Lord Of The Flies: The Main Theme And Character Analysis

The novel Lord of the Flies, written by William Golding in 1954 tells a story of a group of boys stranded on a lifeless island and their attempt to govern themselves. During a war retreat, a airplane crashes leaving preadolescent children and littleuns as the only survivors. In the group of young boys, there are two who want to lead for the remainder of their stay, Jack and Ralph. By opposing Jack and Ralph, Golding reveals the slow transition process from democracy to dictatorship. The contrast between Ralph's group on the beach and Jack's tribe at Castle Rock symbolizes the hostility between liberal democracy and totalitarianism. The novel Lord of the Flies shows how the two political ideologies are compared by contrasting Jack's strict, violent, and ordered system qualities, that make up a totalitarian government with Ralph's open, restrictive, and rule-filled system, showing a democratic perspective.

Jack's craving for ultimate power and a strict environment represents a totalitarian government. The hunger for absolute power causes Jack to morph into a savage that reigns through terror. From the beginning, Jack sought to be chief and lead the group. Jack told the group, "I ought to be chief,' said Jack with simple arrogance, 'because I'm chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp" (Golding 19). Jack is a natural-born leader. His personality is overflowing with confidence, which is why so many boys gravitate to him. Jack thinks he should have the power because he always had it. In multiple cases, Jack is selfish and belittles others while wanting to feel superior. He wants to be the center of all discussions and no one other than him can be right. Jack says, "And you shut up! Who are you anyway? Sitting there telling people what to do. You can't hunt, you can't sing - Why should choosing make any difference? Just giving orders that don't make any sense" (101). Jack is starting to unravel and come to the idea that Ralph is not fit to be chief. Jack hits his breaking point and makes it clear that he believes he should be chief. Once Jack succeeds from the group and forms his own group, he rules through fear and terror. Unlike Ralph, he earns the respect of his followers; "'He's going to kill Wilfred.' 'What for?' 'I don't know. He didn't say. He got angry and made us tie Wilfred up"' (183). Jack turns to terror and torture for no reason, other than gaining respect. Jack knows that if he loses' the boys' respect then his absolute power system ends. Jack turning to rule by fear represents him losing contact with humanity and turning completely savage.

Ralph's ability to be fair and civil symbolizes a democratic society. Ralph represents the good, fair, and friendly leader that everyone likes, not necessarily respects. Throughout the novel, Ralph has one thing Jack does not; the conch. The conch symbolizes order, rational thought, and civilization; three things Ralph maintains till his rescue. Like in democracy, Ralph did not want to obtain all the power. He split it up amongst the group, "We've got to have special people for looking after the fire. Any day there may be a ship out there… and if we have a signal going they'll come and take us off. And another thing. We ought to have more rules. Where the conch is, that's a meeting. The same up here as down there" (43). Ralph's democratic way allows him to possess most of the power but also allows others to inherit some too. Ralph tries to establish an orderly civilization among the boys by prioritizing the fire and making rules. Ralph is constantly insisting on an organized system of government, symbolized by the conch. Unlike Jack, Ralph thinks with reason. He is logical but also realistic. Ralph notices the recent decline in the tribe and says, "Things are breaking up. I don't understand why. We began well; we were happy" (90). Ralph does not understand why everyone else cannot see the logic in

keeping up with the signal fire or help with building the shelters. Ralph prefers taking care of the fire and shelters because he believes the only way off the island is by giving off a signal. In Ralph's mind, food is low on the totem pole. Ralph was never seen as a respected leader. He let many things slide. He was not the main focal voice. He let everyone give their opinions and then ran his society off of everyone else's likes and dislikes. By ruling this way he was never respected or viewed as a leader, rather a friend. Later Ralph says, "Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up" (208). Ralph believes in law, order, and working towards the common good - in this case, rescue. Jack focused on hunting, moment by moment living, and disorder. Ralph wants everyone to unite and be one functioning tribe with the power divided amongst all.

In Lord of the Flies, William Golding favors a totalitarian government. The novel is a political allegory referencing the Cold War. The Cold War was a battle between Russia's communism and US democracy. In the novel, Golding presents the superior system, totalitarian, by the success of Jack's tribe and the ordered system that prioritizes the food and signal fire. In chapter eleven, Ralph and Jack are fighting over the "break-in" at Ralph's tribal area. While the two are fighting, Piggy gets shoved off the edge of the mountain and falls to his death. Piggy dying represents the voice of society and civilization dying. As Piggy dies, so does humanity. When Piggy falls to his death he drops the conch shell. The shell symbolizes order and humanity. Once the shell breaks, it is a symbol of all hell breaking loose and the civilization no longer having rules or order. In a totalitarian state, the citizens are treated more like slaves that are bound to the sole ruler. In the novel, Jack is the tyrant while his followers are his slaves.

The portrayal of a totalitarian government to a democratic government is a common theme throughout the novel. Comparing Jack's strict, violent, and orderly system qualities, that make up a totalitarian government to Ralph's open, restrictive, and rule-filled system, showing a democratic view it exhibits how the two types of governments change and form a society, but end the same way. Regardless of what the government won, both systems were rescued. Today, the US follows a democratic system that divides the power amongst all the branches and has systems that prohibit one branch from inheriting too much power. Jack and Ralph's systems had two different theories of how their people should be governed, but in the long run, whether the method used was correct or not, both tribes and governments were saved.

Work Cited

1. Golding, William. Lord of the Flies. New York: Penguin Group, 1954. Print.