



Entrapment of Dualistic Binaries in William Golding's *Lord of The Flies*

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Abstract

This essay analyzes how William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* creates the dualistic binary of culture versus nature and women versus men. I draw upon Marti Kheel, Val Plumwood and Sherry B. Ortner's studies to examine how the novel reinforces the problematic dualistic binary of culture versus nature and men versus women. Through qualitative analysis of textual references, this essay discovered that selected fiction by situating masculine characters in dominant position and by placing feminine characters in an oppressed state, establishes the dominance over culture over nature and men over women. In addition, this essay uncovered how the novel by using feminine metaphors associates nature with women and culture with men and reaffirms the subjugation of nature and women in the hands of culture and men. This essay helps in identifying the crucial role of literature in constructing and maintaining the structures of domination leading to inequality in society.

Keywords: Dualistic Binaries, Femininity, Nature, Masculinity, Culture

Introduction

The survival of life depends upon the healthy state of the environment which also requires to protect the elements existing in nature. Literature in this regard, has ability to evoke emotions that can influence the relationship between environment and human-beings (Papavasileiou et al., 2020, p. 293). Although Literature possesses ability to produce awareness regarding the protection of the environment but at the same time literature has tendency to create subtle dualistic binaries that reinforce the supremacy of culture over nature and men over women. Dualistic binaries refer to a conceptual split between two opposing ideas. Val Plumwood (1993) explains how these dualistic binaries ensure that culture and men secure the position of superior subjects who dominate nature and women as their objects of satisfaction (p 41-68). These dualistic binaries

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“culture/nature, mind/body, male/female, and subject/object” have major contributing in mutual subjugation of nature and women in the hands of culture and men (Hawkins, 2009, p 158). Dualism not just situates the other as “inferior” object as compared to the “higher class” (O’ Connor, 2022, p 14). As a result, the higher class is given the status of self and subject while the lower class is viewed as other and object” (O’ Connor, 2022, p 14). Fiction being an impactful form of literature can play significant part in constructing and later reinforcing these dualistic binaries. In this regard, there is a need to identify the subtle tactics through which fiction contributes in development and reinforcement of dualistic structures in society. For this purpose, this essay through qualitative method of study, examines how William Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies* strengthens the supremacy of culture over nature and men over women which can lead to the subjugation of latter in the hands of former. To understand the establishment of dualistic binaries of culture versus nature and women versus men in the novel, this essay engages with the theoretical foundations provided by Marti Kheel, Val Plumwood and Sherry B. Ortner. This essay aims to produce an urge among researchers and academics to unearth and recognize the various ways through which fiction has tendency to contribute in hierarchal binaries in society.

The novel *Lord of the Flies* shows the era of an unknown war during which group of English school boys survive the plane crash and find themselves caught on a desolate Island. Initially the island depicted as tranquil dreamland pleases the aesthetic senses of the readers but as the story moves forward the position of the nature dramatically changes. The story divides the characters into two groups among which one group possess masculine traits and aggressive behavior and remains dominant throughout the story. However, the other group lacks masculine qualities and has gentle behavior but remains in oppressed position and has been destroyed at the end of the story. The characters of Ralph and Jack are part of masculine group and therefore have authority and superiority over the other boys. On the other hand, the characters of Piggy and Simon are depicted as feminine characters who visibly lack masculine. The novel depicts them as characters who have gentle and kind behavior towards animals and plants and do not have any interest in masculine traits of hunting and warfare. This essay explains how the subjugated status of effeminate characters, and dominant position of masculine characters, reinforces the supremacy of “culture over men” and “men over women and men” (Ortner, 1972, p 09). According to Plumwood (1993), the binary of “human versus nature” constructs a notion that environment is “inessential” and “mindless” object (p 107). As a result, of these narratives, culture appears to consider itself distinct and greater as compared to nature.

The dominant status of culture and men as subjects, leads to the exploitation and degradation of nature and women as objects of consumption and satisfaction for culture and men (Plumwood, 1993, p 107). This study reveals how fiction through its underlying message, has ability to reinforce the superiority of culture upon nature and men upon women and therefore can contribute in reaffirmation of the binary between culture versus nature and men versus women. This study helps in recognizing the influence of fiction in establishing the notion that nature and women being mindless objects of consumption, are meant to satisfy the desires of culture and men.

