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Late Capitalism and the Schizophrenic Self in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*: A Fredric Jameson Approach

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Abstract

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* narrates the story of a group of teenagers trapped in an island where they have to survive. This essay aims to analyze this novel from Fredric Jameson's point of view. Jameson developed the notion of late capitalism, and he believes that capitalism creates a reality for the individuals that nobody challenges. When the teenagers in Golding's novel face a new reality in the island, they are confused and this conflict leads to insanity and violence. In fact, experiencing a new reality leads the teenager toward paranoia and schizophrenia. Jameson's method rests upon historicism, a study of historical background of a literary work in order to understand its main ideas.

Key Words: capitalism, *Lord of the Flies*, Fredric Jameson, Historicism

Introduction

William Golding (1911-1993) was a British novelist, poet and playwright and his most known novel is *Lord of the Flies* (1954). This novel narrates the survival struggle of a group of teenagers lost in an island during Second World War bombardment. The novel depicts how the innocence of the teenager is lost and how they become violent and start attacking each other and finally burn the whole island. This study aims to present a Marxist study of this novel through the ideas of Fredric Jameson, American neo-Marxist thinker and writer.

Jameson's Key Ideas

Late capitalism is one of Jameson's contribution. According to Jameson, during the postmodern era, capitalism has become a simple and ordinary part of everyday life. "No one particularly notices the expansion of the state sector and bureaucratization any longer: it seems a simple, "natural" fact of life" (Jameson 8). Thus, Marx asserts that the ultimate stage of capitalism is the world market. It seems that the world market is a system in which the whole world is a big market for capitalism. Accordingly, Jameson claims that late capitalism is a system in which world market will be created. Late capitalism and the world market have changed the world into a more materialistic sphere. It means, the only important matter is production, relations of production and selling.

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Historicism is another idea Jameson developed. He believes that the historical background of a literary work is important in its interpretation. Historical background tries to explore the economic, political and social situation of England in the 20th century. Class conflict, modes of production, controlling elements, dominant ideologies and the structure of power are related to Jameson's historical reading of a literary text. Therefore, this essay intends to discuss such issues and link them to *Lord of the Flies*.

Schizophrenia and Paranoia

Accordingly, late capitalism creates a culture of materialism in which individuals are involved. This culture of capitalism and the involvement of individuals in it make a schizophrenic self. Levitt and Collins define Schizophrenia as "The word schizophrenia conjures images of a nightmare world where strange and twisted realities exist. Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that can be so devastating, and has such a dark history, that its very name can be frightening" (12). They continue, "Schizophrenia, however, is a psychotic disorder that causes severe mental disturbances that disrupt thoughts, speech, and behavior" (14).

Some of the symptoms of Schizophrenia are delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, and trouble in thinking. Levitt and Collins assert, "Hallucinations occur when someone hears, sees, smells, or feels things that are not really there" (17). They also assert that another symptom is delusion. "Delusions cause the patient to believe that people are reading their thoughts or plotting against them, that others are secretly monitoring and threatening them, or that they can control other people's minds" (Levitt and Collins 17).

Paranoia is an umbrella term, which covers a wide range of meanings and implications. However, the core idea is the persistent feeling of being under attention. Paranoids persistently think that others are paying attention to them and this creates anxiety and stress for them. According to Munro, a paranoid may have the following symptoms:

- He or she is suspicious of other people. It means he or she thinks that other people try to cheat him or her or tell lies.
- He or she is not able to trust other people.
- May think that other people intend to damage him or her.
- He or she is unable to get along and compromise with other people.
- He or she thinks that the world is place of constant threat.
- He or she is always defensive.
- He or she is hostile and aggressive to other people (22).

The following paragraphs will focus on scanning these notions in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

Historicism

The historical context of *Lord of the Flies* includes some important events of the twentieth century that influenced the writer's mentality and represented themselves in the novel. The first major event was the two World Wars.

Two World Wars created an atmosphere of fear in European countries including England. Golding himself was a member of the British Navy and experienced the horror and fear of war. "Based upon his wartime experiences in the British Navy, Golding asserted that the unlimited brutality shown by the Nazis was a capacity not limited to Germans or indeed to any particular group. While the world was horrified by news of the Nazi death camps, Golding felt that none of the nations was too far from committing atrocities of the same magnitude" (Kelly 15). Cold war between eastern and western blocks was another important event of history.

Cold war started between eastern and western nations, specifically the United States and Soviet Union, right after the end of the Second World War. The importance of the Cold War was that it kept the shock and suffering of the Second World War. "Golding fought in World War II, and when the war was over, he

saw that people were still shocked about how Hitler and his regime inflicted such large-scale inhuman horrors on the Jews and others. Golding felt compelled to write about the human capacity for evil” (Bloom 14). Besides, the cold war was an age that the threat of nuclear bombs and another atomic war between United States and Soviet Union was imminent.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Golding witnessed the horrible scenes of war when he participated as soldier. These scenes and realities encouraged him to write about humanity, violence and loss of innocence in his novel. *Lord of the Flies* represents how war and violence damage the mentality of individuals and lead to more violence and insanity. Furthermore, capitalism normalized World Wars and this created a false reality of individuals including the teenagers in Golding’s novel.

