

Decrypting Environmental Impact on Human Psychology in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*



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ABSTRACT: This research work sets out to highlight the influence exercised by the environment on human being's psychology as shown in disguised in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Every human being no matter his/her race, sex, age, or social affiliation at a given moment of his/her life has been subjected to the influence of some particular elements uncontrollable by the intrinsic power to dominate on anything. This may seem innocuous for a being not hardened, but in reality, it shows the weakness of human essence regarding to external or internal stimulations. To those stimuli, the mind and the soul are highly impacted to the extents of an abrupt behavioral change.

KEYWORDS: Environmental, Impact, Human psychology

INTRODUCTION

Humanity no matter how it is defined by scientists nowadays remains a big diversity of people holding deep down them feelings and facets shaping undeniably individual behaviors. In general, human beings regarding to extreme situations are predisposed to react unpredictably. When some people subjected to the influence of different elements they have no control on remain sound of mind, some others at the contrary change drastically and become dangerous for the society. This may sound normal but in reality it makes a slight difference between cold blooded people and troubled ones. *Lord of the Flies* written by the great British novelist William Golding is a dystopian novel that explores the universe of a group of British young boys whose plane crashed by accident on a desert land over the pacific.

First published in 1954 by Faber and Faber Limited, the story narrated in the novel takes place during the period of the Second World War (1939-1945). Through the novel, William Golding exposes the weakness of a childish society built upon the standard modal. This society built by children failed to remain strong as a single entity and fall apart in violent tribal wars. The current edition subject of this dissertation comprises 288 pages, subdivided in 12 chapters. Globally the novel has tackled many issues worthwhile to be raised such as: social derision, war, anarchy, violence and ultimately man's inherent evil.

This dissertation focus is the **impact of environment on human psychology** in the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. In that framework, it states the impact of environment and portrays it upon human psychology through the traits to the personality of characters depicted in the novel. It makes as well a critical analysis of **environment impact on human psychology** in the novel. This dissertation is organized in three chapters: Chapter one makes an overall introduction to the study; Chapter two presents a general overview on the novel; and finally Chapter three finally is dedicated to an analysis on the novel through an exploration of environment impact on human psychology, a critical analysis of it and lastly the presentation of some perspectives to the study.

I- INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This section of the dissertation introduces the research work on the novel *Lord of the Flies*. In a global manner it presents the content of the dissertation by stating the following parameters:

1-1- Problem Statement

This research work aims to substantiate a clear correlation existing between psychological changes and the influence exercised by the different elements people has no control on meant here by the term **environment**. The different scenes of violence,

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savagery and murders orchestrated in the novel raises makes wonder how children can abandon their innocence and revert to primitivism.

1-2- Purpose of the Study

The reasons leading to the choice of such topic are personal, social and academics. The present work calls the awareness of readers on how external and internal elements they have not compulsory control on affect their psychology and alter their lives for the better and for the worst. So, the purpose here in general is to help actors at different levels to perceive in a realistic way the impact exercised by environment on human psychology.

1-3 Significance of the Study

This research work arose from a willingness to study more the psychological matters pointed out by William Golding in the novel. Throughout *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding has endlessly figured out the way children at the base innocent plunged in a nameless savagery. This research work may help at ceasing more the reality pictured in the novel.

1-4 Hypothesis of the Study

In the core of this dissertation, two hypotheses have been developed. The very first materializes human beings here as products of external conditions influenced by the environment. And the second one defines human beings as the sum of their inner state, then made up since the base of evil pulses.

1-5 Limitation to the Study

This dissertation is only focused on establishing a relationship between psychological changes and the external and internal elements constituting environment in general. Still there are many other aspects worthwhile to be raised apart the one concerning this study.