Literature Review

Here I provide an overview of various researches explaining the dangers related to the dualistic binaries of culture versus nature and men versus women. According to Plumwood (1993), Dualism separates nature from culture and women from men and inscribes domination of culture and men by “radical exclusion” of nature and women. This systematic exclusion appears natural and gradually constructs the order of “ruler and ruled” between nature and culture and women and men (Plumwood, 1993, p 47-48). SORCHA O’CONNOR (2022) explains that Dualism not just assigns “inferior” position to nature and women but also works as “hierarchical structure” that completely disregards the dependency of the “higher” on the “lower” (p 14). The “dualistic construal of difference”, not merely produces the “difference of degree” between nature and culture and women and men but develops a major dissimilarity of category that ends up portraying the other as “utterly different” thing (Plumwood, 1993, p 50). Freya Mathews (2017) adds that the problematic construction of differences acts as complex and adaptable domination that “dichotomizes the masculine and feminine and ranks men above women and culture above nature” (p 01, 06). According to Isil Sahin Gulter (2022), the legacy of domination related to dualism, develops central cultural concepts and identities which ensure the lack of “equality and mutuality” in societies (p 383). These “dualistic structures” contribute in situating the “self as a master” and “other as colonized by the master” (Hawkins, 2009, p 158). Hawkins (2009) emphasizes the urgency to reform the “dualistic structures” to defeat the falsifying thinking “of the master” (p 158). Bina Agarwal (1991) suggests that the power structures that conflates women and nature must be deconstructed to bring justice in world (p 151-153). Likewise, Barker (1998) stresses upon the need to reconstruct dualism in way that it “re-conceptualizes” the dualistic binaries in “non-hierarchical ways” (p 87). To encourage the mutual growth of plants, animals, human

beings and ecosystem and to control damages and injustices, it is imperative to promote “non-dualistic environmental ethical framework” (O’Connor, 2022, p 54, 55). According to the study of American fiction readers, literature possess the power to compel readers to understand the vulnerability of ecosystems and human societies and can develop awareness against environmental injustices and inequality on the basis of gender, race and nationality (Mayerson, 2018, p 486, 495). In this regard, fiction by providing criticism and investigation can depict reality and can help in liberating the world from entrapment and unavoidable legacy of domination (Mathews, 2017, p 14). Hence, fiction as powerful form of literature has to avoid contributing in establishment of dualistic binaries which ruin environment and human world. For this purpose, it is necessary to uncover the original message of the text to reveal the role fictions plays in development of dualistic binaries. This essay exposes how fiction can develop and strengthen dualistic binary of culture versus nature and men versus women which leads to the domination of former over latter.

Methodology

To uncover the assertion of dualistic binary in Golding’s novel, I engage with Marti Kheel’s (2012) study which explains how violent act of hunting is viewed as a characteristic that exhibits masculine strength (p, 33). Kheel’s concept helps in understanding how brutal killing of animals is celebrated as masculine trait while kindness towards nature as characterized as feminine characteristic in the novel. Furthermore, Kheel’s notion assists in elaborating how the novel by showing cruel butchery of animals as compulsory quality of masculinity, covertly endorses the dominance of human beings over the nature. I also interconnect with Val Plumwood’s concept of “instrumentalism” to unearth how the novel gives the position of an “instrument” to the nature controlled by the human-beings as representatives of the culture (Plumwood, 1993, p 48). By drawing upon Plumwood’s (1993) theoretical foundation, this study reveals how the nature’s status as a possession of culture in the novel, reinforces the binary of colonizer master and colonized slave in which latter aches as possession of the former (p 48-55). I also draw upon Sherry B. Ortner’s study to explain how the novel associates nature with women and assigns them inferior status on the basis of their mutual reproductive qualities. Moreover, Ortner’s concept assists in uncovering how the novel subtly provides superior and dominant status to culture and men on the basis of their war fare traits. In this regard, Plumwood’s (1993) study helps to uncover how association of nature with women and their mutual inferior

position in the novel, supports their “incorporation” and consumption to pacify the needs of culture and men (p 48-55).

