Democratic and Totalitarian Power Systems in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*
Summary

One important theme in William Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies* is power. The boys in *Lord of the Flies* copy the behavior of their parents: competing, fighting and even killing each other for power. They form two groups, each following a different power system, the democratic system on the one side and the totalitarian system on the other.

My aim in this essay is to examine the complexity of these power systems in *Lord of the Flies*, revealed in the two layers in which they appear in the story, the boys on the island and the adults in their world. Moreover I want to show how Golding contributes both positive and negative traits to both systems, never falling into the habit of giving a black and white picture of either of the power systems. Overall I will focus on two boys, Jack and Ralph, exemplifying through them how the two systems gain their power, develop their structures, which methods they use to keep power, and how the systems handle crisis. At the end of my essay I then will shortly illustrate how Golding connects the adult world and their behavior to the boys’ story.

My conclusion is that Golding shows very clearly that the desire for power and the will to fight and kill for it exists in both adults and children. Overall his attempt is to illustrate that it is difficult to have an absolute, perfect and ideal power system. There are always things that can be criticized and improved. However, he does indicate that certain systems are more dangerous than others. The totalitarian power system can escalate much easier into savagery than the democratic system. So, Golding prefers power systems that benefit the community rather than only the leader himself.
One important theme in William Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies* is power (Poppe 6). Golding considers the desire for power and destruction as something innate and justifies this by stating that humans simply follow certain patterns in their behavior, which they have inherited from their ancestors (Niven 38). The boys in *Lord of the Flies* illustrate this very clearly, copying the behavior of their parents: competing, fighting and even killing each other for power. They form two groups, each following a different power system. Golding’s description of the boys’ power systems and their situation on the island is very vivid. Firstly, Golding had been a teacher and therefore was very accustomed to the way children behave in certain situations, and his experiences during the Second World War showed him very clearly what humans are capable of doing. He had lived through the horrors of the war as a naval Commander, before he was confronted with the start of the Cold War (Poppe 20). He wrote *Lord of the Flies* as a response to these times, which had seen a conflict between democratic and totalitarian ideals. As Woodward argues persuasively, “The conflict which Golding so superbly articulates, is between the order of democratically rules and the expression of aggressive instincts” (93).

My aim in this essay is to examine the complexity of these power systems in Golding’s novel *Lord of the Flies*, revealed in the two layers in which they appear in the story, the boys on the island and the adults in their world. Moreover I want to show how Golding contributes both positive and negative traits to both systems, never falling into the habit of giving a black and white picture of either of the power systems. Nevertheless he more often warns against the threat of totalitarianism. Overall I will focus on two boys, Jack and Ralph, exemplifying through them how the two systems gain their power, develop their structures, which methods they use to keep power, and how the systems handle crisis. At the end of my essay I then will shortly illustrate how Golding connects the adult world and their behavior to the boys’ story.

The two power systems presented in the novel are a democratically organized system, and a totalitarian system. In a democracy the leader is elected by the majority of the people, giving him/her the right to guide the process of important decisions concerning the community. Nevertheless even his/her decisions are bound to the law and are checked by councilors appointed by the community. Moreover the community always has certain protected rights, for example the right to free speech or freedom in beliefs (Gadsby 364). The leader is bound to the law in the same way as the community is. All are supposed to have similar goals and to work towards achieving them together, while punishment is only a last
resort to secure the good of the community. Usually the system counts on the common sense of the people to keep its order. Totalitarianism on the other hand is based on a leader that strictly follows an ideology, deciding everything concerning the community by himself (it always seems to be a he), and aiming to force the community to follow his ideology and develop towards those ideals. There are no rules he has to follow, but many restrictions on the rights of the community, such as no free speech, limited privacy, and no questioning of the leader’s decisions (Gadsby 1528). All work towards the ideal state of the leader’s dream. Moreover the community is confronted with forceful punishments if disobeying the orders and rules of a leader who does not tolerate any disobedience (Gadsby 1528). If necessary the leader is even willing to kill whoever stands in his way. The community has no say at all in the decision-making process, but only follows and works to fulfill the creation of the ideal state. If another person has authority or power in the system this is only because the leader allows it, for example to secure his leadership by spreading fear. But there are also other instruments the leader takes advantage of to secure his leadership, for example the use of rituals. By doing so he degrades the importance and well-being of the individual and puts the “tribe” first. Above all stands the ideology of the leader, and everything is supposed to work towards creating it (Gadsby 1528).

