

A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLS IN THE NOVEL LORD OF THE FLIES BY WILLIAM GOLDING

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a semiotic analysis of symbols in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, aiming to uncover the underlying meanings and implications of various symbols within the text. Employing a semiotic approach, the study examines how symbols function to convey complex themes related to human nature and societal dynamics. Data for analysis was collected by highlighting significant quotes and dialogues throughout the novel, focusing on key symbols such as the conch shell, Piggy's glasses, the beast, the signal fire and the Lord of the Flies. This methodology allowed for a detailed exploration of how these symbols reflect the characters' psychological states and the broader commentary on civilisation and savagery. The findings reveal that Golding uses these symbols not only to depict the descent into chaos but also to critique the inherent darkness within humanity. Ultimately, this research highlights the richness of semiotic analysis in understanding the intricate layers of meaning in *Lord of the Flies*, contributing to a deeper appreciation of Golding's insights into human behavior and societal structures.

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1. Introduction

This study examines the symbolic elements in *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, focusing on their evolving significance within the context of the narrative. Golding's novel serves as a profound exploration of human nature, highlighting the tension between civilisation and savagery. It addresses a pressing research problem: the necessity of understanding how literary symbols function as mediums for expressing complex ideas about societal structures and human behaviour.

To address this, the research adopts Saussure's semiotic theory as its framework, enabling a detailed analysis of key symbols such as the conch shell, Piggy's glasses, and the "beast." These symbols are explored not only as narrative devices but also as constructs that reflect deeper cultural and psychological themes. By positioning this analysis within the broader theoretical discourse on semiotics and symbolic systems, the study addresses existing research gaps, particularly regarding the fluidity of meaning in literary symbols under varying social contexts.

Drawing on the insights of (Saussure, 1916) and subsequent advancements in semiotics, this research identifies and interprets the multi-layered meanings of symbols within *Lord of the Flies*. The findings contribute to a richer understanding of how Golding critiques societal collapse and human nature. Moreover, the research highlights the allegorical dimensions of the novel, where symbols operate within a relational system to convey broader existential and moral concerns. The aim of this study is to enhance our understanding of the symbolic structures in *Lord of the Flies* through a semiotic lens. By doing so, it seeks to offer readers and scholars a robust interpretative framework that underscores the novel's enduring significance in literature and its insightful commentary on the human condition.

2. Research Method (bold, 12 pt)

This study employs a qualitative approach combined with semiotic analysis. The qualitative methodology was selected to allow for an in-depth exploration of symbols and their meanings within William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Semiotic analysis, rooted in Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, was employed to decipher the relationship between signifiers (symbols) and signified concepts, thus uncovering the meanings conveyed in the novel. This research includes literary works that feature significant symbolic elements. The sample is (Golding, 1954), a novel that rich in symbolic content related to societal structures, power dynamics, and human psychology. The novel was chosen based on its thematic depth and relevance to semiotic analysis. Secondary data samples include academic journals, books, and critical essays that discuss symbolic and semiotic interpretations of the novel.

Textual Data Collection Primary data were sourced from *Lord of the Flies*. Key symbols such as the conch shell, fire, and Piggy's glasses were identified through close reading. This involved analysing passages where these symbols appeared and noting their thematic relevance. The study employed the following techniques: **Close Reading:** The novel was examined meticulously to understand the interactions between characters and symbols, focusing on pivotal scenes. **Thematic Coding:** Instances of symbolic representation were categorized into themes such as order, chaos, fear, and authority.

Secondary Data Collection Secondary sources, including literary criticism and contextual studies, were reviewed to complement the analysis. These provided historical, cultural, and theoretical frameworks that enriched the interpretation of the novel's symbols. The collected data were analysed using two primary methods:

Semiotic Analysis The researcher examined the signifier-signified relationship for each symbol in the novel. For instance: The conch shell as a signifier symbolised authority, order, and civilisation. Its gradual loss of influence illustrated the breakdown of societal structures. Fire represented hope and destruction, depending on the context within the story. This analysis revealed the dynamic nature of the symbols, as their meanings evolved throughout the narrative.

