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Human-Monster Interactions, Lawlessness and Plasticity in *Lord of the Flies*: An Interdisciplinary Exploration

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Abstract

William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* is considered one of the best dystopian fictions not for its segmented setting and political contour but for its deep exploration of the horror and terror of untrodden spheres of the human psyche. In the novel, in Jack's life we witness a paradigmatic metamorphosis that results in human monstrosity due to the neuronal politics. So far, academic research is concerned, Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* already holds a significant amount of scholarship in the existing body of literature. In spite of that, the neuronal concern for turning a human into a monster is yet to be negotiated. The venture can be efficiently supported by the framework of the plastic brain by Malabou, which relies on the mechanism that if the subject's ego dies because of trauma as a result of constant humiliation, the destructive plasticity starts working by default. Therefore, by problematizing the question of the brain mechanism that helps someone perceive things in an alternative way this paper articulates the concern for dystopia itself as a destructive creation. It shows how a traumatized psyche can restore law and order and destabilize too.

Keywords: *Monstrosity, Lawlessness, Dystopia, Human Monster, Brain Plasticity*

Introduction

In the age of the Anthropocene, when human activity decisively governs planetary processes, the question of agency and responsibility acquires new urgency. The argument begins with our consideration of the Anthropocene as a separate entity with a plastic brain capable of both creation and destruction. Then why can't we regard dystopia as a brainchild of an anthropocentric ontology, especially when it shows very little care for its ecology? The politics of psychology goes back to the days of Sigmund Freud, when he was treating his hysterical patients. Although Freud initiated the process of fathoming the deep machinery of the human psyche, it is carried forward by Malabou with her thought-provoking insights into the trauma of new wounds—the wounds that Freud did not address at that time.

However, with due respect to Freud, Catherine Malabou broadens and enriches the psychoanalytic tradition. It is Malabou who, for the first time, asserts that the human brain is flexible in nature and it can shape a human identity according to its operational mechanism. She believes that trauma completely reorganizes human psyche in such a way that the former becomes unknown to the latter. This change, she contends, exposes both the fragility and

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resilience of the human mind. Hence, unlike other trauma theorists, Malabou designs the model of trauma in a far-fetched way, which advocates for the emergence of neo-formed beings.

In the novel, we encounter the stranded British schoolboys on a barren island. Everything happens after a plane crash. The boys undergo terrible consequences. In understanding trauma, we are not supposed to deny the role of place that interplays with the life of a trauma subject. William Golding's establishment of an isolated island as a setting intensifies the island's traumatic qualities, causing almost all the boys present to undergo mental transformations. We cannot deny Jack's demagoguery, which the island makes possible. D. Graham Burnett argues in On the Monstrosity of Islands, that islands historically evoke confinement, betrayal, and despair. According to him, islands are "homes to mutineers, wreckers, and pirates," places where monsters appear with alarming frequency (90). Golding's island belongs to this tradition, producing monstrosity as a function of isolation and trauma. In the essay, "Self-Destructive Community and the Improbability of War in *Lord of the Flies*," Yasunori Sugimura writes that:

> An uninhabited island, the setting of this story, contains two vying elements: firstly, the sign system and the sign-destroying force. These two elements, juxtaposed and intertwined with each other, inhere in the topography, scenery, and various aspects of the island, interacting in a delicate balance, out of which comes the endlessly multivocal, differentiated world. The conch is a typical example of this sort of balance. Lack of this balance brings about the world of nondifferentiation, uniformity, and violence. (47)

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Monster Theory deepens this perspective. He argues that monsters are cultural constructs. They embody society's fears, anxieties and desires. Jack is not an abnormal child. He is the representative of the projection of humanity's inherent aggression. And it is revealed when societal order falls apart. Monsters, Cohen insists, are "our children," generated from within rather than encountered from without. Golding's narrative exemplifies that monstrosity arises not from an external beast but from within the boys themselves.

Masahiro Mori's insights further complicate this analysis. Through his famous concept of the uncanny valley, Mori describes in the book *The Buddha in the Robot: A Robot Engineer's Thoughts on Science and Religion*, how the discomfort humans feel toward entities that resemble them but deviate subtly from natural human form. Jack always appears frightening to his comrades. He bears a face of both human and inhuman which generates an uncanny effect on his fellow mates. Thus, Jack's and even Hitler's transformations are poignant illustrations of how the rise of an uncanny demagogue warns society of a monstrous future. And indeed, the entire matrix is psychological.