The two power systems are very different in the way the leaders gain power and develop their structures. To become a leader of a certain power structure you have to have special character traits, which both main characters in Lord of the Flies, Ralph and Jack, fulfill. Ralph is no child anymore, but not yet a grow-up either, which makes him a person to respect, but also to be friends with. He has a boxer-figure “as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went, but there was a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil” (Golding 5). He makes the “littluns” feel safe by being physically able to protect them but seeming not wanting to hurt them. Additionally he has a natural aura of authority which increases the feeling of safety in the boys. Ralph can tell them anything without having proof of it, and the majority will believe him and accept what he has told them (Golding 36). Although Ralph’s appearance has some traits of a totalitarian leader, he uses it to gain the people’s votes and their trust. His behavior supports these traits as well. They are also an advantage when being elected at the beginning of the story. Ralph’s major goal is the good of the community. For example he takes on parental features when he is concerned about what the boys can eat on the island and what can be poisonous. He is duteous and thinks before doing something that could harm the community. This cautious behavior can be seen in small actions like when he wants to go swimming in a pool he found on the beach. He “inspected
the whole thirty yards carefully and then plunged in’” (Golding 7). Moreover he tries to improve, plan and organize the living conditions on the island to make life for the boys easier. For example he wants to draw a map of the island so everyone can find their way around safely (Golding 24), and he also wants to have a fire burning all the time so they can be rescued (Golding 37).

Up to this point Ralph’s behavior is positive for the community and for himself, which facilitates his election as a leader. But he also has some selfish traits that only profit him. As an elected leader, he depends on the continued support of those who elected him. He wants the community to like him and he is willing to sacrifice others for it. He even betrays the trust of his best supporter by telling the other children about his nickname “Piggy” (Golding 17). The reason he does so is only to gain a laugh, and win the sympathy of the other boys. He also tries to satisfy a big majority of the group in order to feel and be approved in his leadership. Even though he is not very happy with the decision of the choir to hunt, he accepts this to keep the majority in favor of his election. Nevertheless Ralph is still a child in his behavior and wants to have fun like the rest of the boys. He once says to Piggy: ‘’This is our island. It’s a good island. Until the grown-ups come to fetch us we’ll have fun’’” (Golding 33). This behavior definitely gains him some points with the other children, since fun in their eyes is one of the most important things on the island. Adding up Ralph’s behavior on the island reveals a very positive picture. Even though not all of his actions are good for the community, it all leads to him being elected by the boys. He simply adds the factor of fun to his regime which can also only be seen in a positive light. In addition to all of this he gives the boys exactly what they need at this time: order and safety.

Besides this, Ralph’s political beliefs also facilitate his election. They are similar to the ones the boys are familiar with from home and therefore make them lean towards a habitual way of life rather than towards the unknown. Again, this helps to get their support. Ralph’s unbroken trust in adults is only one of his beliefs (Golding 8). It is comparable to the trust of the grown-ups at home in their government, following it without questioning. Moreover Ralph also trusts in the power of law and order, similar to the world at home. Even small rituals like having tea time at four o’clock brings a rhythm to life and because of that also order (Golding 107). It is also very important to him that everyone listens to each other and does not interrupt when someone else is talking. At one of the first assemblies he says ‘’We can’t have everybody talking at once. We’ll have to have ‘Hands up’ like at school.’[…] ‘Then I’ll give him the conch.’ […] ‘He can hold it when he is speaking’” (Golding 31). The hope for rescue of the boys plays a very important role in Ralph’s beliefs too. The
community needs someone who is sure about its future to feel safe on the island, someone who can make them believe everything will be just fine (Golding 36). Moreover he cares about how the boys feel. He builds shelters for their safety and tries to keep down their fears (Golding 52). Nevertheless, the most important belief for him as a leader in a democratic power system is his sense of duty. His beliefs reflect the morals from home and make him a perfectly qualified leader in a democratically organized power system. By looking at the whole character of Ralph we can see that these preconditions may not all be in favor of him becoming a democratic leader because “intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy […] [and] the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance; and most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch” (Golding 19). He is the kind of leader the boys know from home.

