

On the Duality of Civilization-Deep Implication Reflected in Lord of the Flies

Li Xiaofang

School of Foreign Languages, Yan'an University,
Yan'an Shaanxi, China 716000
E-mail: 1765229450@QQ.com

Abstract—Lord of the Flies, written by the famous contemporary novelists, was published in 1954. Golding won the Nobel Prize for it. Since its publication, it has become the focus by the literary critics. In order to catch its deep implication of the novel, the study, combining the background information of its creation, presents the duality of civilization: the restraints of civilization from degradation and the fragility of civilization, which plays a permanent warning for human beings.

Keywords—William Golding; Lord of the Flies; Restraints of Civilization; Fragility of Civilization

I. INTRODUCTION

William Golding, born in 1911 and died in 1993, is one of the most outstanding contemporary writers, whose first novel, Lord of the Flies, secures him a lasting fame and won him Nobel Prize in 1983. It has caught the tenor of the early 1950s so successfully that the novel has quickly established as one of the most influential as well as fashionable books of its decade. Lord of the Flies tells a story of a group of English schoolboys who change into cruel savagery after they landed on a desert island without adult supervision after a plane crash. At first, the children manage to look after themselves and hope to be rescued. However, the boys are soon controlled by the terror of their minds. The boys on the island changed into two opposite groups. They are leading respectively by Ralph, who is the symbol of civilization, and Jack, who is the symbol of savagery. Finally, the paradise-like Eden is ruined by the fire of savagery, at that very moment, an English Cruiser come and the schoolboys are survived and go to England when he is in his business of fighting with another cruiser.

The novel has been not only among the best sellers, but also has been learned by the students in schools and universities as well. It has been filmed by the distinguished director Peter Brook in 1963, because the novel reveals the human condition in the world of 1950s with realistic narrative technique and blend of diverse arts.

After Lord of the Flies is published, it has become the focus of discussion by literary critics. John Peter in his essay "the Fables of William Golding" (1957) concludes that Golding's first three novels belongs to fables because of its unique characteristics of fable. Then, Lord of the Flies is read as a moralistic fable or a pessimistic allegory on human depravity. But Samuel Hynes argues that "though Golding is a moralist,

he is not a moral maker, and his novel belongs, not with Aesop's Fable, but with the important symbolic novels of our century – with Camus and Kafka's." [1] Golding points out that "the connotation and effect of symbolism are beyond description for its very nature of undescriptiveness and I have never heard the multi-meaning of symbolism, but I have been always experiencing them" in the Hot Gates. [2] So, on one hand, Lord of the Flies is "an adventure story which is easy to understand; on the other hand, it has important psychological, anthropological and theological horizon" [3]. Golding prefers myth because he holds that myth is deeper, more important, profounder, significant, which derive from the deep essence of things that the human beings occupy it from the ancient era for the nature of existence, namely the complete significance of life. As for its interpretations, different people have different preoccupation. Marxism views it as "a novel with evident tendency of idealism." [4] Samuel Hynes holds that Freudians seek a psychological theory of conscious sublimation in the novel: "denied the sustaining and repressing authority of parents, church and state, (the children) form a new culture the development of which reflects that of genuine primitive society, evolving its gods and demons (its myth), its rituals and taboos (its social norm)." And the people "who occupies political trend have been able to read it as the modern political nightmare because in the story the reason and democracy is damaged by unreasoning authoritarianism. The religious have simply said, in a satisfying mood, Original Sin, of course." [5] The studies about human nature have never stopped from the ancient, Greek philosopher Aristotle holds human nature is a kind of constituting fixed customs, habits and the desire for pleasure, while in the eastern world the Confucian have caught the essential goodness of human beings and Master Xun focused on its evil phase. According to the Christian doctrine, original sin is the universal sin of the human race, which is a so profound and mysterious topic that philosophers and scientists have taken part in its interpretation and debate for years from the ancient era, such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung. When the world had witnessed two world wars by the middle of the last century, William Golding enlisted the researchers who studied the human nature, as he provided in Time a simple explanation that the theme attempts to find the root of the shortcomings of society and human nature at the bottom.

Each school has its own individual preference and all these interpretations show the originality and power of the novel and pose ambiguity in understanding. The value of *Lord of the Flies* has not been reduced for different schools appear one by one and people's artistic tastes are changing progressively. On the opposite, its multi-themes revealed have been aware by more and more readers gradually. Combining the background information of its creation, the study deal with the duality of civilization reflected which has permanent warning for the human beings.