Thematic Analysis Recurring themes such as fear, power, and the clash between civilization and savagery were identified and explored. This thematic analysis helped illustrate how the symbols contributed to the novel's overarching critique of human behavior and societal constructs. To ensure validity, the study adhered to established qualitative research protocols, including triangulation of data through primary and secondary sources. The analysis was corroborated by existing literature on semiotics and literary symbolism. The researcher was actively involved in all stages, from data collection to analysis, ensuring a thorough and consistent approach. Data collection was carried out over a duration of six months, during which the researcher engaged in an iterative process of reading, coding, and analysing.

3. Research Findings and Discussion

Key Symbols and Their Meanings The research identifies the following symbols as pivotal to understanding the novel's central themes:

The Conch Shell: a. Signifier: A spiral seashell used by the boys to call meetings. b. Signified: Represents order, authority, and the fragile nature of democracy. The conch's destruction symbolises the collapse of societal structures and the descent into savagery.

Piggy's Glasses: a. Signifier: A pair of spectacles. b. Signified: Symbolises intellect, reason, and technological progress. The damage and eventual theft of the glasses illustrate the decline of rationality in the boys' society.

The Fire: a. Signifier: A signal fire initially lit for rescue. b. Signified: Embodies hope and destruction, reflecting humanity's dual potential for progress and chaos. T

he Beast: a. Signifier: An imagined external threat. b. Signified: Represents primal fear and the darkness within human nature.

The Lord of the Flies: a. Signifier: A severed pig's head mounted on a stick. b. Signified: Symbolises evil, corruption, and the intrinsic capacity for savagery within humans.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Symbol	Signifier (Physical Form)	Signified (Concept Meaning)	Context and Analysis
The Conch Shell	A large spiral seashell used by the boys for calling meetings and establishing order	Represents order, authority, democracy, and civilisation	The conch is initially used to gather the boys, symbolising authority and the boys' desire to maintain societal norms. However, as chaos escalates and Ralph's authority weakens, the conch loses its symbolic power, marking the decline of order. When Piggy is killed, and the conch is shattered, it signifies the total collapse of the democratic structure and the destruction of civilisation on the island.
The Shattering of the Conch	The broken conch after Piggy's death.	Represents the collapse of civilisation, the end of authority, and the triumph of savagery	The destruction of the conch is a turning point in the novel, symbolising the final breakdown of order and the triumph of the chaotic, savage nature of the boys. The shattering signifies that any hope for maintaining societal norms has been obliterated, and chaos has fully taken over.

4.1. The answer to the first question

This study analyses the main symbols in Lord of the Flies with a semiotic approach, showing that the conch shell symbolises law and social order, Piggy's glasses reflect knowledge and rationality, the signal fire symbolises hope and connection with civilisation, the beast depicts primal fear, and the Lord of the Flies represents evil forces and moral destruction.

4.2. The answer to the second question (bold, 12 pt)

These symbols together build an allegory of the dualistic nature of humans and fragile social conditions, revealing how civilisation can collapse when moral values are ignored. The results of the analysis show that these symbols work collectively to build an allegory of the dualistic nature of humans and fragile social conditions. The novel highlights how a seemingly stable civilisation can collapse quickly when moral and social values are not maintained. Golding successfully shows that instability in society can trigger chaos and destruction, raising deep questions about the essence of humans themselves.

Discussion

In examining the symbolism in *Lord of the Flies*, it becomes evident that William Golding uses symbols to not only reflect the collapse of society but also to critique human nature itself. The breakdown of social structures on the island parallels the disintegration of the symbols that were meant to maintain order, ultimately revealing the fragility of civilisation.

The conch, initially a symbol of authority, order, and a means to uphold rules, serves as a reflection of the attempt to establish a civilised society among the boys. Ralph's leadership, which depends on the conch to maintain control, gradually loses its significance as the boys slip into savagery. When the conch is shattered alongside Piggy's death, it marks the final collapse of the social order they had tried to establish. This decline critiques the fragile nature of societal norms, illustrating how

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easily they can disintegrate when fear and violence take precedence over collective responsibility.

Similarly, the fear of the "beast" begins as an external threat but evolves into a symbol of the primal darkness that resides within each of the boys. What starts as an imagined terror becomes an internal force, revealing the characters' growing awareness that the true enemy is not an outside force, but the savage instincts that lie dormant within. Golding uses the beast to symbolise the destructive potential of fear and its ability to strip away the veneer of civilisation, showing that the boys' descent into savagery is driven by their internal fears and their inability to confront their own darker impulses.