In addition Ralph also has a natural instinct that is not common. He has a feeling for the real character of a person. He can tell whether someone is honest or not and whether a person is straight with someone else or if they are doing it for their own profit. However there is one big exception. Jack intimidates Ralph right from the beginning. When the choir enters the beach for the first time Ralph firstly thinks that they are a black creature: “the creature stepped from mirage on to clear sand, and they saw that the darkness was not all a shadow but mostly clothing. The creature was a party of boys, marching approximately in step in two parallel lines and dressed in strangely eccentric clothing” (Golding 15). When Jack and his choir reach Ralph, he wants to know where the man with the trumpet is and Ralph seems intimidated: “‘There’s no man with a trumpet. Only me’” (Golding 16). If Ralph had known how to use his instinct better, he may have seen the danger in Jack’s display of power. We could say that this ignorance is one of his biggest weaknesses.

Jack uses Ralph’s weakness and achieves the ruling position. His character is completely different from Ralph’s although they grew up in the same culture. The looks of Jack make the difference to Ralph even clearer: “he was tall, thin, and bony: and his hair was red […]. His face was crumpled and freckled, and ugly without silliness” (Golding 16). He appears as an antithesis to Ralph the minute he enters the story (Fleck 33). As mentioned he appears out of the woods like a black creature (Golding 15), like an authoritarian man-of-power, marching in like a drill sergeant (Hynes 59). He is the natural leader, already in charge of the choir, feeling what it is like to have power. He once says: “‘I ought to be chief’ […] ‘because I’m chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp’” (Golding). This is probably the reason why he had been elected as the leader of the choir, and he considers it to
be normal for him to be in power. However, since Jack’s appearance is not considered attractive or positive this makes it more difficult for him to win a democratic vote. It is easier therefore to follow another path to gain, or in this case maintain, power – the totalitarian way.

Jack’s behavior also reinforces this political direction. He wants to feel superior to the other boys, so he prefers to be called by an adult name, Merridew, and not by his child name Jack. He ridicules others to improve his own image and to amuse the community. Piggy, for example, is constantly ridiculed for his name, his figure and his attitude (Golding 17). By doing so Jack tries to win the sympathy of the other boys, aiming at increasing his own power status. His “loud and savage” voice also helps him with this (Golding 74). But nevertheless he also wants the support of the community (Golding 76), and tries to attain it by giving them what they want. In this case it is meat, fun, and safety from the beast (Golding 89). Jack loves taking over the leadership from Ralph and does this whenever he gets the chance (Golding 127). He is very selfish and his goal is to gain the position with the most power on the island. He pays no attention to the wishes of individuals in the community (Golding 21), makes himself heard first in discussions (Golding 94), and always has his say (Golding 31). He has all the traits of a totalitarian leader. He shows no signs of a democratic ideal when he claims the leadership all by himself (Golding 140). He needs no vote to feel in charge. Moreover, he even uses violence to force people to accept his will or to simply demonstrate his unhappiness with a situation. For example, he smashes Piggy’s glasses because he was losing a power battle against his rival Ralph. Piggy really has nothing to do with the fight, but he is at the wrong place at the wrong time and Jack takes advantage of someone weak being there (Golding 75). Jack shows very clearly that he is not a person that wants to govern a democratic system. His way of handling things are much more similar to a totalitarian system.

His beliefs confirm this even more. Controlling others to keep order and discipline is one of his highest priorities. He shouts at the boys to make them feel inferior (Golding 15, 16), and loves to punish them for disobeying the rules (Golding 32). Moreover he considers the individual (except himself) as less important than the community. For example when Simon faints at the beginning of the story Jack does not care about him (Golding 16). Simon is only one individual boy from the big mass and therefore can be sacrificed for the good of the whole community. Jack also believes in Darwin’s theory that only the strong survive. He is not interested in the “littluns” because they gain him no profit but only burdens (Golding 88). So Jack’s beliefs emphasize his wish to be a totalitarian leader. The fact that he does not
show his true principles until after he gains power shows how smartly he is working towards his goal. No one wants to be suppressed, punished and robbed of their rights by their leader.