II. THE RESTRAINT OF CIVILIZATION FROM BARBARITY

Civilization is fully embodied from the plot development, which is symbolically arranged by Golding from two lines. One is keeping the signal fire, which symbolizes the instinct of civilization; the other is a series of hunts, which connotes the instinct of savagery. The process of keeping the signal fire symbolically embodies the process of restraint of civilization from barbarity. The eight hunts, which includes hunts for animals and humans, symbolically reveals the boy's change from schoolboys to savages gradually, on the other hand, it release that civilization is weak confronted with the attack of the evil of human nature. *Lord of the Flies* is structure work of art whose organization aims to demonstrate the transformation of human's fundamental nature.

In the novel, first, civilization, far from being a corrupting influence, is the only thing that restraints mankind from a life of utter barbarity and degradation. In the first hours on the island, Ralph, symbol of civilization, do some physical sports freely bathed in pleasure and innocence, however, after he determines to follow the rules of the activity, he has a responsibility to face the power he has called to the giant platform near the sunny lake. This embodies that the instinct of civilization has a deep root in his mind. Also at this assembly, Jack, symbol of savagery, desires power above all other things to such an extent that he is furious when he loses the election to Ralph. But early on, he obeys the rules and explores the island voluntarily, which embodies the influence of civilization.

In the exploration, Jack has experienced his first hunting with Ralph and Simon. They races ahead, Jack pulls out his knife suddenly. His arm is waving in the air. At that moment, Jack pauses for a while, the pig keeping screaming in the creepers, the blade of the knife keeping shining at the end of Jack's bony hand. The pause of Jack is a period time which is long enough for the boys to acknowledge what a giant result the downward killing it is. But, the piglet bites away from the undergrowth and run away screamingly. The three boys are standing seeing the place of fighting and terror. The face of Jack is as pale as a sheet under his freckles. Confronted with the piglet's trap and terror, Jack has a pause and the boys are terrified. Jack is hesitating to kill the piglet because he can't stand up with seeing the cutting of the knife into living flesh and the splash of flying blood. This releases Jack's a little bit of sympathy and mercy for the prey—a poor helpless piglet. All of these reveal that the remains of civilization and reason still work in his deep mind. He remains the moral and behavior acquired in school and family. This point can be confirmed by the behavior of Maurice and Roger (name of children come to the island) who disturb the playing of the little ones. Maurice

follows Roger to kick the sand castles over, bury the flowers and scatter the chosen stones, laughing. Only when Percival begins to whimper with an eyeful of sand, Maurice hurries away? Because the boy named Maurice had punished due to fill a younger boy than him with sand in his past life. At that moment, although their parents are far away, he still feels that a heavy hand maybe fall on his back which is unease and uncomfortable because of wrong-doing, at the back of his mind appears the uncertain content of an excuse and Roger bends down and takes up a round stone and aims for a while then, casts the stone at Henry—casts it to miss... it is estimated that there is a space round the little boy, maybe about six to seven yards in diameter that he is afraid to cast. Roger and Maurice are conditioned by the civilization they had gained. As it is said, "invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child were the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law". [6] If the children came back to England, they would bring troubles and do something wrong to the society, however, they are eventually controllable, even they were brought to the juvenile court for their misbehavior, and they would not be a danger for the society in the long run. Their parents, teachers and police will punish them appropriately and accordingly. As Alastair Niven puts it, "to counter the anarchy which man's selfishness would create if there were no checks and balances to restrain it, we adopt certain 'articles of peace', which impose restrictions on individual liberty." [7] It shows it is quite necessary for our society to have some piece of restraints to control the behavior from the instinct of savagery. That is to say that the civilization, far from being a corrupting influence, is the only thing that restraints mankind from a life of utter barbarity and degradation.

III. THE FRAGILITY OF CIVILIZATION

What is the result when the instinct of civilization is facing the attack of evil power within human nature? After the failure of his first hunt, Jack feels a bit ashamed. Then, Jack pulls his knife out, and cut it into the middle of tree trunk and promises that the next time he must succeed and no mercy at all. The vow of Jack and behavior of Roger and Maurice reveal their capacity for dangerous violence. Also Ralph and Simon don't stop their action. If they had stopped them, it would have been otherwise. This shows the darkness exists in all of their hearts only with different degree. At the second assembly, Ralph has made the speech rules and decided to build shelters and make a signal fire for attracting ship, which suggests that they want to build a rational order utopia by themselves under the enforcement of their instinct of civilization. At the same time, the second unsuccessful hunt has taken place. Jack, with a sharpened stick about five feet long tailed from his right hand, traces the pigs by the droppings along the pig-run, where comes the quick, hard patter of pigs hoofs, a castanet sound, seductive, maddening sound that promises meat. Except for a pair of tattered shorts held up by his knife-belt, he is naked. The sticks and his nakedness embody the characteristics of primitive men and their brutish nature, because during the hunt compulsion to track down and kill are swallowing Jack up. But he fails this time.