1-6 Literature Review

This research work has to deal with the dystopian genre. In the literary context **dystopian literature** is a form of speculative fiction that figures as a response to utopian literature. It pictures a utopian society in which things have gone wrong. Some other authors and literary works have treated similarly a theme reliable to my research work. *Greybeard* by Brian W. Aldiss (1964) in which the future has been destroyed by an 'accident' that sterilized its males, leaving an aging and childless population to slowly die out. *A Boy and His Dog* (1969) by Harlan Ellison a dystopian novel in which the dog, named Blood is telepathic. The boy, Vic, has a mean streak that would put any of the *Lord of the Flies* kids to shame. Another major dystopian work is *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro easily as dark as *Lord of the Flies*. *Never Let Me Go* hits its readers with some very unsettling sci-fi twists, though the slow way in which they're unrolled makes them feel more ominous than shocking. In Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* the protagonist Ender was only allowed to be born because the government needs him to be the destroyer of an entire race of aliens. Like William Golding masterpiece these gripping novels explore the thin line between human and savage.

1-7 Research Methodology

This dissertation work is an exploratory research that has been carried out in order to make a decryption of the impact of environment on human psychology in the novel *Lord of the Flies*. In order to achieve that goal, the collection and analysis of only data to get full information on the novel was a focus point. As well, a literary study and some analysis based upon the novel were of paramount importance. Throughout this work, the use of **Psychoanalytic criticism**, a form of literary criticism that uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature was helpful in order to cease the novel.

1-8 Conceptual Clarification

As the topic of the research work cannot be well understood if the keywords like '**Environment**' and '**Human Psychology**' are not clarified:

- Oxford Languages 10th edition defines the term '**Environment**' as the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant or operates. Some others synonyms of the term 'Environment' are 'Habitat' or 'Territory'. In our context here, the term '**Environment**' refers to all the elements people has no control on and that affect their own life and its wellbeing.
- '**Human Psychology**' is a compound work, the term '**Psychology**' is defined as the mental characteristics or attitude of a group of person. It is synonym of 'mindset' or 'mind'. Put in our context here the term 'Human' combined with the term 'Psychology' means simply human state of mind

II GENERAL OVERVIEW ON THE NOVEL

This section of the dissertation presents the novel itself including the characters and their relationship. Ultimately, it presents the general results of the analysis performed in the context of the study. Objectively, in this section Psychoanalytic criticism has been of paramount importance. It is a form of literary criticism that uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature. Indeed, the use of Psychoanalytic criticism has been of great importance because of the nature of

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the topic that deals with matters relevant from psychology. And its use taken into account helps to examine the core of psychological troubles raised in the novel by investigating the interactions of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind as follows:

2-1 The Unconscious Mind:

The unconscious mind by definition is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that stand outside of our conscious awareness. It contains contents that are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, anger, sadness or conflict. A typical example of the unconscious mind materialization is what is commonly known as a Freudian slip¹. It is a verbal or memory mistake revealing secret thoughts and feelings that people hold deep down them. For instance, a husband calling the name of his spouse by his ex's name or even a child calling accidentally his teacher 'Mum'.

These examples of common mistakes are believed to be linked to the unconscious mind. Generally, the slip shows the sudden intrusion of unconscious thoughts and feelings recalled into the conscious mind, this often due to unresolved or repressed feelings. According to Freudian interpretation, thoughts as well as emotions outside of our awareness continue impact our behaviors.

2-2 The Preconscious Mind:

The preconscious consists of anything that could potentially be brought into the conscious mind. The contents of the unconscious mind enclose all the feelings and thoughts we are actually aware of, and ejected into the conscious awareness. The preconscious acts as well as something of a guard, controlling the information entering into the consciousness. For example, someone may see or hear something that makes him remember something he had planned to do before, or even someone else having a sensation of Deja-vu in a given situation. This is basically how the preconscious acts; it recalls to mind in some specific situation thoughts we are not actively thinking of. Some sources place the preconscious as a part of the mind separated from the unconscious. This interpretation of Freudian theory makes a clear distinction between the parts of the mind we can have access to or not.

2-3 The Conscious Mind:

The conscious mind also known as **self-awareness**² contains all of the thoughts, memories, feelings of which we are aware of at a given moment. This is the aspect of our mental processing that we can think and talk about rationally. Through the conscious mind, we are consciously aware of ourselves in the immediate environment as a being personally separated from others and having a different personality. There, is the mind of our five physical senses enabling us to consciously experience the outside physical world as unique master of our experiences. Moreover, the conscious mind is the seat of our ability to reason and make the difference between good and evil.

