

# **The Unconscious and Tripartite Psyche: A Study of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies***

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## **Abstract**

*This paper analyses the psychoanalytic features in William Golding's allegorical novel, **Lord of the Flies** (1954). It re-examines the validity of the Freudian claim that a literary text is a verisimilitude of dream; an expression of a writer's neuroses; unconsciousness and repression. From the purview of psychoanalytic criticism and a close reference to Golding's symbolic characters, the authenticity of man's tripartite psyche is justified. Hence, this paper posits that psychoanalytic criticism is a vital tool for understanding human behaviour and social anomaly.*

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, literature, tripartite psyche - *id, ego, and superego*

## **Introduction**

There are several approaches of reading and appreciating literary works. Dobie (2009) posits that psychological approach is one in which a reader reads to understand human behaviour. However, this approach was not fully appreciated until 1916-1917 when Sigmund Freud propounded the Psychoanalysis theory. As a practising neurologist in Vienna, in the late nineteenth century, Sigmund Freud saw the need to explain the physical causes of the complaints of many of his hysteric patients. After thorough analyses, he discovered that distress was caused by factors that victims were probably ignorant of. Hence, in his book *Studies in Hysteria* (1885) he asserts that symptoms of Hysteria are the results of unresolved but forgotten emotions. Hence, Freud concludes that human behavioural disorders are rooted in the unconscious and in fact, people can be cured if their unconscious thoughts can be made conscious.

## Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism

Psychoanalytic criticism is a literary theory that sprung from 'psychoanalysis'. It aims 'to reveal the latent content of the work that underlies its visible content' (Nolas 2011:92). Similarly, [wsu.edu/psyche.cri.html](http://wsu.edu/psyche.cri.html), explains Psychoanalytic criticism thus:

.... like psychoanalysis itself psychoanalytic criticism seeks evidence of unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts, guilt's ambivalence and so forth within what may be called a disunified text. Hence, the author's childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts, fixations are traceable within the behaviour of the characters in the literary work. Also, psychological materials are expressed indirectly disguised or encoded (as in dreams) through principles such as symbolism: (the repressed object, represented in disguise); Condensation (several thoughts or persons represented in a single image); displacement (anxiety located unto another image by means of association)

Michael Delahoyde posits that Psychoanalytic criticism adopts the method of reading employed by Sigmund Freud and later theorists to interpret texts. He argues that literary texts like dreams express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author; literary work is a manifestation of the writer's own neurosis (mental illness).

However, apart from psychoanalyzing the writer of a text, it is also possible to psychoanalyse a particularly interesting character in a given work. This approach, like psychoanalysis, entails following the analytic interpretative process discussed in Freud's *The interpretation of Dreams* and some other works. Using this approach, critics view the fictional character as a psychological case study, by attempting to identify Freudian concepts such as; The tripartite psyche, Penis envy, Oedipus Rex, defences, selective memory, denial, projection regression, fear of intimacy, and fear of death etc. all of which are means of burying the conflicts in the unconscious mind. However, Tyson (1999) opines that repression of conflicts in the unconscious does not eliminate our painful experiences and emotions rather; man unconsciously behaves in ways that allow them to play out. This paper focuses on psychoanalysing William Golding and some characters in the *Lord of the Flies*.

### The Tripartite Psyche; The *id*, the ego and the Super-ego

Freud (1923) maintained that human desires and unconscious conflicts give rise to three areas of the mind (the *id*, the ego and super ego) that wrestle for dominance as we grow from infancy to childhood and to adulthood. Each of the three parts is discussed below;

The id: Reid (2011) defines the id as that part the psyche that consists of all that is inherited (i.e. the biological components of personality, including the sex life instinct-Eros) which contains the libido and aggressive instinct –*Thanatos*. McLeod (2008) says the id is predominantly passionate, irrational, unknown and unconscious part of the psyche. It follows impulses that seek gratification and acts in a very irrational manner. It is the appetite part of the psyche.

The Ego- this is predominantly rational and logical part of the psyche. It tries to decipher a compromise between the two extremes of the id and the superego. The ego is in a constant state of conflict. It is the institution in the mind, which regulates all its own constituent processes”. The ego is both conscious and unconscious- meaning one is both aware and not aware of it. The ego is grounded in perfecting. The ego’s job is to keep the id under control. Freud says the ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions. These three parts are cooperative within the mind although one would dominate other, however, when one dominates neurosis sets in.