Discussion and Analysis

Here I analyze how depiction of hunting as valorous act in the novel, glorifies the ability to kill animals as necessary characteristic for fulfillment of masculinity. Throughout the story, the violent hunting of animals has been portrayed as symbol of strength and power. In this regard, I quote Marti Kheel according to whom “hunting is an act of violence and happy hunter is unabashedly anthropocentric” (Kheel, 2012, pp 30, 35). Anthropocentrism refers to a concept that provides “privileged” position to human beings and considers environment as an object of consumption for humanity (Clark, 2011, p 03). In the novel, Jack has been ridiculed by his fellow boys due to his first failed attempt of hunting the piglet. The mocking laugh of the boys implies that man’s failure in hunting animals is actually cause of shame for his masculinity and therefore to prove his strength, man must become a successful hunter. Similarly, despite the fact that island is full of fruits that can satisfy the hunger of the boys, still Jack satisfies his obsession for hunting by instilling an urge to have meat among boys (Golding, 1954, p 42). According to Kheel (2012), ecologists view hunting as necessary characteristic in exhibiting strength required to develop “male character” (p, 33). Likewise, after being ridiculed by his friends on failed attempt of hunting, Jack states “next time there would be no mercy” and determines to kill an innocent animal in order to prove his masculinity (Golding, 1954, p 23). This proves that violence against animals depicted in the novel, has not been done to satisfy the hunger and for the sake of survival but has only been done to assert the ecstasy of masculine strength. According to Kheel (2012), hunting is considered as an obligatory act to deny to existence of feminine gentleness in men and to satisfy their “instinctual and aggressive desires” (p, 34). Similarly in the novel, there is display of explicit sense satisfaction and pride after a successful hunt. For instance, “look! we’ve killed a pig...we had a smashing time....we hit the pig... ‘I cut the pig’s throat’...said Jack, proudly” (Golding, 1954, p 58). The “the victory against the pig” is celebrated by the feast given by the hunters, during which Jack proudly exhibits the honor of butchering the pigs (p 56). For instance Jacks states “I got you meat...I stole up. Now you eat—all of you” (p 62). According to Kheel (2012), “Many cultures require a young boy to hunt and kill an animal as symbolic rite of passage into manhood” (p 38). Likewise, Golding by showing the merciless slaughter of animals as necessary action to establish masculinity, reinforces novel’s

anthropocentric approach in which human-beings are authorized to consume and exploit nature for the sake of their pleasure.

Here I examine how the way novel depicts the environment as human possession, implicitly reaffirms the dualistic binary between the culture (human-beings) and the nature. According to Plumwood (1993) the problematic relationship between culture and nature is similar to the relationship of “master and colonized” (p 49). Similarly, the depiction of boys as possessors and owners of the island natural reinforces the concept of “instrumentalism” (Plumwood, 1993, p 48-55). Likewise, Ralph after being mesmerized by the beauty of the island, immediately claims its possession. Plumwood (1993) further explains that these “dualistic structures” develop foundation for “instrumentalism” in which nature takes the position of as subordinate who serves as an instrument or object meant to be possessed and controlled by humanity (p 48-55). Golding, (2012) in the novel mentions how beauty of the island develops desire to control the island, for instance,

They were on the lip of a circular hollow in the side of the mountain. This was filled with a blue flower, a rock plant of some sort, and the overflow hung down the vent and spilled lavishly among the canopy of the forest. The air was thick with butterflies, lifting, fluttering, settling
Ralph turned to the others [and says] “this [the island] belongs to us” (p 21)

In above-mentioned quote, the serenity and splendor of the island has been portrayed as a “resource” or possession, meant to satisfy the needs of their human “master” (Plumwood, 1993, p 48-55). The way novel demonstrates how mercilessly boys set an entire forest on fire for their personal benefit, reveals how novel reasserts nature’s position as an object of consumption for humanity. According to Plumwood (1993), the “instrumentalism and objectification”, refer to when the “other” is viewed only as an “object” to fulfill the demands of the superior subject (p 48-55). Likewise, in the story Ralph in order to protect himself from Jack’s aggression and violence, seeks refuge in forest but Jack sets forest on fire to force Ralph to come out from the forest. For instance,
Smoke was seeping through the branches. They had smoked him [Ralph] out and set the island on fire.

Great heaviness of smoke lay between the island and the sun.

The fire reached the coconut palms by the beach and swallowed them noisily.