The Monster Question

Now, what do we mean by a monster? What does a monster do? So, the term 'monster' has its Latin root, *monstrum*. It means an omen, a sign of divine displeasure with the charisma of creation. As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock cites Stephen Asma to point out that the monster is not simply a biological anomaly. It is a cultural construction. It is a "cultural category" under which societies place unusual forms of existence. This is the same kind of monstrosity we encounter in a serial killer. In Monster Studies, one strand of inquiry is teratology, or the study of birth defects. Based on Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's book *The Monster Theory Reader*, the French physician Ambroise Paré ponders on the birth of a monster in his treatise *On Monsters and Marvels*. These

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include the glory of God, the narrowness of the mother's womb, the corruption of semen, the imagination of the parents, or even physical blows to the mother's body during pregnancy. Paré emphasizes on the anomalous physical appearance however metaphoric to define monstrosity. In this case, the monstrosity is psychological.

The becoming of a psychological monster can be traced to neurological deformities, dissociation, and trauma, as the monster rejects normative cognition and calls into question social notions of justice. As Weinstock explains, "comprehending psychological illness as the product of childhood trauma and/or psychological factors may help us feel sympathy for those affected and thus undercut their monstrosity in our eyes" (23). People are motivated by powerful external forces that are beyond their control in certain circumstances. After being tragically shaken to the hilt, they opt for a deviant behaviour (23).

The role of childhood in the becoming of human monster has been studied extensively. James Kincaid's explanation in the edited book *The Cultural Construction of Monstrous Children: Essays on Anomalous Children from 1595 to the Present Day* by Simon Bacon and Leo Ruickbie, that children are not fully developed individuals is a clarion call for its own safety as well as the protection of society, this ambivalent and potentially violent individual needs to be socialized. They contend that childhood becomes a place of the continual conflicts between collective guilt and suppression and cultural standards, resulting in a fetishized body that suggests societal anxiety and what might happen in the future if such suppressed impulses come to light (16).

Michel Foucault in *Herculine Barbin* talks about historical construction of monsters. They are produced. Cultural and legal systems have constructed them. Consequently, they tread beyond transgressing nature's rules and society's customs (Weinstock 26). In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, particularly in the figure of Jack, we find same phenomenon takes place. We see how Jack's ego being weakened by external forces paves the way for transformation into a human-demon. Hence, Jack becomes the embodiment of Foucault's human monster whose transgression of natural restraint and social law marks his metamorphosis into monstrosity.

Hitler and Jack, the Human-Monsters: Lawlessness and Brain Plasticity

In his foundational work *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen asserts that "the monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us." (7) Monstrosity is the expression of cultural, political, racial, sexual, or psychological alterity in human form. (7) Sigmund Freud reminds us in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that the foundation of civilization is collective power, which restricts personal freedom. All members should be equally protected by true justice, but unbridled ego and aggressiveness resurface when social systems break down. This tension between cultural restraint and individual impulse creates the ground for monstrosity. (95) The monstrous identity is an abjected identity, the simultaneous attraction to and rejection of what breaks cultural boundaries. Jerome Cohen argues in the sixth thesis of the book *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)* entitled *Fear of the Monster is Really a Kind of Desire* that the monster is the abjected fragment that allows for the construction of all types of identities-personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal, and particular; as such, it displays their partiality and continuity. (19)

Judith Herman argues that trauma frequently drives the subjects into moral conflict, particularly when violence is man-made. Such trauma erodes the boundary between victim and

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perpetrator. Judith Herman writes in the first chapter *A Forgotten History* of his book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* about psychological trauma of a child. He discusses psychological trauma and points out the necessity of witnessing horrifying events in this course. When traumatic events are caused by humans, those who see them become embroiled in a conflict between victim and perpetrator and struggle to stay neutral in the situation. (4)

Adolf Hitler exemplifies the historical human-monster so as Jack in *Lord of the Flies*. Jack's metamorphosis from a mere schoolboy to a cruel human monster is an instance of demagoguery. Like Hitler, Jack also uses spectacle, fear, and an appeal to instinct rather than reason to establish power. Jack does not focus on the wellbeing of the group. He insists on violence. Jack's becoming of Hitler like despotic not only makes his leadership condemnable but leaves a footprint a cruel monstrosity. Believing the Jewish race to be evil, Hitler orchestrated the Holocaust as an attempt to annihilate an entire people. Here monstrosity was not an abstract metaphor but a catastrophic reality that indicates toward a broader political danger of demagoguery, the frightening ease with which civilization can yield to spectacle, fear, and authoritarianism. In her book *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, and Deconstruction*, Catherine Malabou argues that brain wounds can so radically alter personality that identity itself collapses, creating a new and often monstrous self. (xv)

Mohammed Abdulbasit Ibrahim uses Caruthian model of trauma in his article, "The Beast Within: Trauma and Psychological Effects of War in *Lord of the Flies (1954)*." He writes:

