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Mask Of Societal Influence

Society influences humans in numerous ways; it shapes their views, emotions, and morals. Society functions in a way where it preaches to itself that they are a good society; it says what is right and to stay away from evil and savagery. This is true in a sense because this is the goal of society, to create peace in the world and to teach people to respect the Earth and everyone on it. In *Lord Of The Flies,* William Goldinggoes beyond this mask society has placed on itself and explores the true savage nature of humans. As a result, *Lord Of The Flies* suggests, societal influences keep humans from descending into savagery.

Golding sets his novel in World War II; his young characters have just crash landed on an island isolated from society. At first, the boys still have a sense of civility as they are under the influence of societal rules. This can be seen on page 64- 65, “... 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” (Golding, 64-65). This clearly shows how the boys are still innocent and cannot bring themselves to hurt anyone just yet. However as the story goes on, the boys start to corrupt as they gradually forget about societal influences. Under this spell of savagery, heinous acts are committed by the boys and they go further and further into the abyss of evil and savagery.

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 Particularly, the savage nature can be seen as the boys hunt and kill. It is bad enough to have kids hunting and viciously killing other animals, but it could always be shrugged off because they are satisfying their need for food. However, the killing of other humans is something unacceptable and shows signs of true inhumanity. One of these instances can be found as the boys killed Simon:

The beast was on its knees in the centre, its arms folded over its face. It was crying out against the abominable noise something about a body on the hill. The beast struggled forward, broke the ring and fell over the steep edge of rock, to the sand by the water. At once the crowd surged after it, poured down the rock leapt onto the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws. (168-169)

This scene is gruesome enough on its own, but the use of diction gives a foul image. In this passage alone, it becomes almost impossible to tell these are young boys and not savage beasts. The actions are animalistic, “screamed, struck, bit, tore… tearing of teeth and claws” (169), this is clearly not describing the actions of an innocent boy but a savage. Furthermore, the descent into savagery can be seen through the death of Piggy. This incident is found on page 200 - 201:

The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee;the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist. Piggy, saying nothing, with no time for even a grunt, travelled through the air sideways from the rock, turning over as he went.

The rock bounded twice and was lost in the forest. Piggy fell forty feet and landed on his back… His head opened and stuff came out and turned red. Piggy’s arms and legs

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twitched a bit, like a pig’s after it has been killed… the sea breathed again… and went it went, sucking back again, the body of Piggy was gone. (200-201)

In comparison to Simon’s death, this shows more savagery as this is done in complete awareness of killing another human being. In Simon’s case, they killed him out of fear, but there is absolutely no excuse in killing Piggy. They simply threw the boulder on him with intentions of killing him which shows true savagery. In these examples, the importance of societal rules and influences can be seen as only they can hold back the savage beast lying dormant in all humans.

Furthermore, the boys on the island have a common misunderstanding of the beast living on the island. All the boys at some point, start to believe there is a beast on the island, all except for Simon. Simon is more aware than the others and understood how the beast is not a physical being, but something within all humans, something evil. When having a discussion about the beast, Simon expresses his thoughts about the beast, “What I mean is... maybe it’s only us” (96).

In this quote, Simon is trying to explain how the only beast residing on this island is within the boys themselves. The beast represents the savagery of human nature. Further along the book Simon has a conversation with “The Lord Of The Flies”. This metaphorical character, is the representation of the devil. In this conversation Simon confirms what he already knew about the

beast, “There isn’t anyone to help you. Only me. And I’m the Beast” (158) and also, “You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you?... I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are?” (158). “The Lord Of The Flies” is explaining how he is in everyone. This supports the theme as it shows how the savagery or the beast exists within everyone; nevertheless it can only come out when the barriers of societal influences are broken down.

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Finally, the ending of the novel shows the stark contrast of the character's behaviour as authority is brought back upon the kids. Leading up to the ending of the book, the savages (Jack’s tribe) were hunting Ralph in hopes of killing him. As Ralph is about to confront one of the savages, an intervention happens from a naval officer who appears on the island. The officer is described in such a way, commanding authority within himself, “...a huge peaked cap. It was a white-topped cap, and above the green shade of the peak was a crown, an anchor, gold foliage. He saw white drill, epaulettes, a revolver, a row of gilt buttons down the front of a uniform.” When this representation of authority appears before the boys, there is an immediate change in

them, “...infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart... “ (225). The boys remembered their old selves and had realized what they had become, from the moment societal influence returned to them, they start to revert back. This clearly shows how only societal influence can keep back the savage beast

within all humans; without it, humans are savages, but with it, they are but beasts hiding behind

the appearance of civility.

Conclusively, certain deaths occurred in the book, far from being considered accidental. They were done with malevolent intentions and show how savage humans can be when societal rules are removed. Furthermore, a sense of true human nature is shown, the savagery lying within. There is a beast within all humans, a beast who is waiting patiently for the time to break the walls that are societal rules and authority. Finally, the return of authority shows the major

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contrast of humanity with and without societal influences. This novel shows how societal influence is a thin barrier keeping human savagery at bay. Although society likes to believe

humans are all good creatures, which is simply false; the evil and savagery within one is simply masked by a thin layer of goodwill, civility, and societal influences.