Jack’s instincts support his way of gaining power as well. He strives after power in a way that is similar to the adults at home. He cannot or does not want to control this striving and it increases all the time. In the story this hunger for power is symbolized by the desire for meat. It gets stronger and stronger all the time, and the way the boys hunt for meat gets more and more animal-like (Golding 51). Jack “swung back his right arm and hurled the spear with all his strength. From the pig-run came the quick hard patter of hoofs, a castanet sound, seductive, maddening – the promise of meat” (Golding 49). The hunting ritual intensifies in a way that makes Jack seem like an animal, which is hunting prey. However being an animal makes himself a prey as well, and this threatening feeling of being hunted catches up with him during the story. He tries to explain his feelings to Ralph: “‘If you’re hunting sometimes you catch yourself feeling as if—’ He flushed suddenly. ‘There’s nothing in it of course. Just feeling. But you can feel as if you’re not hunting, but- being hunted; as if something’s behind you all the time in the jungle’” (Golding 53). His penetrating urge for power, the safety of it and his own security make it easier for him to go down the path of a totalitarian leader.

So Jack’s appearance, his behavior, beliefs, and his instincts all make him a leader not in a democracy but in a totalitarian system. That is also the reason why he manages to take the chief position from Ralph. In his totalitarian power system he is a stronger and better adapted leader than Ralph is in his democratic system. Golding stated once that “our greatest desire and one of our greatest fears: […] is the desire to control ourselves and others and the fear that any sense of control we possess is ultimately false” (quoted in Olson 3). Jack makes sure that he keeps his power. He lives by this desire and gives everything to hold on to it. Summing up, the character of a person plays a very important role in whether they can be a strong leader in a certain power system or not, in the way they gain their power and how they handle it.

By looking at Ralph and Jack we can not only illustrate how the leader’s character is important to a power system but we can also show how the systems try to stabilize their power by using others. Ralph uses two other boys, Piggy and Simon. Piggy supports Ralph’s system with his intelligence and his rational advice. He thinks logically, like an adult. After their plane crashes no one in the adult world really knows where the boys are and rescue is therefore not a sure thing for Piggy’s common sense: “‘They’re [adults] all dead,’ said Piggy, ‘an’ this is an island. Nobody don’t know we’re here. You’re [Ralph’s] dad don’t know, nobody don’t know’” (Golding 9). Since the other boys do not think about rescue or their
safety at all, enjoying the fact of being able to do whatever they want to do without adults to restrict them, Piggy also keeps reminding Ralph about the need of a fire (Golding 183, 197). By doing so he helps Ralph give the other boys a feeling of safety and thus secure Ralph’s power position. Moreover Piggy fights for Ralph’s rules (Golding 97), motivates him to stand up to Jack’s attempts to gain power (Golding 99-101), and tries to make Ralph forget the cruel murder of Simon to keep him focused on his duties as a leader (Golding 173). The importance of Piggy in Ralph’s power system becomes crystalline clear when Piggy is helpless because his glasses have been stolen by Jack, and he expects Ralph to fetch them for him. Ralph has no clue how to help or even what to do. He seems lost and has problems thinking clearly (Golding 189). Piggy makes sure that Ralph stays on track as a leader and gives him the necessary support. Hence Piggy is the person really epitomizing the original democratic beliefs and rules. He has a power position of his own, even if he is not aware of it himself. So, Ralph simply uses Piggy and his advantages when he needs them to keep him focused. He also uses Simon to make himself feel comfortable in his leadership position. Ralph sometimes has his doubts about whether the situation on the island is safe and if the boys will be rescued. But Simon tells him, like a Christian prophet talking to his disciples, “You’ll get back to where you came from” (Golding 121), and this gives him the feeling that everything will work out just fine. Simon receives nothing in return. Ralph only takes from him what he needs. This behavior is not typically democratic. I would have expected the leader to try to confirm the right of equality and not aim at his own profit, as Ralph obviously does with these two boys.