Whenever, even if human mind is divided into separate parts, there do form within them a single and unique puzzle. The unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious mind whether separated or not or can work together and make decisions about our life. Furthermore, Sigmund Freud has divided as well the human psyche into **Id**, **Superego**, and **Ego** also called **tripartite**

2-4 Id :

The id is the personality structure that operates in the unconscious mind which means it stands outside of all consciousness. Based on the pleasure principle that demands immediate gratification regardless to the consequences, the id is often pictured as a little devil whispering on one's shoulder. He is selfish, impulsive, and instinctual and refers to non-conscious mindset that strives to satisfy basic needs such as sex, eating and aggression.

2-5 Superego:

The Superego is the personality structure mostly unconscious and commonly pictured as the little angel smiling on one's shoulder. He exists in the three levels of consciousness and is like the internal judge based on the moral principle. He tells what is right or wrong, what is socially acceptable or not and conform to the rules and norms prescribed by society. The ability to think logically is a main characteristic of the superego. Particularly moral precepts are the social fundamentals that enable the individual to do what is right from wrong and to use his knowledge to solve problems instead of using brutal force.

2-6 Ego:

The ego is the personality structure that operates in the preconscious and the conscious mind. Simply put the ego is what one thinks he is, it has the ability to make decisions about our lives.

¹ From <https://www.verywellmind.com>

² From <https://www.verywellmind.com>

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III. DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVES

This last section of the research work makes an analysis on the novel by exploring environment impact on human psychology, it makes a critical analysis of it and lastly presents some perspectives and recommendations to the study.

3-1 Exploration of Environment Impact on Human Psychology:

The decryption of environment impact on human psychology in *Lord of the Flies* implies in first place an exploration of it. The novel opens with the meeting on the beach between two protagonists Ralph and Piggy. The two boys are the lucky survivors of a plane crash, and yielded to the fact that they were abandoned on a desert land with no adults around. Boys were at majority children and as they met, they agreed to choose Ralph as their leader. Ralph as elected leader has appointed immediately the named Jack Merridew as head of hunters and engaged an expeditionary corpse to inquire about the nature of the land they grounded on. By the time the expeditionary corpse finished sounding the island, they went back to hold another meeting with the rest of the community and there raised first the idea of the beast, a snake thing living in the woods. To that, children were preparing to defend themselves and kill in case of danger. Face to the wildness of this island, they were ready to take drastic measures.

Later in the novel after building with difficulties a fire signal by the mountain, Jack and his hunters in charge of watching it, let it burn out and went for hunting. As they were absent, a ship passing by didn't notice their presence. Back from hunting, Jack was enjoying the savage mutilation of a pig. 'I cut the pig's throat. [...] you should have seen blood' (Pages 87, 88) were the only words he was out loud shouting. And enraged after Ralph's sermon, 'he took a step, and able at last to hit someone, stuck his fist into Piggy's stomach' and viciously shouted out loud 'you would, would you? Fatty' (Page 89). This scene demonstrates that the character Jack in the wild nature surrounding him is progressively changing and letting violence overcome his being. He is trying with hostility to impose himself as dominant male, coming then straight into resonance with the wildness of his environment. By the way, this rude fervor emanating from Jack spread like a virus upon all the boys, and very soon, they were going to deny their humanity and revert 'to darkness and desperate enterprise' (P 151)

Further in the novel as the conflicting atmosphere was thickening, the community built by the boys folded and broke into two opposed tribes. By one side Ralph and some children faithful to him and on the other Jack with his troop of hunters. Actually this was just the beginning of boy's descent into hell.

Indeed, a horrible nightmare which innocent boys are the artisans has been orchestrated. Haunted by a morbid dread, boys mistook their mate Simon for the terrifying beast they all fear and stabbed him to death. Savagely mutilated, 'Simon's dead body moved out towards the open sea' (P 190). This tragic event depicts truly to which viciousness and despair children have been brought, the wildness in which they vegetate, added to their fear of the unknown turns progressively their behavior into something primitive. Their environment corrupts them and transforms them into savage beast devoid of humanity.

