

## Loss of Childhood in *Lord of the Flies*

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### Introduction

*Lord of the Flies* (1954) was written by one of the Nobel Prize for literature winners of the twentieth century, Britain's William Golding (1911-93). Its theme is children's change from innocence to loss of innocence and it is set on a desert island where there are no adults: the children learn of the end of innocence and the darkness of the human heart. *Treasure Island* (1883) which was written by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Swallows and Amazons* (1930) written by Arthur Ransome and *The Coral Island* (1858) written by Robert Michael Ballantyne are adventure novels as well as *Lord of the Flies*. *Treasure Island*, *Swallows and Amazons* and *The Coral Island* portray children who encounter evils from outside. Unlike three novels, *Lord of the Flies* describes evils within children.

The ideas of childhood in literature change over the centuries: authors in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw children differently. John Dryden (1631-1700) who was the first poet laureate as well as a dramatist and critic wrote *All for Love* a tragedy 1677, said as follows, "Men are but children of a larger growth". (*All for Love*, 89) In other words people physically grow up but their mentality tends to remain as immature as children. In contrast to Dryden, there is a traditional notion of children as something unquestionably pure. William Blake (1757-1827), who was an artist and influential poet of Romanticism published *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in 1794. "The Chimney Sweeper" is both in *Songs of Innocence* and *of Experience*. In "The Chimney Sweeper" in the *Songs of Innocence*, Innocence is expressed as follows, "Hush Tom never mind, for when your head's bare, You know that the soot cannot spoil your white." (*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 19) Even under severe conditions, the child is immune to crisis because the child does not know reality, so, he or she is innocent. In "The Chimney Sweeper" in the *Songs of Experience*, loss of childhood is expressed as follows, "And because I am happy, & dance & sing, They think they have done me no injury: And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King Who make up a heaven of our misery." (*Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, 61) The child knows reality and accumulate experience as a social being like an adult, and accordingly, the child loses his or her innocence. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* shows that human beings are born with innocence and

through experiencing, they lose innocence. There is antagonism between innocence and experience. William Wordsworth (1770-1850), who is a Romantic poet laureate wrote "The Rainbow" in 1807. He expresses this idea as follows, "The Child is father of the Man." (*English Poems and Their Meanings- Eishi he no Izanai*, 5) The adult inner life can remain and continue as he was a child. Both of them are connected by a line. That is, the sources of adults are pure children. The children are not corrupted: the children are pure. Naturally, the children are pure. As they grow in experience, they become corrupted. In *Lord of the Flies*, when the children are set on a desert island where there are no adults, the children change. In the space which is a desert island, William Golding expresses the Romantic idea of childhood in the *Lord of the Flies*.

### **Innocence in physicality**

In *Lord of the Flies*, physical characters of children are expressed as follows, "He [Ralph] was old enough, twelve years and a few months, to have lost the prominent tummy of childhood and not yet old enough for adolescence to have made him awkward. You could see now that he might make a boxer, as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went, but there was a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil." (*Lord of the Flies*, 10) The first sentence represents Ralph's physicality as that of a child. The second sentence represents Ralph's physicality as it might change from a child to an adult, but Ralph retains enough innocence even with his physical change in progress. That is, Ralph's physicality is getting built up like an adult but his inner nature is still innocent as a child.

There are descriptions of the physical characters of the choir, hunters who are likely to be of similar age as Ralph but who differs from Ralph's physicality as follows, "The creature was a party of boys, marching approximately in step in two parallel lines and dressed in strangely eccentric clothing. Shorts, shirts, and different garments they carried in their hands; but each boy wore a square black cap with a silver badge on it. Their bodies, from throat to ankle, were hidden by black cloaks, which bore a long silver cross on the left breast, and each neck was finished off with a ham-bone frill." (*Lord of the Flies*, 19) Ralph pays attention to the choir's clothing when they come to the gathering with an effect of the conch first. Ralph thinks at this time that the choir is something unlike human beings by using the word, 'the creature'. Also, by expressing their appearance as 'strangely eccentric clothing'. The clothing of the choir is like a military uniform, the clothing which works as a symbol of Jack's military authority as a leader on the desert island. The uniform implies militant unification of the hunters. Ralph finds the clothing of the choir strange, because they discard their own clothes to form a unity of military group.