The Superego- contrary to the ‘id’ the superego acts as the conscience and checks inappropriate desires. It works in the form of punishment, guilt and fear. According to Dobie (2009:72), the superego is defined as; ‘the part of the human psyche that provides discipline and restraint by forcing unacceptable desires back into the unconscious. It is formed early on by parents and later by social institutions and other models

### **William Golding’s Biography**

According to <http://www.gradesaver.com/author/william-golding/> Sir William Gerald Golding was born in 1911 in Saint Columb Minor in Cornwall, England, to Alec Golding, a socialist teacher who supported scientific rationalism, and Mildred Golding (née Curnroe), a supporter of female suffrage. As a child, William Golding was educated at the Marlborough Grammar School, where his father worked, and later at Brasenose College, Oxford. Although educated to be a scientist at the request of his father, the young Golding developed an interest in literature, becoming devoted first to Anglo-Saxon texts and then to poetry, which he wrote avidly.

At Oxford, he studied natural science for two years and then transferred to a program for English literature and philosophy. Following a short period of time in which he worked in various positions at a settlement house and in small theatre companies as both an actor and a writer, Golding became a schoolmaster at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury. During the Second World War he joined the Royal Navy and was involved in the sinking of the German battleship Bismarck, after which he returned to Bishop Wordsworth's School, where he taught until the early 1960s.

In 1954, Golding published his first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, which details the adventures of British schoolboys stranded on an island in the Pacific who descend into barbaric behaviour.

Although at first it was rejected by twenty-one different publishing houses. Golding's first novel became a surprise success. According to E.M. Forster *Lord of the Flies* is an outstanding novel of its year of publication, while *Time and Tide* called it "not only a first-rate adventure story but a parable of our times." Golding continued to develop similar themes concerning the inherent violence in human nature in his next novel, *The Inheritors*, published the following year. This novel deals with the last days of Neanderthal man. *The Inheritors* posits that the Cro-Magnon "fire-builders" triumphed over Neanderthal man as much by violence and deceit as by any natural superiority.

Golding's subsequent works include *Pincher Martin* (1956), the story of a guilt-ridden naval officer who faces an agonizing death, *Free Fall* (1959), and *The Spire* (1964), each of which deals with the depravity of human nature. *The Spire* is an allegory concerning the protagonist's obsessive determination to build a cathedral spire regardless of the consequences.

In addition to his novels and his early collection of poems, Golding published a play entitled *The Brass Butterfly* in 1958 and two collections of essays, *The Hot Gates* (1965) and *A Moving Target* (1982). Golding's final works include *Darkness Visible* (1979), the story of a boy horribly injured during the London blitz of World War II, and *Rites of Passage* (1980). This novel won the Booker McConnell Prize, the most prestigious award for English literature, and inspired two sequels, *Close Quarters* (1987) and *Fire Down Below* (1989). These three novels portray life aboard a ship during the Napoleonic Wars.

In 1983, Golding received the Nobel Prize for literature for his novels which, according to the Nobel committee, "with the perspicuity of realistic narrative art and the diversity and universality of myth, illuminate the human condition in the world of today." In 1988 he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II. Sir William died in 1993 in Perranarworthal, Cornwall. At the time of his death, he was working on an unfinished manuscript entitled, "The Double Tongue," which focused on the fall of Hellenic culture and the rise of Roman civilization. This work was published posthumously in 1995.

### **A Psychobiography of William Golding**

From Golding's biography, it can be deduced that *Lord of The Flies* is a manifestation of writer's repressed experiences. Through the principles of condensation, displacement and symbols Golding presents his childhood traumas, family life and war experiences. Hence, there are fixations about him that are traceable within the behaviour of the characters in the novel. Golding displaces his childhood image and experiences in Ralph, the protagonist of the novel. Ralph is rational and have good intentions but ignorant of the innate darkness in man, like young Golding, who was taught by his father, Alec to believe in man's rationality and perfectibility he is ignorant of the beastie nature of man .

Ralph's experience on the Island is a similitude of Golding's traumatic experiences in the navy between 1940 and 1945. At the beginning of the novel just like at the war, the target was to rescue man but the focus gradually shifts to uncontrollable and delightful destruction of fellow man. Ralph's sole concern on the Island is to devise means by which they might be rescued. Initially, the boys, including Jack the antagonist share this objective goal but when the *id* sets in, the focus gradually shifts from setting fire on the mountain as a sign for rescue, to hunting animals, killing one another and in the end setting fire on the Island itself. - a similitude of the chaos that obtains in the world at large. Having discovered the true nature of man, Golding asserted in his writing about his War time experiences that 'man produces evil, as a bee produces honey'. Likewise, Ralph after his narrow escape from death weeps and bemoans the innate cruelty in man. He weeps for the end of innocence and the darkness of man's heart.