After this event, some other similar cases occurred in the novel. With no single regret to Simon's memory, a squad of savages headed by Jack held a violent raid against Ralph's lot on the beach platform³ in order to steal from them fire. And as an action calls compulsory for a reaction, after the raid, galvanized by Piggy's words, Ralph with the twin's boys Sam and Eric as well as Piggy went at the savage's tribe's headquarters. They went there to ask for Piggy's glasses pacifically, but Piggy found an awful end. Indeed, Roger, a sociopath lieutenant of Jack rolled a monstrous rock that 'struck a glancing blow from chin to knee;' and 'Piggy, saying nothing with no time for even a grunt, travelled through the air sideways from the rock, turning over as he went.[...] His head opened and stuff came out and turned red' (Pages 222, 223). Clearly here, this macabre scene demonstrates that boys with no doubts have reverted completely to savagery and deny the little part of humanity remaining in them. Orchestrating this sang froid murder emanates from a conscious will to kill for satisfying a blood thirst. Thus boys accept being the wild animals living in harmony with the threatening environment surrounding them.

Another case of violence act occurred at last in the novel. The tribe of savages on Jack's orders engaged a terrible hunt to track down and kill Ralph. They launched themselves after Ralph, willing to exterminate him ruthlessly and impale his head as trophy on a stick sharpened at both ends. Consequently, to get him captured, 'They smoked him out and set the island on fire' (P 242) destroying the wildlife and the flora with no regard to the material losses. This last act from boys demonstrates that they assimilated themselves completely to their environment, they are now vectors of wickedness and violence. Indeed, affected by the wild living conditions, they have transformed themselves finally into savage beast without humanity so as to impose themselves.

Through the novel many other scenes of violence have been orchestrated and result at majority from the influence exercised by the environment on human psychology. Children from the very beginning were not described to be beings filled with bitterness

³ From <https://www.sparknotes.com>

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and having insatiable appetite towards violence. But throughout the novel, as they tried to survive and build a community in the savage nature surrounding them, there started troubles. Putting unknowingly their humanity aside they have left themselves shaped by the wildness present in their immediate environment. Thus, an unavoidable descent into violence have been engaged and primitivism has started. Throughout the entire novel, the violence scenes orchestrated do demonstrate in a realistic way the impact exercised by environment on human psychology in general and particularly on children as puppet of this dreadful fact.

3-2 Critical analysis of Environment Impact on Human Psychology

Lord of the Flies by William Golding is mainly about struggle for power and savagery, it is one of the most celebrated and largely read of modern classics. In a dystopian style it exposes the way children at the base innocent put their humanity aside and turned to a nameless violence. From the story related in *Lord of the Flies*, we may perceive in one aspect mankind an evil and savage specie defined by the environment. In this common-sense, the main question to be asked is 'How does environment influence human psychology and bring to extreme extents?'. To provide answer to this question, based on the behavioral changes of characters in the novel, we will have to picture the environment as a whole dividable into two complementary portion. An internal part enclosing human basic instincts shaping facetiousness and an external part enshrining the outside conditions impacting human mind undeniably.

In a special writing style, degenerateness has been introduced in the novel with the raising of the idea of the 'beast, the snake-like living in the woods' (P 46), or the creature sighted on the mountain top . This brought troubles in the peaceful life and civility boys were trying to maintain. Driven by their fear of the unknown, children killed their mate Simon they believed to be the famous terrifying beast. Curiously, some seemingly scenes of horror like this have been orchestrated throughout the novel. Another tragedy was the murder of another boy named 'Piggy', the fat boy, object of social derision. He died smashed by a monstrous rock rolled over him by Roger, a sociopath displaying cruelty toward his peers. Based on the characters Jack and Roger, we may perceive some drastic behavioral changes and a sudden rise of violence in children. Boy's appetite toward violence grows progressively, it becomes the systematic response to solve problems. We can perceive this as an important matter resulting from the troubled inner condition of boys. Indeed, boys are driven by their primitive instincts and act to express their resentment. Through bloody massacre and sang froid murder, they are liberated from self-consciousness as well as any kind of humanity. Empty of the ability of making the difference between good and evil, children ineluctably are given to descend below the level of beast and plunge in savagery. To be brought to such extent, people definitely wicked, evil, savage by nature and driven by their basic instincts. Human beings do have a sort of inner peace that disappears automatically when primitive instinct takes control over the good sense.

