

Rethinking moral values and primal drives in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the character dynamics of the central characters in the novel *Lord of the Flies* to demonstrate the character development of humans when faced with isolated island due to World War II. This research uses descriptive research method with qualitative approach. The data collection technique involves reading *Lord of the Flies* and look for experts' data related with character dynamics of the central character. Data are linked to intrinsic elements, including character and characterization, setting, plot, conflict, symbolism, and irony, and relate them to extrinsic studies covering psychoanalytic theory, the life and death instincts theory, and narcissism theory, all three theories proposed by Sigmund Freud. The results of this study show that the character dynamics experienced by the central characters, Ralph, Jack, and Piggy, are dominated by complex psychological and social factors, including the influence of an isolated environment and group tensions. The central characters play their respective roles. Ralph tends to favor the values of order and morality, Jack is influenced by the death instinct and aggression, while Piggy retains logic and rationality. In conclusion, this analysis shows that under extreme conditions, human character can change. Humans can lose their moral values due to basic primal drives such as the desire of power, fear, and the tendency to act violently. When tensions rise. The moral principles that guide human behavior seem to disappear, so humans tend to fall into destructive behavior that ignores a sense of empathy and civilization.

Keywords: *Central Character; Dynamics; Psychoanalysis; Instinct; Morality*

Introduction

Character is defined as psychological traits that distinguish a person from others, General Indonesian Dictionary in Arofad (2022:16). A person's character begins to form through their environment: family, school, and the surrounding community. Unlike character formation, character development is carried out through three stages, the stages of knowing, acting, and habit. character is not only limited to knowledge, because someone who knows about knowledge, because someone who knows about knowledge is not necessarily able to act according to his ability, unless the person is used to doing it (Bakri, 2022:1). Being an adult means being responsible for one's actions. A mature person is not easily overcome by emotions and does not react through destructive behavior. Adults can generally think openly and see things from many perspectives (Tiarasari, 2019: 1&3).

In addition to the explanation of adult persona character, it is also important to know the explanation of children's character. There are four types of children's character, including choleric, sanguinis, melancholic, and phlegmatic. Children with a choleric character tend to have traits such as enthusiasm, synergy, and assertiveness. Sanguinis children are friendly, cheerful, and sociable. On the other hand, melancholic children tend to have traits such as enthusiasm, synergy, and assertiveness. Then phlegmatic children have a patient, relaxed, and adaptable nature (Psychology, 2023:1).

Children's character development cannot be separated from their mutual interaction with their environment. This process is complex because children interact with environmental conditions that are always changing. According to Bronfenbrenner, the system that most influences children's development is the microsystem. Examples of this microsystem environment include family, school and children's friendships (Djuwita, 2023:1). In the face

of good character formation, children need adult supervision. Because the role of adults is so important in providing direction and support in shaping quality character.

Given that environment is one of the fundamental factors in children's character development, it is important to know how the tragedy of armed conflict can affect children's character development. Such is the case with the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine. This invasion was motivated by Russia's unacceptance of the Ukrainian leader's closeness to Western states and wanting to become NATO (CNBC Indonesia, 2022:1). Similar events are happening in Israel and Palestine. The conflict between the two countries was motivated by the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, who obliged the British government to establish a national home for the Jews in Palestine. The contents of the letter have an impact on Palestine to this day (R. S. Putri, 2023:1).

Similar conditions also occurred in the case of World War II. The war was fought from 1939-1945 and was triggered by political and economic instability in Germany, as well as long-standing resentment of the Treaty of Versailles. World War II involved two camps: The Axis (Germany, Italy and Japan) and the Allies (France, Great Britain, the United States and Soviet Union) (Septiani, 2023:1). From September 1940 to May 1941 Germany bombed Britain (Editors, 2024:1). The British government planned massive evacuation. Over the course of three days, around 1,5 million civilians – mostly children – were transported from the city center to safer countryside (Alfiyyah, 2022:3). The process of evacuating these children was called Operation Pied Piper (Zimmerman, 2021:1).