Piggy's glasses, which initially serve as a tool for starting the fire—symbolising reason, intellect, and the potential for scientific progress—become increasingly damaged as the story unfolds. As the glasses break, so does the boys' ability to reason and think critically. This symbolic destruction of intellect underscores Golding's critique of the fragility of rational thought in the face of irrational forces such as fear, aggression, and the primal desire for power. The glasses, once a symbol of civilisation's reason, are now useless, reflecting the boys' descent into a world where intellect and reason are easily overshadowed by more base emotions.

The severed pig's head, left as an offering to the imagined beast, serves as the most direct symbol of the boys' descent into evil. It is not just a physical object, but a manifestation of corruption, chaos, and the eventual triumph of evil. The head

speaks to Simon, embodying the internalised evil within every human being.

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Through this chilling image, Golding suggests that the darkness in human nature is not merely a by-product of societal collapse; rather, it is inherent and always present, lurking beneath the surface and ready to surface once civilisation falters. The fire, which initially symbolises hope and the boys' desire for rescue, becomes a dual symbol of both hope and destruction. The fire, used to signal their presence to potential rescuers, is also responsible for the island's eventual destruction. This dual nature underscores Golding's view of civilisation's inherent volatility. Fire can provide warmth and light, but it can also burn everything to the ground. Similarly, human progress, when unchecked or used irresponsibly, can lead to ruin. It serves as a metaphor for the tenuous balance between civilisation's potential for growth and its capacity for self-destruction.

These symbols work together to illustrate the complex relationship between society and human nature. The boys' initial attempt to create a structured society is reflected in their use of the conch and the fire, symbols of order and hope. However, as their descent into savagery progresses, these symbols lose their power, reflecting the breakdown of social structures. Golding's novel critiques the fragility of civilisation, suggesting that the societal structures we rely on are only as strong as the individuals who uphold them. When those individuals are overcome by fear, violence, and base instincts, society crumbles.

Moreover, these symbols critique not just the breakdown of civilisation, but the nature of human beings themselves. The beast symbolises the internal fears and savage impulses that exist within every individual, while Piggy's glasses represent reason, which is easily overrun by irrational forces. The destruction of both these

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symbols shows how fragile human intellect and morality are in the face of fear and savagery. The characters' transformation from children who initially sought order into brutal hunters reflects the terrifying potential for evil that resides within all people, waiting to emerge when civilisation's structures are removed.

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* offers a chilling portrayal of the collapse of civilisation, not as the result of external forces, but as the inevitable outcome of internal human nature. The symbols of the conch, the beast, Piggy's glasses, the *Lord of the Flies*, and the fire all reflect the fragile nature of the structures that govern society and the darkness that lies within each individual. By presenting these symbols as reflections of the boys' gradual descent into savagery, Golding critiques the veneer of civilisation, showing how easily it can be stripped away to reveal the chaos beneath.

Ultimately, through the symbols in *Lord of the Flies*, Golding critiques both human society and human nature, suggesting that while civilisation may provide structure and order, it is always at risk of disintegration when confronted with the more primal forces within human beings. The novel serves as a warning, not just about the collapse of social systems, but about the darkness that lies within every

person, always ready to emerge when the constraints of civilisation are removed

4. Conclusion (bold, 12 pt)

This study analyses the main symbols in *Lord of the Flies* with a semiotic approach, showing that the conch shell symbolises law and social order, Piggy's glasses reflect knowledge and rationality, the signal fire symbolises hope and connection with civilisation, the beast depicts primal fear, and the *Lord of the Flies* represents evil forces and moral destruction. These symbols together build an allegory of the dualistic nature of humans and fragile social conditions, revealing how civilisation can collapse when moral values are ignored. The results of the analysis show that these symbols work collectively to build an allegory of the dualistic nature of humans and fragile social conditions. The novel highlights how a seemingly stable civilisation can collapse quickly when moral and social values are not maintained. Golding successfully shows that instability in society can trigger chaos and destruction, raising deep questions about the essence of humans themselves.

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