### **Fluctuation in Ralph's mentality**

There is a scene where Ralph's mentality undergoes a change: a new phase of inner mind. Ralph's mentality can be seen as follows, "A strange thing happened in his [Ralph] head. Something fluttered there in front of his mind like a bat's wing, obscuring his idea." (107) 'A bat's wing' suggests the dark side of his mind. By using the phrases like 'a bat's wing' and 'obscuring', they imply hostile and dark emotions toward Jack and the hunters.

Also it is obvious that Ralph cannot control these dark feelings toward Jack and the hunters as follows, "Then, at the moment of greatest passion and conviction, that curtain flapped in his [Ralph] head and he forgot what he had been driving at." (163) There are the words which are 'curtain flapped in his head' and 'forgot' in this quotation. A curtain connotes something hidden. By using the words which are 'a bat's wing', 'obscuring', 'curtain flapped in his head' and 'forgot', Ralph consciously excludes what Jack and the hunters are doing from Ralph's head. Although what he has in his mind at the moment is not different from Jack and the hunters in his unconsciousness. S. W. Foster said "The war alone was not what appalled him [William Golding], but what he had learnt of the natural- and original sinfulness of mankind did. It was the evil seen daily as commonplace and repeated by events it was possible to read in any newspaper which, he asserted, were matter of the *Lord of the Flies*. The war could be regarded as the catalyst which released an already present evil. People possessed this trait in a fundamental and permanent fashion – it could emerge at any time and under any condition." (S. W. Foster cited in Afaf Ahmed Hasan Al-Saidi, 129) It means that collective unconsciousness that is discussed by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) naturally resides in the human mind, which stores latent evils. That is, Ralph, Jack, and the other children have evil in the heart.

### **Darkness of the human heart**

The darkness of the human heart arises in a child, "He [Jack] capered toward Bill, and the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness." (64) In this quotation, Jack cannot hunt the pig because he still has guilt about killing: he has own self-control. To overcome his guilt he puts the mask on and escapes the judgement of good and evil to be the other self. That is the moment when Jack loses his innocence..

Roger, who is a hunter, comes to lose his innocence as well, "Roger gathered a handful of stones and began to throw them. Yet there was a space round Henry, perhaps six yards in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and

the law. Roger' s arm was conditioned by a civilization that knew nothing of him and was in ruins." (62) In this passage, without any adults or guards on the desert island, the child starts to attack weaker and powerless children: it represents the survival of the fittest in a miniature of human society. When Roger hesitates to throw stones at Henry, Roger has memories of social authority and discipline in this outside space which is a desert island: the protection of parents, school, policemen and the law. Therefore, Roger cannot yield completely to savagery because of the power of civilization which human beings carry.

Ralph unconsciously loses innocence, "No. They' re [hunters] not as bad as that. It was an accident." (184) Here after Ralph has lost Piggy and Simon, who are Ralph' s allies due to the murder of Jack and the hunters and the children who are in Ralph' s force Ralph is left alone. In order to establish his ultimate authority Jack orders the hunters to kill Ralph and Ralph escapes from Jack and the hunters. In spite of this situation Ralph still concludes the murder is an accident. As Jack puts the mask on his head and looks away from reality, Ralph looks away from the murder of Simon. It is the awakening "persona" that is discussed by Jung. Jack and Ralph equally transform themselves into a different persona. This becomes their means of escape.

## **Conclusion**

"[...] Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man' s heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy." (202) Although Ralph criticizes Jack and the hunters, Ralph finds that his innocence is lost along with Jack and the hunters. Ralph' s tears occur from his guilt over the loss of innocence, which also causes loss of his childhood and consciousness to the darkness of man including himself. Also, Ralph cannot try to resist Jack and hunters unlike Piggy and Simon, as Ralph has lost his innocence and learned about the darkness which lurks within the human mind. Even with the development of civilization, it cannot control the darkness of human beings. Ralph' s transition from childhood to adulthood represents a change from innocence to its loss. Takamoto Takako discusses that "Innocence" is negative rather than positive. "Innocence" means ignorance. Also, it is not something eternal but transitory. It is similar to what William Blake expresses as loss of innocence caused by experience. Charles Baudelaire (1821-67) who was a French poet and critic displays that there are the adult who maintain innocence: immature adults as follows, "[...] a man-child, as a man who is never for a moment without the genius of childhood- a genius for which no aspect of life has become stale". (Baudelaire cited in Tribunella, 67) However, William Golding may represent the Romantic idea of childhood in the *Lord of the Flies* even when children are isolated from adults. John Dryden expresses

“Men are but children of a larger growth” (*All for Love*, 89). In contrast William Golding may express Children are but men of a smaller growth in the *Lord of the Flies*.

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