The impact of this war has resulted in trauma such as deep fear, sleeplessness and difficulty concentrating. They lose interest in activities that they used to do happily, and despair. Some of them experience behavioral disorders such as aggression, unruly, and withdrawal from social interactions. This is ironic considering that children who previously went to school and played happily must experience the cruel conditions of war (Merdeka.Com, 2024: 14-16).

William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* tells the story of a group of boys who are supposed to be

safe from the ravages of World War II, but it doesn't end as expected as they are stranded on a deserted island after the plane, they are travelling suffers an incident. All the adults are declared dead in the incident, leaving only a group of boys. With no adults present, the children stranded on the island try to build a new society. Over time when the island is no longer a haven of opinion resulting in changes in their character. This eventually grows into chaos and is the beginning of the collapse of social norms.

The novel *Lord of the Flies* was written by William Golding, a famous British novelist, playwright, and poet. Golding was born in Newquay, Cornwall, England, 19 September 1911 and died on 19 June 1993 in Perranarworthal, Cornwall England. He was born into a middle-class family and studied at Marlborough Grammar School and later continued his education at Brasenose College, Oxford University, where he studied literature. His work is characterised by a deep understanding of human nature and an exploration of the darkness of the human self. His work continues to be honored and he has become one of the most influential writers in 20th century English literature. Golding has contributed a lot to literature and has produced several works such as *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *The Inheritors* (1955), *Pincher Martin* (1956), *Free Fall* (1959), *The Spire* (1964), *Rites of Passage* (1980). Thanks to his contributions, he was honored with the Nobel Prize in Literature for *Lord of the Flies*. He also received the Booker Prize for his work *Rites of Passage*. Golding had joined the Military Forces, namely the British Royal Navy with a position as an officer on a warship. His experiences during World War II influenced one of his works, *Lord of the Flies* (Britannica, 2023:1).

The novel *Lord of the Flies* was chosen as the object of research because of the researcher's interest in the different characters of Ralph, Jack and Piggy. In addition to their different characters, these characters show human psychological responses when faced with difficult situations, as well as explore neglected human nature, such as indifference, loss of empathy, and selfishness. Such is the change in character experienced by the central figure in the novel *Lord of the Flies* when they lose their human nature and morality. Without adult

supervision, the children on the island will engage in destructive, selfish acts, losing empathy for others.

In this novel, Golding uses the genre of allegory to explore evil in his characters. He describes how the island's rule-less conditions turn the children's behavior into savagery, Bhadury in Jasim (2021:89). Allegory is a work that conveys hidden meaning, generally spiritual, moral, or political meaning conveyed through symbolic characters and events, Mahler (2024:1). The novel *Lord of the Flies* is one proof that the condition of a person isolated on a remote island causes conflict and character development of the figure.

Methods

This research uses a descriptive method of analysis with a qualitative approach. The qualitative research uses a narrative context which means presenting data in a narrative manner, namely presenting the results of data processing using sentences. The primary data source used in this study is the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. Meanwhile, secondary data in this study were obtained through print media such as journal articles, theoretical books and several academic studies related to elements in literary works.

In this study, the intrinsic elements used by the author to help analysis include character and characterisation, setting, plot, conflict, symbol and irony (Rivaldy et al., 2020; Kusuma et al., 2024; Widodo & Rahayu, 2024). While extrinsic elements that support the analysis of character dynamics include psychoanalysis theory, life instinct and death instinct theory, narcissism theory, all three of which were proposed by Sigmund Freud.

Findings and discussion

After being elected as the leader of the island, Ralph proved his leadership qualities by ordering the other children to make a fire as a symbol of hope, *"There's another thing. We can help them to find us. If a ship comes near the island, they may not notice us. So, we must make smoke on top of the mountain. We must make a fire"* (Golding, 1954:38). Ralph's *Id* in the data describes the urge to survive and the desire to be saved. This is also related to Freud's life instinct

theory, in this instinct, individuals tend to strive to gain pleasure and end suffering (Betsy, 2024:1). On the other hand, Ralph also reflects the function of the *Ego* through his rational thinking about the idea of lighting a fire for the sake of being saved. Here, *Ego* tries to satisfy the *Id's* urge about survival in a reasonable way, namely lighting the fire. Ralph's *Superego* is seen when he shows his moral leadership qualities through his action of making fire.