### **The Tripartite Psyche in *Lord of the Flies***

#### The Id

In the novel, *Lord of the Flies*, Golding turns to the characters to explore the nature of man. The three main characters (Ralph, Jack and Simon) symbolise each of the aspects of the tripartite psyche. Throughout the novel, Golding suggests Jack as the embodiment of the *id*. From his first utterance to the last, Jack is depicted as an archetype of a tyrant or the devil himself. On hearing the sound of the Conch, himself and all the members of the choir trace the trumpets-like sound and discover Ralph and Piggy with the Conch. Instead of acknowledging their bravery, Jack in the disappointment of meeting young boys and not men, arrogantly asks "Where is the man with the trumpets?" Ralph answers him "There is no man with the trumpet only me" but after Ralph's answer, Jack still angrily asks "Isn't there a man here?" From the narrator's comment, what Jack saw of the fair head boy did not satisfy him. Like the teleological devil, he feels humiliated to be controlled by anybody. The narrator's first description of Jack and his style of leadership are evident in the extract below;

The boy who controlled them (the choir) was dressed in the same way though his badge was golden. When his party was about ten yards from the platform he shouted an order and they halted, gasping, sweating, and swaying in the fierce light. The boy came forward, vaulted on the platform with cloak flying and peered into what to him was almost complete darkness. Where is the man with trumpet? (*Lord of the Flies* p.27)

Jack operates for the purpose of finding pleasure and gratifying his instinctual needs. He describes the Island to the boys by announcing all the pleasure sources to them. He says; 'There's pigs. There is food; and bathing water in that little stream along there and everything. Didn't anyone find anything else?'

His violence and lustful desire for power is not apparent until he loses the election to Ralph. Because he is the leader of the choir, he assumed that no one but him would be chosen to lead. With simple arrogance he says ‘A chief! A chief! I ought to be chief’ “I’m the chapter choir chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp” (p29).

However, Contrary to Jack’s expectations Ralph is elected and this marks the beginning of the manifestation of his id. Unlike the other boys who all applauded Ralph’s election; Jack was rather sad. The narrator describes his reaction thus: ‘the freckles on his face disappeared under a flush of mortification. He started up then changed...’ The lust in him for power conflicts with his unconscious and then the id burgeons. He refuses to be contented with the role of subordinate head and secretly nurses the ambition of becoming the chief and as a result; he pushes the boundaries for his subordinate role in the group.

In the bid to gratify his instinctual need, he turns his back against rationality and order, which they all had established and seeks solely to gratify his lust. When Ralph tells Jack of the need to build shelter on the Island for their safety, he tells him emphatically ‘we want meat’p65. He decided to go for hunting and eat meat rather than build shelter or set fire on the mountain as a signal for rescue. Just as Jack is dominated by the id, majority of the boys are equally distracted. They prefer to gratify their lust than to be rescued. Ralph describes their lust for pleasure to Jack. He says;

They (the littluns) are hopeless. The older ones aren’t much better. You see? All day, I’ve been working with Simon. No one else they are off bathing, or eating or playing. (pg64).

Jack is not only all dominated by the *id* he also ensures that majority of the boys are. With his pleasure advocacy strategy, he buys majority of the boys over to his tribe, and as an embodiment of the id, promotes lawlessness and loss of order. First, he arouses in them the desire for pleasures; second the desire to destroy their moralized self. At the peak of the manifestation of the id, the desire to kill not just pigs but man becomes the goal of Jack’s tribe. They paint their faces like barbarians and from being blood drunken for pigs’ blood they lust for human blood and turn to savages. Ironically, the more Jack becomes a savage the more the boys respect him. This idea connotes that man loves pleasure and celebrates the corrupt in the society .Indeed, apart from Ralph, Simon and piggy the group largely follow Jack casting off the super- ego (moral restraint) and embracing violence and savagery.

### The Ego

Ralph, the protagonist of the novel is an embodiment of the second psyche, ‘the ego’. He is a primary representative of order, civilization and productive leadership. In the novel, while most of the boys are dominated by their ‘id’ they play and are concerned with having fun and avoiding work, Ralph is preoccupied with building huts and thinking of ways to maximize their chances of

being rescued. He tells Jack enthusiastically, 'The best thing we can do is get ourselves rescued' (p. 67).