Freud and Caruth both believe that trauma could be expressed through nightmares. According to trauma theory, when a person experiences a traumatic event, their unconscious mind may struggle to cope with the overwhelming emotions and memories associated with it. These hidden desires and suppressed goals, often related to traumatic experiences, interact with cultural norms and standards. (79)

Further pondering upon the traumatic impact on the characters the author directly takes example from the novel. He writes:

In the same way, in *Lord of the Flies*, many of the boys experience nightmares and flashbacks related to their past experiences, which can be interpreted as symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For example, Simon has nightmares and dreams in which he imagines many unreal things. Simon's dreams of the pig's head in Lord of the Flies are a pivotal moment in the novel and serve to highlight the psychological impact of trauma on the human psyche. Simon is a sensitive and usually fearful boy who is deeply affected by the violence and brutality he sees around him. (79)

He concludes by saying that "Nightmares experienced by the boys on the island are common symptoms of trauma and are consistent with the principles of trauma theory." (79)

If we look back at Hitler's, we will find a cruel and authoritarian father who stifled his early aspiration to be an artist. With affection, his creative potential might have been realized instead, his psyche was moulded toward destruction. A literary analogue to Hitler's monstrosity can be found in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in which the boys fall into lawlessness

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initiating a concern for fragility of civilization. Jack manipulates others using the imagery of the "beast" and creates propaganda to obtain power, much as Hitler did.

Even Hitler, the quintessential human monster, had Buddha-nature, as Mori would tell us. The tragedy isn't his innate deformity, but the perversion of his spiritual potential. Some biographers speculate that he might have become an artist. Instead, the violent imprint of his upbringing and the sociopolitical climate activated the destructive pathways of his plasticity. And he became a monster. The monstrous, then, is not an essence but a potential realized under particular condition. In his article, "Civilizing Massacre: Lord of the Flies as Parable of the Invention of Enemies, Violence, and Sacrifice", J.S. Piven argues that the children's cruelty can stem from an authoritarian quest for imposing order. René Girard says in his book *Violence and the Sacred* that sacrifice transfers communal violence to a chosen victim, temporarily uniting the group. Piggy has been cast as a scapegoat throughout the narrative. Yasunori Sugimura writes in the essay, "Self-Destructive Community and the Improbability of War in *Lord Of The Flies,*" that

> What is common with the victims in *Lord of the Flies* is that they are killed or almost killed in a sacrificial fashion; sacred imagery is used in relation to Simon's dead body, Piggy falls and crashes on an altar-like square rock, Ralph's head is to be pierced like a sow's with a stick sharpened at both ends. The sow's skewered head is contrived to appease the uncanny beast, which is actually an image cast from the boys' minds full of aggrandized violence. But this sacrificial offering produces an adverse result. The violence intrinsic to the sacrificial ritual itself does not expel violence from the community but redoubles it. (55)

Manoj Kumar writes in his book chapter titled *Destruction of Environment: Consequences and Treatment in Context of William Golding's Lord of the Flies* that:

> the children are allowing themselves to be captured by illogical thoughts that they need to murder because of the island, because they are so wrapped up in the ritual and the celebration of their sacrifices. This is because the youngsters are so preoccupied with the ceremony and the celebration of sacrifices. The children had no idea what they were doing since the ritual was controlling them in a negative way and prevented them from positive thinking. (63-64)

The boys' impulses override reason. The inherent evil in human being is lurking under that as Ganga Ram Paudyal points out in his article, *Inherent Evil Nature in Golding's Lord of the Flies: A Psychoanalytical Approach*. Jack's vicious laughing after murdering a pig while shouting, "I cut the pig's throat," exemplifies the dissociation of emotion and memory. And the trait is very common in a traumatized psyche. Then, in the book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman claims that traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become separated from their cause and take on a life of their own. (24-25) And Jack's is not an exception.

In his research article *The Kids Are Still Not Alright: Rediscovering Lord of the Flies, Florian* Andrei Vlad mentions the film Cannibal Holocaust, which is well-known for its depictions of animal brutality, rape, mutilation and murder. Florian points out that, "in addition to the youth as a facilitating factor to the manifestation of the dormant evil within human nature, a further problematic issue is that of monstrosity." (5) Under certain conditions, such as a breakdown in

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society norms, individuals can be pushed to perform horrific deeds even if they do not have an inherent psychological problem. Jack is a cold-blooded troll. His journey along the uncharted path transformed him into a human devil.