Over time, when hope of rescue is lost, the children are filled by death instincts and primal needs. In a tense situation and pressed by Jack's camp, Ralph went into hiding because he was about to be killed. In hiding, Ralph has prepared a weapon to fight with Jack's camp, *"Ralph picked up his stick and prepared for battle."* (Golding, 1954:219). *Ralph felt the point of his spear with his thumb and grinned without amusement. Whoever tried that would be stuck, squealing like a pig.*" (Golding, 1954:219). Ralph's actions show that we will eventually become part of the savages on the island. Although his intention was to protect himself, his *Superego*, which represents his moral values, has been lost. Ralph's actions that began to be brutal contradicted his initial principles that championed rational thinking. As quoted in the previous quote. *"Well, we won't be painted," said Ralph, 'because we aren't savages."* (Golding, 1954:196). In this quote, Ralph is still committed to the principle of morality and refuses to fall into Jack's brutal actions. This change in Ralph's character is a manifestation of the influence of situation irony, which represents a different result to what is expected (Allo, 2017:6).

Jack's Character Dynamics

From his social dimension, Jack is a choir member. *"The tall boy shouted at them 'Choir! Stand still!"* (Golding, 1954:17) *"He's always throwing a faint," said Merridew. 'He did in Gib; and Addis' and at matins over the precentor."* (Golding, 1954: 17). Choirs are closely related to churches; generally church choirs have the intention of praising God. Church choirs dedicate most of their musical works as a form of praise and honor to God. Church choirs are also conducted in churches and serve church activities (Gasong, 2023: 40-42). This description is relevant to the mention of locations such as Gib,

Addis and matins which are services performed in the morning by Christians (Reske. 2023:1). This description shows that Jack comes from an environment with a strong religious background. Jack's role as leader of the choir members shows that he has been given the trust to organise and lead his group members. This shows that prior to Jack's election as choir leader, the church authorities had seen leadership traits in Jack, thus requiring him to become choir leader.

Over time, Jack found Ralph's leadership useless, as he thought he was the one who always provided food for the children on the island. Jack made physical strength and hunting skills the benchmark of a true leader increasingly, Jack's primitive instincts are dominated by hatred and aggression. The culmination of his cruel actions can be seen when he dares to kill Piggy.

Ralph heard the great rock long before he saw it. The rock struck Piggy glancing blow from chin to knee. 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. Piggy's arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig's after it has been killed.

"See? See? That's what you'll get! I mean that! There isn't a tribe for you anymore!" Viciously, with full intention, he hurled his spear at Ralph, the point tore the skin and flesh over Ralph's ribs, then sheared off and fell in the water. Ralph stumbled, feeling not pain but panic, and the tribe, screaming now like the Chief, began to advance. (Golding, 1954:206).

Based on the description above, Jack transforms into a very scary figure, and he even kills Piggy using a large stone rolled from above. This is a clear manifestation of death instinct. Piggy, who was known as an individual who supported civilisation and rationality, is killed in a horrific way. Morality no longer exist on the island. Moreover, Jack's act of ferociously throwing his spear at Ralph shows a loss of control and humanity. The actions of Jack and his tribe in attacking and shouting are an illustration that they have merged with primitive instincts and are no longer bound by social rules, as Ralph implemented in the beginning.

In Freud's psychoanalytical perspective, Jack shows the dominance of the aggressive and brutal *Id*

after Piggy's death. Jack who said *"See? See? That's what you'll get! I mean that! There isn't a tribe for you anymore!"* (Golding, 1954:206). Reflects pride and satisfaction in the violence that has just occurred. This shows that the aggressive instinct and basic instinct of the *Id* can drive individuals to inhumane behavior. Jack's inhumane action in the above data shows irony, considering that Jack came from a religious background that should reflect morality, but his behavior is the opposite. This condition is included in the situation irony, irony that presents a different result from what is expected (Allo, 2017:6). At first, the relationship between Ralph and Jack seems harmonious, with Ralph being the leader and Jack accepting the role of the hunter. The relationship between the two had shown the potential for good cooperation, but the situation turned into an ironic situation. Ralph originally hoped that Jack would cooperate and help maintain harmony within the group, but in reality, turned into a source of conflict and chaos.

