Savagery in *Lord of the Flies*: When Boys Turn to Animals

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Carl Jung once said, “Inside of every person exists the potential for evil. It is by choice that we conform to society’s laws and suppress our inner savagery.” This statement makes sense because everyone has a choice to be civilized or not, as long as we are willing to accept the consequences of being evil or breaking the law. *Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding, explores the limits of this “inner savagery.” By depicting young boys who are unable to follow rules without authority, who tease each other mercilessly, and who resort to violent behavior, Golding suggests that everyone is naturally savage and that the rules of civilization are what keep us under control.

Without their parents and other authority figures, the boys are unable to create and follow civilized rules on the island. For example, the boys decide early in the novel that they will blow inside of a conch shell whenever a meeting is being called, and that the person holding the conch is the only one who has a right to speak at that time. By the middle of the novel, the boys are no longer following their own rules. Golding writes, “‘Conch! Conch!’ shouted Jack. ‘We don’t need the conch anymore. We know who ought to say things. What good did Simon do speaking, or Bill, or Walter? It’s time some people knew they’ve got to keep quiet and leave deciding things to the rest of us’” (101). This passage shows that Jack is already frustrated with the rules they had set, and that he is trying to gain more power on the island by silencing the other boys. Civilized people are able to follow rules or change them in an orderly way when they want them changed, instead of resorting to power struggles and arguments. The difficulty that the boys have following rules shows that civilization is unnatural to them.

The boys tease and taunt each other the way that savages would. For instance, during one heated moment on the island, Ralph taunts Piggy by asking, “You wouldn’t, would you, Fatty?” (71). This evidence shows how abusive Ralph is towards Piggy because he calls him a
derogatory name. Being abusive towards friends is a sign of savagery because civilized people do not act that way. In another example, the boys choose to tease Henry instead of encouraging him. Golding writes, “The sound of mock hunting, hysterical laughter and real terror came from the beach” (98). Civilized people would be encouraging each other instead of making one of their own feel more fearful. The boys are clearly becoming savages by this point because they are working against each other instead of working together to build order on the island.

In addition to teasing each other, the boys are also violent towards each other. The most shocking example of this violence occurs when the boys kill Simon late in the novel. They are so savage by this point that they think that Simon is a beast instead of a fellow person. When Simon returns to the group after discovering a dead pilot in a parachute, the boys launch into a chant and kill him:

*Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood! Do him in!*

The sticks fell and the mouth of the new circle crunched and screamed. The beast was on its knees in the center, its arms folded over its face. It was crying out against the abominable noise, something about a body on a hill. [ … ] At once the crowd surged after it, poured down the rock, leapt on to the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws. [ … ] Presently the heap lay still, a few yards from the sea. Even in the rain they could see how small a beast it was; and already its blood was staining the sand. (152-3)

No act is more savage than murder. Civilized human beings do not kill each other. The fact that the boys are so caught up in their violence that they mistake Simon for a beast and then violently
kill him shows that they have completely lost touch with civilization and society. Unfortunately, by this point, the boys, with the exception of Ralph, are completely savage.

*Lord of the Flies* reminds us how important it is to keep the ugly side of human nature under control, even when it is hard for us. Indeed, the boys’ behavior demonstrates the utter savagery that would unfold when human nature is left unchecked. Every time we stop at a red light or pay for an item at a store, even when we do not want to, we are agreeing that rules help our society run smoothly. The alternative, as we see in *Lord of the Flies*, is much worse.
Work Cited