On this level Ralph is quite similar to Jack. Jack also takes all the advantages other people offer him without returning any favors to them. He uses Roger’s brutality to spread fear to the other children, for example when he tortures the twins ‘SamnEric’ to make them join the tribe (Golding 202; 213), or when he beats the boys on Jack’s command with no other reason than to intimidate them (Golding 176). At one point the two boys Robert and Roger are talking about Jack’s decisions. Robert starts:

‘He’s going to beat Wilfred.’
‘What for?’[…]
‘I don’t know. He didn’t say. He got angry and made us tie Wilfred up. He’s been’- he giggled excitedly-‘he’s been tired for hours, waiting-’
‘But didn’t the chief say why?’
‘I never heard him.’ (Golding 176)

So both power systems have their own supporters and advisers to help them gain power and also to help them keep it. Nevertheless the leaders only treat these ‘helpers’ with respect as
long as they are of useful for the development of their power systems. This sort of behavior can be expected of a totalitarian leader but it is supposed to be untypical for a democratic leader.

Although Jack and Ralph have some similarities in their ways of using people they are very different in how they try to maintain their power. Ralph clearly emphasizes the use of democratic methods in order to control his power. Again he falls back on methods known and approved from home. He establishes rules to organize things better (Golding 42), to have a better overview of the situation, and to control the mood of the boys. For this he also uses a conch as a symbol for order and power, which they all had silently agreed on at the beginning of the story. For example, to make the boys come together, be quiet and listen to the things being said, Ralph blows the conch very, very loudly (Golding 95) and holds it afterwards in the air (Golding 108). Nevertheless Fleck points out that this power that Ralph, or maybe better Piggy, gives to the conch depends completely on the recognition by the boys (34). Without them wanting to follow the conch, Ralph cannot force them to do so, which will be the case later in the story, when Jack takes over the power. Moreover, Ralph tries to maintain his power by making decisions concerning the whole group during assemblies where everyone can participate in finding solutions, thereby being integrated by feelings of importance to the community (Golding 81). Ralph also talks with people that do not agree to decisions that have been made. He tries to appeal to their conscience and to persuade them that a particular decision is the best thing for the community (Golding 51), such as convincing Jack of the importance of keeping the fire burning all the time (Golding 73) or trying to remind the boys of their connection to home – to a world bound to rules and order (Golding 99). Nevertheless Ralph also has to make compromises to keep the power. He encourages the other boys to choose the way of diplomacy rather than force to try to stay in charge of the game (Olson 6). For example he gives Jack the opportunity to decide what he and his choir want to work with for the community (Golding 19). He more or less hands Jack the ruling scepter by doing so. Here Golding clearly points at another weakness of this power system: by depending on the views of others the leader is put in a relationship where he/she is too constrained to work freely. But Ralph also uses a more straightforward and aggressive method to maintain his power: direct confrontation. He has learned that when he wants his listeners to understand and remember something he has to repeat it over and over again, like a good politician nowadays also does (Olson 11). Furthermore he talks openly about the problems they have, which is not very typical for any power system. Showing weakness motivates opponents to attack the leadership. For example Ralph asks Jack directly why he
hates him (Golding 129). This type of confrontation can be intensified by Ralph’s use of his “sharp voice” (Golding 93) to make the importance of the discussion even clearer. Another very effective method Ralph uses is the technique of silence. While Jack is very loud and active during their disputes, Ralph chooses the role of being silent. By doing so he takes all of Jack’s leverage away and wins most fights (Golding 77). But the most effective way of maintaining his power is simply to claim the role of the leader based on the won election (Golding 166-167). The boys are used to following a leader who has been voted by a majority and therefore this is the best advantage Ralph has over Jack.

On the other hand Jack uses methods to support his power position which are very typical for a totalitarian leader. He constantly tries to attract attention to himself. For example he interrupts people, especially Ralph, while they are speaking to say something he thinks is important (Golding 31). Although Jack does not show any respect towards others he can pretend to be a social and caring person to make the community love him. This is a technique he may have learned from home, where politicians say things that are not true to gain votes for an election. When Jack apologizes to Ralph for letting the fire go out when the ship passes (Golding 76), he wins sympathy from the boys, stabilizing their support and good will towards the growth of his power. Moreover, he promises the community the most important thing a leader can provide: safety. The boys on the island have a fear that they cannot define, locate, or explain. They name it ‘the beast’, trying to find a solution to their insecurity. Jack externalizes this fear into some kind of creature and makes the boys believe he can keep the beast away from them by hunting it down (Golding 88-89). He also invents a machine to protect the boys from intruders to their tribe, something he probably learned at home and uses on the island to his advantage to gain the approval of the majority (Golding 176). In addition Jack gives the boys as much food as they want (Golding 165). He even manages to give them meat, special and valuable almost like money, symbolizing a sort of payment for his leadership. He also supports his power position by holding propaganda-like speeches, stating all the advantages the boys will have when they come and join his tribe (Golding 166).