A flame, seemingly detached, swung like an acrobat and licked up the palm heads on the platform. (Golding, 1954, p 176-179, 181)

The above-mentioned reference explains how the forest full of trees, fruits and inhabitants has been ruined just to satisfy the power struggle between human-beings. Besides, due to the massive fire, military airplane receives signal and rescues the boys from the island. The depiction of burning forest implies that burnt forest first helps Jack to locate Ralph and later becomes source of their safe rescue from the island. According to Hawkins (2009) “human domination” can leave dreadful impacts on nature that often go “unmarked and unnoticed” (p 180). Likewise, the pilot of the airplane along with the rescued boys, leaves the entire island “shuddering with flames” while being completely indifferent towards the burning forest in front of his eyes (Golding, 1954, 180). Hawkins (2009) further discusses how nature as “non-sentient” or unconscious object is “forced to obey the will of humans” (p 180). Thus, the ironic description of boys being rescued by burning the forest and then leaving the forest in state of a ruin, reinforces “instrumentalism” of nature in the hands of human-beings as representatives of culture (Plumwood, 1993, 48-55).

Here I explain how by employing specific metaphors, novel connects nature with women and reaffirms the dualistic binary of culture versus nature and men versus women. The story shows how brutally boys kill a sow to pacify their masculine desires of violence and hunt. Also, the way author uses feminine metaphors for the killed sow, illustrates how author relates sow (nature) with women. For instance, “a little apart from the rest, sunk in deep maternal bliss, lay the largest sow of the lot...with a row of piglets” (Golding, 1954, p 119). The phrase “maternal bliss” refers to the joy of motherhood which is distinctive characteristic of womanhood and therefore subtly establishes a connection between the sow (nature) and women. According to Ortner (1972), society and culture associate nature with women on the basis of their mutual function of reproduction. Consequently, the connection between nature and women is established on the basis of their biological quality of reproduction (p 14). In this regard, the reproductive quality of nature and women is considered inferior and less fascinating as compared to masculine traits of hunting and warfare. This problematic consideration contributes in mutual oppression of nature and women in society (Ortner, 1972, p 14). For instance, Ortner (1972) states,

Woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, on the other hand, lacking natural creative functions, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, ‘artificially’ through the medium of technology and symbols. In so doing, he [man] creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables. (p 14)

Likewise, in the story “[when] the sow staggered her way ahead of them, bleeding and mad, and the hunters followed, wedded to her in lust” (Golding, 1954, p 120). The metaphorical phrase “wedded to her in lust” appears to accentuate the relationship between male hunters and the feminine sow and symbolizes the subjugation of woman in society (ibid). According to Sigridur Gudmarsdottir (2010), the “derogatory terms” masked in “the metaphorical sayings” are used to associate animals with women (p 208). These derogatory phrases such as referring women “to cows, dogs, bitches, beavers, bunnies and finally pieces of meat”, play a crucial role in the mutual “objectification” of nature and women in society (Gudmarsdottir, 2010, p 208). Similarly, the derogatory phrase used for the sow in the novel for instance, “Right up her ass!” (Golding, 1954, p 128) serves as a “derogatory term” that associates sow with woman and implicitly reasserts the mutual “objectification” of nature and women, being done in the hands of culture and men (Gudmarsdottir, 2010, p 208).

In addition, novel develops an idea that feminine creatures are meant to be sacrificed and consumed to provide honorable status to their masculine dominators. In the story, Jack has an obsession to display his masculine strength in order to achieve the title of a chief among the boys. According to Plumwood (1993), the association of nature and woman is based on the “dualistic structure” of “incorporation” in which women are stereotyped as dominated class whose function is to “incorporate” with the desires of their male controllers (p 48-55). Likewise, the depiction sow’s slaughter in novel, tends to “incorporate” with the desires of her masculine subjugator (Plumwood, 1993, p 48-55). For instance, Jack in order to give assurance of his physical strength and masculinity, kills the sow and therefore wins the status of chief. The novel depicts how the killing of the sow gives Jack a prestigious position among boys which he proudly cherishes. For instance, after the killing, during the celebratory feast, Jack has been “painted and garlanded, [and] sat there like an idol. There were piles of meat on green leaves near him, and fruit, and coconut shells full of drink” (Golding, 1954, p 132). The establishment of connection between sow and woman and then depiction of sow’s brutal killing, has tendency to develop an idea that nature and women are meant to sacrifice themselves to provide honorable status to men in society and men too cannot prosper until they use nature and women to facilitate their (men’s) benefits.