Malabou describes Jack's metamorphosis, but Masahiro Mori's idea of the "Uncanny Valley" highlights the emotional and artistic aspects of his leadership. Now, what is "Uncanny Valley"? In his essay *The Uncanny Valley*, Mori proposed that as robots and artificial figures become more humanlike, our comfort with them increases to a certain point. When a figure appears almost human but slightly "off," our emotional response dips sharply into what Mori called the "uncanny valley." This is the zone of unease, eeriness, and fear. If the resemblance becomes perfect, comfort rises again. Due to significant advancements in fabrication technology, it is now impossible to tell the difference between a prosthetic and actual hand at a look. The prosthetic hand resembles a natural hand, except it is pinker, as though it had just been washed. (2)

Why does this happen? The uncanny valley occurs because near-human figures highlight distortions and ambiguities. They look alive but not fully. They remind us of death, corpses, or the sick. They unsettle because they violate our expectations of humanness. However, when we understand that the hand, which appeared to be real at first glance, is actually artificial, we have an unsettling feeling. For instance, we might be taken aback by the coldness, texture, and feeble, boneless grip during a handshake. As a result, the hand seems strange and we lose our sense of kinship. (3) Jack's painted face conceals his previous identity and allows him to act without shame. For the other boys, his painted face produces fear and awe. It transforms Jack into an uncanny figure, still human yet disturbingly inhumane. This uncanny transformation is central to his demagoguery. Just as propaganda and spectacle exaggerate charisma, Jack's mask heightens his power by producing both attraction and repulsion. The boys submit not because of reason but because the uncanny spectacle overwhelms them. Mori's framework helps us see how Jack's theatricality operates. His uncanny appearance destabilizes the boundary between boy and monster, amplifying his authority.

Beyond the psychological, Golding also critiques ecological monstrosity. The boys' violence against nonhuman life mirrors the Anthropocene's destructive relationship with nature. Here monstrosity extends from human cruelty to environmental devastation. Scholars like Mohammad Shaaban Ahmad Deyab argue in the article, *A New Historicist Reading of William Golding's Lord of the Flies* (1954) that Jack mirrors Hitler's authoritarian ruthlessness. His dismissal of a fainting boy during a march reveals his disregard for human vulnerability, foreshadowing his complete moral decline. Jack's monstrosity lies not only in savagery but in his instrumental view of others as mere tools for power. (86)

Nidhi Gupta and Pratibha Tyagi write in their article, *Decoding the Myth of Civilization in Heart of Darkness and Lord of the Flies* about the contrast between 'savagery' and 'civilization', a highly contested idea. They have tried to establish the fact that how Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* both examine the innate darkness within humans, which emerges when societal structures are removed. Conrad argues that prolonged separation from civilization tempts individuals toward their inherent evil, as seen in Marlow's journey deeper into the wilderness. Similarly, Golding illustrates how a group of stranded boys,

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without the constraints of society, gradually descend into barbarism. We see Jack, in particular, becomes a brutal leader of the precarious civilization. Gupta and Tyagi further write:

> Golding tries to imply that it was not just adults who had the capacity for brutality and cruelty as could be witnessed in German labour camps. He isolates young children on a deserted island and makes us see that how these young, innocent children are capable of acting with just as much barbarism as adults in the real world. (265)

Ultimately, with such characterization of Hitler and Jack we are provided with a clearcut understanding of how repression, trauma and unchecked aggression can deform the human psyche into monstrosity. Malabou believes that such transformation "reinforces the permanence of identity." A completely new and unique identity develops alongside the previous one and gradually takes over entirely. Human nature is sensitive to external influences, especially fear, turmoil and social pressure. Jack, like Hitler, exploits these conditions to consolidate power.

In Part I, Chapter IV, "Psychoanalytic Objection: Can There Be Destruction Without a Drive of Destruction?" Catherine Malabou makes this argument, of the book *Ontology of the Accident, An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, "a monster is a new being who comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in his biography. (2) She goes on to say that this kind of plasticity can create identity by destroying things, which allows a psyche that has given up its history, its precedents and itself to arise. (68) Cohen's seventh thesis then reminds us that "monsters are our children." (20) And, they return to confront us with the darker side of our cultural and psychological inheritance.

Conclusion

The discussion indeed juxtaposes a wide array of ideas to justify the metamorphosis of a trauma subject. Malabou and Mori both contribute to Jack's image as a prototypical demagogue. Their reasons for consideration differ. Malabou emphasizes the emotional injury that culminates in a new horrible identity. Mori highlights Jack's strange self-presentation. And for Foucault, Jack is a human monster constituted by transgression of social and natural norms who, like Hitler, leverages fear and creates adversaries. His demagogic leadership out of trauma, turmoil and fear supplants reason and justice. To summarize, this argument is the last but not least when referring to Macbeth's transition into a hellhound from valour's minion, to demonstrate the inevitability of degeneration when the cognitive process is ruled by something weird.

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