However, Jack also uses methods to maintain his power that are effective for him but lead to serious consequences for the individual in the community. He robs the people of their individualities by painting their faces with ‘Dazzle paint’ and making them all look alike. This is the same color and same procedure the soldiers at home use when they go to war. The ‘Dazzle paint’ is supposed to make them invisible, so they cannot to be seen. Painting the faces also takes away personal responsibilities, making the boys do things they would never
have done otherwise, like killing a person (Cox 52-53). The painting sets them free from their conscience, and choosing what is right and what is wrong. Jack himself also changes his personality by painting his face. His name changes to chief and his old personality vanishes. The “Personality is overcome by power and he loses his name” (Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes 31). Jack turns the boys into objects of his will, without any identity (Golding 66) and obeying him without any questions.

Jack also achieves this by forming rituals that strengthen the feeling of being one tribe, belonging together, working for the same cause, and therefore collectively following their leader. One ritual they have is the process of killing a pig (Golding 125), and once they even sacrifice the pig’s head to their imaginary beast to win its goodwill (Golding 151). Another ritual is dancing. Jack starts performing dances when fear starts to grow among the boys. At one point of the story a thunderstorm is raging: “The flickering light became brighter and the blows of the thunder were only just bearable. The littluns began to run about, screaming. Jack leapt on to the sand. ‘Do our dance! Come on! Dance!’” (Golding 167). Focusing on something else gives them the feeling of not being alone at that moment and taking away their fear (Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes 34). Moreover Jack uses the dances to “first externalize what they fear and hate, and then ‘kill’ it” (Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes 31). To keep the boys under control he has another task that everyone is supposed to fulfill at some point: guarding the tribe (Golding 176). It gives the boys a feeling of responsibility and importance for the tribe. Besides having these rituals, especially hunting, he takes away the power from the conch and transforms it to his own (Olson 12, 14). A more totalitarian method to keep the power with him is his rule that forbids someone else to talk and decide something (Golding 111). In addition to the restriction of speech he tries to drown out all the other boys’ talking with his powerful and very loud voice, thereby demonstrating his strength and his leadership qualities (Golding 195).

As we have seen earlier he even uses the method of violence to maintain his power, for example when he hits Piggy and destroys his glasses (Golding 75). Here we can see the first steps of were “the element of play is being transformed into ritualized hysteria without restraints” (Whitley 47). This advances and even goes so far that he orders other boys to be tortured to force them into his tribe and to obey his will. The twins SamnEric experience this:

The hangman’s horror clung to him. The Chief said no more to him but he looked down at SamnEric.

[Ralph:] ‘You got to join the tribe.’

[Sam or Eric] ‘You lemme go-’

[Sam or Eric] ‘-and me.’

The chief snatched one of the few spears that were left and poked Sam in the ribs.
Roger edged past the chief [...]. The yelling ceased, and Sam and Eric lay looking up in quiet terror. Roger advanced upon them as one wielding a nameless authority. (Golding 202)

Jack gives the twins only two choices: “obey and join the tribe or die” (Golding 201-202). So the most effective method Jack has to keep the power in his hands is fear. By this he controls the other boys. He can offer them protection and at the same time force them to do things he wants to have done like guarding the tribe, or hunting Ralph. As we can see, both of the power systems have their own ways to secure their power, and both borrowed certain techniques, positive and negative, from home.