When Ralph is building the shelter with Simon for all the boys, Jack leads the boys who keep the signal fire away for

their third successful hunt. Jack creates a new way for hunting in which they paint their faces, behind the painting, the boys not only hide, but also release their self-consciousness, what's more, the boys liberates violence forbidden back in England and catch a kind of security and a sense of release and escape out of their heart from the civilization. When they are hunting, a ship from the civilized nation is sailing by; unfortunately, their fire for saving has died. On the part of Ralph, there is the world of longing and baffled common-sense; while as for Jack, hunting, blood, killing and tough exhilaration is what he seeks. At this moment, the civilization is declining and the savagery is rising, yet the savagery has not reached the extreme point, because Jack says proudly yet twitchily about his achievement: there was lashing of blood, you should have seen it! This implies the true aim of hunt is the need of blood instead of meat. His "twitching" and "shuddering" disclose his terror for the killing and the conflicts between his kind nature and evil nature and the tension between the old taboo and the new freedom. After their feast, the boys begin to dance their game for fun and excitement, chanting, "Kill the pig, Cut her throat, Bash her in!" Even Ralph, the symbol of civilization and becomes envious and resentful and watches them till the hunters feel tired and the chant dies away, which unfolds his tendency towards evil.

As the boys are confused by the fear of their imagined beast, especially when a dead parachutist drops on the mountain, they decide to have an exploration. During the exploration, they have experienced their fourth unsuccessful hunt. Although their prey, the boar, gets away, it brings a lot to Ralph that is a wild dream for him to do, he firstly occupies a hunter's happiness, enthusiasm and pride. Ralph discovers that he is capable of measuring the place to kill coldly and correctly. To the pig only five-yard ahead, he throws the sharp wooden weapon that he takes, looking the weapon descend into the great nose and wave on the flesh of the pig for a while. Ralph is full of terror, happiness even pride. He has repeated, "I hit him (the boar)" for several times, and Ralph bathes in the boy's respect and suddenly senses that hunting is so wonderful. This is the revelation of dark side and degeneration of a good man. Now even Ralph, the symbol of civilization, is caught by the excitement of hunt, he is lost in crazy egomania and cruel bloodlust together with the other little ones. He is controlled by a high excitement all of a sudden, suddenly holds a spear and strikes at a boy named Robert and he is eager to catch a handful of squeeze of that fresh and vulnerable flesh. The eager and desire to hunt and hurt is prevailing and occupies Ralph's mind completely. It is inherent evil finds its expression in his feeling and acts. No more reason and mercy are left. Now the children's game of killing is near to the point of real killing for they nearly kill Robert. Even when Jack says, "use a little one to be the pig", which means to kill a boy like killing a real pig, everybody laughs including Ralph and Piggy. This indicates that the evil human nature expands to such a high degree that the human fellow becomes their prey. Ralph's potential

bestiality and bloodthirstiness emerge, which symbolizes the fragility of civilization facing the lure of evil power. At the same, the scene, which greatly highlights the illustration of the defects of human nature embodies the universality of evil nature, because human beings come from animal decides that human being can never completely free from animalism.

IV. CONCLUSION

Though the Second World War was over, people didn't enjoy peace for long, the world has plunged itself into a chaos with new conflicts and violence here and there. Therefore a lot of writers have begun to probe the problem to find out the answer to the mess, and many of them focused on the nature of man. William Golding was one of them, who created *Lord of the Flies* to trace the cause of human misery through his blending of fable, allegory and adventure story. What the England children do accordingly on the desert island is a mirror of what our adults do in our society.

The conflict between civilization and savagery is the driving force of the novel, which witnesses the young English boys' change process from civilized ones to the wild, brutal, barbaric. *Lord of the Flies* reflects that civilization, far from being a corrupting influence, is the only thing that restrains mankind from a life of utter barbarity and degradation; meanwhile, the instinct of civilization is very fragile facing the attack by evil of human nature.

Lord of the Flies is a master piece of evil core in human nature, but its greatest concern is to point out the way of saving human beings, that is to resort to civilization. It has been sixty-three years since the book published in 1954, but more and more people begin to pay attention to its profound significance. Especially in the days when terrorism and conflicts occur here and there, the theme reflected give a sound warning for the whole world.

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