A Study of ‘Game Metaphor’ in Golding’s Lord of the Flies

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Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in a place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, XIth Edition; p. 780). Gibbs (1994) defines it as an important factor of cognitive stylistics. It maps the space between two different conceptual domains. It is commonly used in literary works and in everyday discourse.

Life is a game; play it. It’s an old saying. William Golding’s novel Lord of the Flies enumerates the games that its characters play but with different motives. Golding tries to play the life game with the varied human nature of his characters. Interestingly, he has selected all his characters below 14 years of age. As the boys play the game, they not only enjoy the fun of the game but also the joy of being savages. They don’t require any order or law of guiding force in their state of savagery. This paper tries to bring out the game metaphor that leads the boys into savagery.

Games are means of entertainment and relaxation. Golding’s use of games in Lord of the Flies develops the central theme of the novel that humanity has evil tendency within its nature. Metaphorically all the games have much deeper meaning than just a game of entertainment. Golding develops this theme from the first chapter of the novel to the climax. In the beginning, the characters play the games for fun and enjoyment. Even in their fun, a kind of cruelty, inflicting pain on others and enjoying the agony of the afflicted one was present. The characters of the novel are well suited to the game and the theme of man’s innate evilness, as they are all below 14 years of age. As the boys play the game, they not only enjoy the fun of the game but also the joy of being savages. They don’t require any order or law of guiding force in their state of savagery. This paper tries to bring out the game metaphor that leads the boys into savagery.

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The hunt game is started by Robert innocently acting as a pig for the hunt. Golding describes the boys’ urge to inflict pain—the Littlun Hentry’s experiments with mastery over the tide pool creatures and the hunters imposing their collective desire on the slaughtered pig—as ‘overmastering’. The unsuccessful pig hunt in Chapter 4 stimulates the boys for hunting and their vulnerability to Robert in Chapter 7 shows that they have mastered themselves by a large force. The victimized Robert himself suggests to the boys that they should have a real pig to improve their game. Golding gradually develops this game metaphor in the novel. As the boys master themselves in hunting—playing the game—they develop their instinct level, moving from innocence to savagery.

Children’s Game for Joy and Excitement

Early in the book, Ralph discovers the nickname ‘Piggy’ of his companion with delight. He “danced out into the hot air of the beach and then returned as a fighter plane, with wings swept back, and machine-gunned Piggy” (p. 12). As time passed, the games give way to hunting, but the hunting is still only talked about in terms of a game and when Jack describes his first kill; it takes the form of a game:

“I cut the pig’s throat__’

The twins, still sharing their identical grin, jumped up and ran round each other. Then the rest joined in, making pig-dying noises and shouting.

‘One for his nob!’

‘Give him a four penny one!’

Then Maurice pretended to be the pig and ran squealing into the centre, and the hunters, circling still, pretended to beat him. As they danced, they sang.

‘Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Bash her in’

Jack cannot at first bring himself to kill a pig because of “the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh, because of the unbearable blood” (p. 34). Roger throws stones at Hentry, but he throws to miss because “round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law” (p. 67). This is purely indicating the world of children’s games. The difference comes when there is no parental summons to bring these games to an end.

Hunt: Game as Legitimate Outlet of Aggression

The boar hunt and the game the boys play provide stark reminders of the propensity of the human instinct toward savagery. Before this point in the novel, Ralph has been largely baffled about why the other boys were more concerned with hunting, dancing, bullying and feasting than with building huts, maintaining the signal fire, and trying to be rescued. But when he joins the boar hunt in the seventh chapter, Ralph is unable to avoid the instinctive excitement of the hunt and gets caught up in the other boys’ bloodlust. In this scene, Golding implies that every individual, however strong his or her instinct toward civilization and order, might be has an undeniable, innate drive toward savagery as well.
There is exasperation in Ralph’s statement which places him outside the game; the fantasy fighter plane has no place in this more hectic play.

Ralph watched them, envious and resentful. Not till they flagged and the chant died away, did he speak.

‘I’m calling an assembly’ (p. 82).

Ralph attempts to defuse the frightening attack in which he has just participated by placing the beating within the context of their civilization’s legitimate outlets for aggression. Ralph who encaged himself in play—standing on head, blowing jets of water while swimming, rolling a boulder downhill, gleefully scuffling with Simon—in the first chapter —justifies himself, taking part in the hunt as just a game.

“Just a game,” said Ralph uneasily. “I got jolly badly hurt at rugger once” (p. 126). Ralph’s justification comes out from his insecure identity. If he does not join, he may not have anyone with him in the island society. All other boys enjoy the fun and the aggression as part of their game for survival.

Maurice seems to refine the process by suggesting that they add a drum and a fire to do the dance ‘properly’ (p. 127). As a boy, he may not have understood the significance of those things. But Golding uses it to bring out the primeval urge to recreate the rituals of tribal sacrifice. Robert and Roger point out that they “want a real pig” (p. 127) to complete the game that they can kill at the end of the game. Jack reveals the game metaphor right in his suggestion that they need someone who could dress up as a pig. He unconsciously acknowledges that this game will inevitably have fatal end of someone from the group. He suggests the crowd to use Littluns, the most vulnerable and weak that he finds no value for them in the island society.

**The Climax of Game Metaphor**

All the games the boys played on the deserted island not only gave them entertainment and excitement, but also made them horrifying at the end. In the mock-pig-hunt, Robert was hurt. The boys forget all their situations and responsibilities as they sing and play as a ritual dance. After the hunt, the boys’ re-enactment of the chase provides a further reminder of the inextricable connection between the thrill of the hunt and the desire for power. Robert, the boy who stands for the boar in the re-enactment, is nearly killed as the other boys again get caught up in their excitement and lose sight of the limits of the game in their mad desire to kill. Though Ralph felt uneasy with the beating Robert received, other boys enjoyed the ‘game’ and wanted to have musical effect with the drums.

Roger, who was conditioned by his civilized instinct not to hit Hentry with stones in Chapter 4, becomes the hangman and torturer of the island society. The climax is reached when the game turns into the killing of Simon, the pig. The next victim of this game hunt is Piggy. Towards the end of the novel, the game of pig-hunt turns into man-hunt. All the boys join Jack in hunting Ralph. When the Naval officer sees the tribe wearing war paint and carrying spears, he assesses the situation as ‘Fun and Games’. But the complicity in this fun and game is that it hunts for a human life.
**Conclusion**

Golding’s use of the game metaphor in *Lord of the Flies* serves two purposes. At first, the boys need a kind of entertainment and relaxation. As school boys on an island, the only entertainment they can have is games. It can be hunting, swimming or collecting fruits from the trees. These games give the boys a certain entertainment and means to while off time. From the games the boys find the possibility of excitement rather than horror. Secondly, it is this game that develops the theme of the boys becoming savages.

As it is described by Golding, the boys initially play on the lagoon with sand and swim in the sea water. Then, they shift their attention towards hunting the pigs. As they taste the game of hunting, they make use of one among them to act like a pig when they do not really find a pig for hunting. This mock-pig-hunt becomes a real one towards the end of the novel and they really chase Ralph to be hunted and be killed. Thus, the game brings out the gradual development of the boys into savagery on the island.

**Bibliography**