Piggy's Character Dynamics

On the other hand, Piggy's psychological dimension is seen when he sees a brownish conch shell among the ferns. Piggy's excitement boils over when he sees the conch shell, *"A shell! Suddenly Piggy was a bubble with decorous excitement right, it's a shell."* (Golding, 1954:11). *We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting. They'll come when they hear us"* (Golding, 1954:12). In terms of his psychological dimension, Piggy is portrayed as an intelligent child. He can think logically in the midst of a difficult situation. Piggy's speech in the above quote reflects a strong analytical mind, where Piggy does not only see an object based on its physicality, but he can also see it as a useful tool, namely, to call other children and hold meetings.

The *Id* in the data is shown through the moment of joy when Piggy finds the conch shell. The joy he feels leads him to become a more productive individual, as when he proposes ideas on how to use the conch shell. Piggy's *Superego* is seen in his desire to build social structures. By proposing to use the conch shell as a tool to summon the other children, Piggy shows an awareness of the importance of cooperation in a difficult situation. This shows that

Piggy is trying to bring social order amidst the uncertainty of the desert island.

Towards the end of the story, Piggy shows a change in his character, this can be seen when he starts to show his assertiveness in his opinion. Piggy asserts that want his opinion to be heard. This situation can be seen in the following data, when Piggy loses his temper and expects attention from the other children in the island regarding his opinion:

“How can you expect to be rescued if you don’t put first things first and act proper?”

“Then when you get here you build a bonfire that isn’t no use. Now you been and set the whole island on fire. Won’t we look funny if the whole island burns up? Cooked fruit, that’s what we’ll have to eat. And roast pork. And that’s nothing to laugh at! (Golding, 1954:47).

The data above shows the man against man conflict between Piggy and the children on the island. His anger towards the children is also a form of *Ego*, as he is frustrated by the children’s undisciplined behavior and only follows the pleasure-based drive of *Id*. Piggy is aware that the children’s reckless behaviour will lead to bad consequences, so he tries to show awareness to others. Piggy’s superego is illustrated through the moral value conveyed about the consequences of children’s impulsive actions if they do not properly guard the fire. In the quotation above, Piggy is unconsciously explaining the good practice of responsibility. Besides emphasising the importance of responsibility, Piggy also wants them to prioritise their desire to survive. Piggy’s desire to survive is closely related to Freud’s life instinct. This is manifested through his desire to build a shelter by the beach, as Piggy realises that they need physical shelter from the harsh natural conditions.

Another Piggy’s action related to life instincts is seen when he emphasises the importance for the children to think of ways to be rescued from the island. He hopes that all the children can stay sane and not act recklessly, as maintaining sanity is one way to maintain their psychological stability in the midst of uncertainty. In this case, Piggy wants the children to act more rationally by adhering to the priority of being rescued. The role of life instinct in the above data does not only focus on physical

survival, but also reflects the desire to maintain a structured social order despite being in the midst of chaos.

Conclusion

The analysis of *Lord of the Flies* highlights the significant impact of the isolated island setting on the character dynamics of Ralph, Jack, and Piggy. Stranded away from civilization, the lack of adult supervision and societal rules forces the boys to rely on their instincts for survival, which gradually alters their behaviors and moral principles. The extended time spent on the island leads to hunger, fear, and tensions that push the boys towards brutal actions and a loss of morality. Ralph evolves from a rational leader into a more aggressive individual, especially as he prepares to defend himself from Jack's camp. Jack, initially moral, becomes increasingly power-hungry and impulsive, driven by his desire for control. Meanwhile, Piggy's character is marked by isolation and vulnerability, as he becomes more emotional and frustrated with the group's moral decline, particularly as their desire for rescue diminishes. Ultimately, the characters' moral deterioration and their transformation reflect the harsh effects of isolation and the collapse of social values.

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