He is committed to order and reason, hence, throughout the novel, he establishes rules and norms. He instituted the idea of holding meetings, where they can all discuss. Also, for effective communication in their meetings; he establishes a discourse turn-taking rule. He explains how each speech participant should contribute to a discourse. He tells them all;

We can't, everybody talking at once. We'll have to have hands up like at school. Then I'll give the conch to next person to speak. He can hold it when he's speaking (p.43)

Ralph, in his rationality, marvels at the other boys' depth of lust for pleasure, resistance to order and their little or no sense of commitment to duty). He expresses his disappointment to Jack. He says;

Meetings. Don't we love meetings? Every day. Twice a day. We talk. I bet if, I blew the conch this minute, they'd come running. Then we'd be, you know, very solemn, and someone would say we ought to build a jet, or a submarine, or a TV set. When the meeting was over they would work for five minutes then wander off or go hunting. (p.64)

From the extract above, it is evident that Ralph finds it quite unimaginable that majority of the boys would detest meetings and abandon their duties for playing on the island.

As the novel progresses, Ralph becomes conscious, like Simon, he comes to understand that the beast, which they all have been afraid of lurks in their hearts. However, he remains determined and refuses to give in to his libido. It was only briefly that he considers joining Jack's tribe in order to save himself. When Ralph hunts a boar for the first time, he experiences the exhilarations and thrill of blood and violence but unlike Jack and the other members of his tribe he refuses to indulge in the act. Ralph's rationality strengthens him for a moral victory. At the end of the novel, he is able to cast the Lord of the Flies to the ground and uses the stake it is impaled on to defend himself against Jack's hunters.

Also, when Ralph attends Jack's feast, he is swept away by the frenzy dances of the group. He ignorantly participates in the killing of Simon (the super-ego). However; Ralph unlike the other boys, experiences a first-hand knowledge of human shadow (the dark unattractive aspects of the self). He becomes conscious as he sees the evil that exists within him and within all human beings. Ralph's personal consciousness empowers him to cast down the shadow that is Lord of the Flies - the head of a sow impaled on a stick (symbol of innate darkness in man's heart).

As the novel progresses, Ralph lost his leadership role to Jack, as the group gradually succumbs to the id instincts over the course of the novel, Ralph's position declines precipitously, while Jack rises eventually most of the boys except Piggy leave Ralph's group for Jack's and Ralph is left alone to be hunted by Jack's tribe. Ralph's story ends semi- tragically, as he is rescued and returns to civilization. As an epitome of reason and sanity when he sees the naval officer, he weeps with the burden of his personal consciousness\ new knowledge about the innate darkness in the heart of man.

### The Super-Ego

Simon symbolizes the third component of the tripartite psyche, 'the super-ego'. He is an epitome of morality whereas Ralph and Jack stand at opposite ends of the spectrum that is ego and id respectively). Simon stands in the natively different plane of all the other boys. Simon symbolizes the super- ego; he embodies a kind of innate, spiritual human goodness that is deeply concerned with nature and in its own way as penal as Jack's evil, the other boys abandon moral behaviour as soon as the societal law is no longer there to impose it upon them. The boys are not innately amoral: rather the real world (the adult's world), the threat of punishment for misdeeds has conditioned them to act morally.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that man is naturally irrational and impulsive. He naturally lusts to gratify the id instinct. Furthermore, In Golding's view, the human impulse towards rationality is not as deeply rooted as the human impulse towards irrationality. It is only Simon that acts completely morally not out of guilt, compulsions or shame but because he believes in the inherent value of morality. He behaves kindly towards the younger children, and he is the first to realize the problem posed by the beast and the lord of the flies that is the monster in the island is not a real physical beast but rather a savagery that lurks within each human being. The sow's head on the stake symbolizes this idea, as we see in Simon's vision of the head speaking to him. Ultimately, this idea of the inherent evil within each human being stands as the moral conclusion and central problem of the novel. (Against this idea of evil, Simon represents a contrary idea of essential human goodness; the 'super-ego' however, his brutal murder in the hands of the other boys is a paradox as it indicates the scarcity of human beings with balanced psyche.

### **Conclusion**

The traceable fixations of Golding's personal experiences within his characters in the *Lord of the Flies* clearly indicate that a literary work is an expression of a writer's; unconsciousness, repression and neuroses. Also, it reveals that a literary text as a similitude of a dream involves a symbolic play-out of a writer's repressed fair, unresolved emotions anxiety, experiences, desires, psychological conflicts etc.

The three main characters Jack, Ralph and Simon in the novel are representations of the three aspects of the human psyche. Jack symbolizes the id, while Ralph, the hero epitomizes the ego and



the quite unpopular Simon symbolizes the super-ego. The existence of the tripartite psyche in the unconscious is not only justified in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, but also substantiated as the source of archetypal behavioural patterns and the root of human conflicts.

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