Another way of apprehending William Golding conception in *Lord of the Flies* is to not only look at human beings as just savage specie by nature but also as creature of the outside conditions. James Allen's *As A Man Thinketh* underlines it 'We are buffeted with circumstances so long as we believe ourselves to be the creature of outside conditions'. As no one by himself is compulsory wicked by nature, the external conditions are to be considered notably in human psychological and behavioral changes. Indeed, in the novel one could remark that children after the plane crash have been against their will put in an environment where wildness was naturally instilled at the base. The character Ralph is a typical case we may point as example out. Ralph as elected leader of the group of boys, has not been mentioned in the novel as a violent being dangerous for the wellbeing of his peers. But as his surrounding started revealing dangers, his behavior started taking murderous significance. Notably he fought roughly against Jack during their altercation at the castle rocks, and during the track engaged against him he has stabbed to death with a spear one of his assaulters. Clearly here, because of the barbarism spreading from his environment, he had no choice left that transforming himself into a savage being. In sum we may perceive clearly here a sudden behavioral change and a return to vulgarity. Children in a hostile and savage environment different from the one they were accustomed were given since the beginning to be savage and hostile creatures.

Basically, the outside conditions have impacted directly children's psychology and put them in the state of wild creatures struggling in a wilder environment. The result was undeniably a return to a primitive state. We should point out that all children at the very beginning were living in a certain harmony and cooperating in order to survive by maintaining civilization. But at a certain moment as the isle their inhabited revealed some dangers, they turned to violence. and created a savage tribe in order to protect themselves in a certain way against the 'beast'. Even if the existence of the famous beast was a product of their imagination. Children were no more master of themselves but rather controlled by this environment they were living in.

Human psychology is made in the way that it's influenced immediately by every single condition, moreover the environment does impact it doubly and in two different ways. An internal part enclosing human basic instincts shapes facetiousness and an external part enshrining the outside conditions impacts human mind.

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3-3 Perspectives

On a professional point of view, be shared between the desire of responding to one's primitive pulses in one hand and on the other remaining sound minded following moral rules, may be a factor a factor of productivity or not at work. Indeed, be responding to primitive pulses will lead a person to act just impulsively and breaking with no consideration the rules guaranteeing the good progress of the work. On the social aspect environment impact on human psychology contributes to make diversity. When some people takes profit from the environment for their personal growth, some others are affected to the extents of becoming social nuisance for their peers particularly and for the whole society in general. As far as the economic domain is concerned as far as the economic domain is concerned leaders may follow their basic pulses and favor then serving selfish and unwholesome purposes. Consequently, they will turn away from global objectives of development and embezzle public funds leading ineluctably to flight of capital, indebtedness growth, and bankruptcy because of financial insecurity. Then on the principle of cause and effect, the whole economic system will collapse.

3-4 Recommendations

Managing with troubles resulting from environmental influence is a hard task but not impossible. The first action to take is to try leaning on one's basic pulses by practicing relaxing activities in order to get rid of disturbances. The second action is to get in an association or community promoting personal development, this because social groups can enable the individual to emancipate himself and find inner peace. And the last step is to consult a psychologist in order to be put under appropriate medical process.

CONCLUSION

Lord of the Flies by William Golding is a dystopian novel that depicts not just psychological disorders but as well the extreme extents to which human beings are brought when there are subjected to deal with good and evil at the same time. My dissertation is concerned with showing the impact exercised by environment on human psychology in the novel and the troubles resulting from that. To achieve this objective, we adopted an exploratory research methodology and a literature research has been carried out in order to gather full information on the author but also the novel. The use of psychoanalytic analysis helped us in exploring better and analyzing critically the novel.

After exploring and analyzing critically the novel, I got to the fact that environment does influence human psychology internally and externally by playing on the structures to the personality (**Id**, **Superego**, **Ego**). Through the study of environment impact on human psychology in the novel we apprehend that human beings are highly influenced by the environment either they want or not. Subjected to this influence human beings do react unpredictably, either expressing drastic changes by reverting to savagery and characterized violence or else at the contrary remaining master of themselves. In sum environmental influence on human psychology is itself the essence of behavioral diversity among human beings.

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