Schizophrenia and Paranoia in Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*

As teenagers enter the island, they realize that there is no adult in the island. This is the moment when their new reality is created.

The fair boy began to pick his way as casually as possible toward the water. He tried to be offhand and not too obviously uninterested, but the fat boy hurried after him.

“Aren’t there any grownups at all?”

“I don’t think so.”

The fair boy said this solemnly; but then the delight of a realized ambition overcame him. In the middle of the scar he stood on his head and grinned at the reversed fat boy.

“No grownups!”

The fat boy thought for a moment.

“That pilot.”

The fair boy allowed his feet to come down and sat on the steamy earth.(Golding 2)

This new reality is contrary to their previous reality they lived in. In fact, they live in the reality that capitalism normalizes for them. In fact, the capitalist system controls the individuals through rules and regulations. However, in the island, these rules and regulations are expunged. Ralph and Piggy are the symbols of control and rationality. They have the conch, which can be seen as the common language of all teenagers. On the other hand, Jack lives in the moment. He and his followers are the symbol of revolutionaries who stand against the rationality and superego. This paradox leads to schizophrenia or a different reality.

According to Kane, “The word schizophrenia conjures images of a nightmare world where strange and twisted realities exist” (12). This is the key term in analyzing Golding’s novel. In fact, there are twisted realities in the novel that confuse the boys and make them savage. “Schizophrenia, however, is a psychotic disorder that causes severe mental disturbances that disrupt thoughts, speech, and behavior” (Kane 14)

The most important symptom that all characters are involved in is hallucination. Schizophrenic people may see various kinds of hallucinations. Said differently, they see objects, patterns and things that do not exist in reality or they possibly hear voices and sounds that do not exist. They even can smell the scents that are without any source. Sometimes delusion and hallucination are considered as the same whereas they are different. Delusion refers to the unreal beliefs that people might have of others or themselves. When individuals think that others intend to harm them, they are in a delusional state. *Lord of the Flies* represents both delusions and hallucinations in the characters of the story.

They start experiencing new things. At first, Piggy thinks that everybody has died and he will die too. This delusional feelings can be seen in his behavior and speech. “They’re all dead,” said Piggy, “an’ this is an

island. Nobody don't know we're here. Your dad don't know, nobody don't know—" His lips quivered and the spectacles were dimmed with mist. "We may stay here till we die" (Golding 8).

The most significant symbol of schizophrenia in the novel is the beast that scares all boys. Although the beast is nothing scary, they have this hallucination and delusion that it is a dangerous creature. At first, the beast is not considered as serious by most boys and they believe that younger children have some bad nightmares. However, as the novel continues, the fear grows bigger and bigger and almost all characters are scared of it. They believe that there is a ghost in the island. This fear and hallucination reach its climax when all boys think that Simon is the beast and kill him whereas Simon had realized that there is no beast.

"You couldn't have a beastie, a snake-thing, on an island this size,"

Ralph explained kindly. "You only get them in big countries, like Africa, or India."

Murmur; and the grave nodding of heads.

"He says the beastie came in the dark."

"Then he couldn't see it!"

Laughter and cheers.

"Did you hear that? Says he saw the thing in the dark—"

"He still says he saw the beastie. It came and went away again an' came back and wanted to eat him—"

"He was dreaming. (Golding 28)

This part of the novel is before the arrival of the parachutist. Therefore, they have both the hallucination and delusion which is the belief that there is a threat all the time. In the novel, it is mentioned that the younger boys scream at night as if the beast is real. Characters like Jack and Simon, who do not believe in the ghost, start to have doubts.

I mean the way things are. They dream. You can hear 'em. Have you been awake at night?"

Jack shook his head.

"They talk and scream. The littluns. Even some of the others.

As if—"

"As if it wasn't a good island."

Astonished at the interruption, they looked up at Simon's serious face.

"As if," said Simon, "the beastie, the beastie or the snake-thing, was real. Remember? (Golding 43).

Therefore, there is dynamism about the beast. Gradually, all characters start to have paranoia. Paranoia is a destructive feeling that all people pay attention to you all the time and you are under persistent observations by others. In Golding's novel, all boys think that they are under the continuous attention of the beast. This might explain why they start to sacrifice pigs and give to it as a ritual. They consider it as the divinity of the island and they start to worship it. Therefore, Golding creates a chain in the novel. Boys start to see hallucinations and have delusions about the beast. Then, a sense of paranoia involves them. Finally, it leads to their savagery and violence. Jack as the hunter of the island at first denies the existence of any beast but gradually he tries to accept it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, capitalism produces an image of reality in a way that subjects cannot see any other alternative. However, they have this underlying paranoia with themselves that reality might not be the image they see every day. On the other hand, "Schizophrenia is a mode of knowledge which interprets the world to be comprised of multiple narratives" (4). Accordingly, paranoid subjects are skeptic of reality and they

believe in various narrations of reality. This situation creates anxiety for individuals and leads to violent and uncontrolled behaviors.

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