Apart from this, the consistent domination of masculine characters over feminine and gentle characters in the story, tends to establish dualistic binary of culture versus nature and men versus women. In this regard, I quote Caroline New (2001) according to whom the actions of “hunting and

warfare” symbolize masculinity and strength while gentleness and nurturing behavior symbolizes one’s similarities with women (p 729). In the novel the characters of Piggy and Simon are portrayed as kind hearted boys who do not possess interest for brutal activities of hunting and war. However, on this basis of their gentleness, Piggy and Simon throughout the story are considered as weak and womanish characters. Besides, both Piggy and Simon unlike other characters, treat environment with care and kindness. For instance, Piggy shows his strong discontentment when boys while creating signal fire for their rescue, end up producing huge fire that burns the trees (Golding, 1954, p 35). Both Piggy and Simon unlike other masculine boys, have qualities of nurturing and empathy towards nature and their young fellows. For instance, Simon helps little children to “found for them the fruit they could not reach, pulled off the choicest from up in the foliage, passed them back down to the endless, outstretched hands” (Golding, 1954, p 46). Likewise, Piggy helps in building the shelters and takes care of little children stranded with them on the island. According to Ortner (1972), as compared to men who are identified with culture, mind and intellect, women due to their qualities of nurturing and caring, are identified with nature (p 12). The society believes that culture is the result of the “human consciousness” and that humanity possesses ability to “regulate the world” and therefore it is justified for human-beings to exercise their dominance over nature (Ortner, 1972, p 10). The problematic association of nature with women, promotes the domination of culture over nature and men over women. Likewise, Piggy and Simon, throughout the story constantly remain dominated and oppressed and at the end have been brutally killed like a sow. For example, boys brutally kill Simon while considering him “a beast” and next morning “Simon’s dead body” moves at the side of the sea (Golding, 1954, p 137). Similarly, Piggy throughout the story “was hurt and crushed” by constant humiliations done by masculine boys. For instance, boys ridicule him by mentioning “who cares what you believe, Fatty!” (Golding, 1954, p 78). Moreover, after snatching Piggy’s spectacles to produce fire, the Jack brutally murders him (p 163). For instance, “Piggy’s head opened and stuff came out and turned red. Piggy’s arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig’s after it has been killed” (ibid). In this regard, I quote Ortner (1972), according to whom the identification of nature with woman, develops an idea that both nature and woman are mindless creatures who exist only to satisfy the needs of culture and men (p 12). This notion leads to the subordination of nature and women and play crucial role in their mutual “devaluation” in every culture (Ortner, 1972, p 12). This dualistic binary therefore asserts the domination of culture and men and subordination, devaluation and oppression of nature and women. Similarly, throughout the narrative, Piggy and Simon

who appear to possess feminine qualities of nurturing and kindness, are controlled and consumed like an “object” of satisfaction to appease the desires of their masculine masters. The persistent authority of the masculine group of boys and consistent oppression of Piggy and Simon as feminine character, show how the novel reaffirms the positions of nature and women as inferior objects of consumption for culture and men.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the critical analysis of *Lord of the Flies* uncovers how the novel situates culture and men at superior positions while placing nature and women at inferior positions. By drawing upon theoretical lenses provided by Kheel and Ortner, this essay uncovered how novel associates the boys who possess feminine qualities of nurturing and caring and lack masculine traits of “hunting and warfare” with women and associates the boys possessing physical strength and masculine traits, with culture. The former group is depicted as an inferior, and oppressed throughout the story and is ultimately brutally destroyed. However, the latter group despite their brutality remains dominant and is finally safely rescued from the island. Moreover, by drawing upon the theatrical studies of Ortner, this essay discovered that novel by tactful use of feminine metaphors, attempts to reassert the problematic association between nature and women. This intentional association reestablishes the superiority of culture and men over nature and women and contributes in their mutual degradation in society. This essay can be useful for eco-critics, eco-feminists and academics to recognize the importance of literature in establishing a balanced relationship between humans and nonhumans. This recognition is necessary in producing awareness regarding the safety of environment to make the planet safe place for humans and non-humans.

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