Although both power systems have their methods to control and secure their power, both are confronted with crises. The ways they deal with the crises are motivated in different ways. Ralph’s crisis is described very clearly and openly in the novel. It could even appear to the reader that he is confronted with a lot more problems in his community than Jack is, but this is an illusion. Let us look at Ralph’s problems in more detail first. He has to constantly compete with others when striving after the leadership position and the power connected to it. His strongest opponent is obviously Jack, who constantly attacks his power and tries to gain it himself (Golding 50). For example, Jack tends to do whatever he wants to do, like hunting, and he does not pay any attention to the things he was assigned to do. When he lets the fire go out as the ship passes he does not even feel guilty (Golding 73). On this level Ralph is quiet helpless and has problems coping with Jack’s attacks. As mentioned before Ralph tries to get control over the situation by giving things to the attackers, such as the right to choose their job in serving the good of the community (Golding 19), to satisfy them and to appease them. Another strategy to stay in charge is that he gives many speeches to convince the boys of his leadership and the good he can bring to the community (Golding 156). Nevertheless the longer the story goes on, the worse Ralph’s speeches get and the more he drives the boys into the arms of his rival Jack. Another approach Ralph has towards Jack, which I mentioned before, is simply talking directly with him. But the best skill Ralph has in their power struggle is the way he answers Jack’s accusations. Ralph stays very calm and collected and answers in a cool and casual way, which takes all the power away from Jack and back into his own hands (Golding 131).

A completely different problem confronting Ralph is that the majority of the community do not want to work for their safety and rescue, but simply want to have fun and
enjoy themselves on the island. The boys usually run off to play when they are supposed to help, for example to build the huts for them to sleep in at night (Golding 50). Ralph’s technique to change this behavior is not very effective and proves counter-productive for his leadership. He accuses them of not helping and shouts at them (Golding 87). He uses a very sharp voice and tries to appeal to their conscience to make them understand what he thinks is good for them (Golding 93).

Another problem Ralph is confronted with concerns only him. As the elected leader of the other stranded boys he is not always happy with his role as chief. The duties and the responsibility are not light burdens for a young boy like Ralph. Before he was stranded on the island he did not have to think about anyone else. He simply had to follow the rules given by the adults, not needing to decide whether this was the best way to live and to survive. So Ralph is forced to grow up very fast and he has to learn to deal with a lot of responsibility in a very short period of time. Therefore one can understand that he is not always happy with his role as leader. Jack on the other hand only does what he wants, forcing others to adjust to the things he likes and wants, without taking into consideration what the good thing would be for the whole community. So, Ralph has to fight with his own wishes and the good for the community while Jack only decides according to his personal will (Golding 55, 68). Ralph cannot find a solution to this problem during the whole story. Only once does he even experiences what it means to have fun and enjoy the power he has: joining the hunters “he discovered himself the excitement, the ‘fright and apprehension and pride’ the others have known” and envies them that they can feel this every day (Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes 25). Nevertheless he accepts his situation and responsibility as the democratic leader of the community because he knows what lies on the opposite if he gives up: “savagery and moral chaos” (Hynes 59).

Ralph has another typical problem: he cannot fulfill all of the community’s wishes. For example without Jack’s help Ralph could not have provided the other boys with meat. This food is considered to be very important and necessary to the other boys, and is very significant for the their satisfaction with their leader. So Ralph has no other choice but to give in to the power distribution between himself and the hunters. Moreover he himself has problems resisting the temptation of meat (Golding 78). This is one of Ralph’s biggest problems to maintain his position as chief because he has difficulty keeping up the boy’s trust in his leadership abilities and therefore cannot secure the communities feeling of safety. During the story’s development the so called ‘beast’, the fear among the boys, grows constantly, which makes Ralph completely helpless and is probably the reason why Jack can
manage to take over the power. As Kirstin Olson shows, Ralph “neither preserves his people nor retains his position as chief, mostly because he never understands the fragility of power” (10). He cannot offer safety, reward good behavior, or punish disobedience (Olson 11). To this, John Whitley adds, “As democracy dwindles in authority and is swamped by the emergent totalitarian power of Jack and his gang, Ralph is thrown back on his limited powers of reasoning and his ability to understand his relation to the growing darkness on the island” and finally the boys choose Jack as their new chief (55).

Jack succeeds in gaining power and bringing his power system into the game, but he is also confronted with problems in his system, and like Ralph, he also has to fight against competition. However, Jack uses a more aggressive method to win by giving speeches commenting on all the negative things about his opponent. Ralph is portrayed in a very bad way by Jack (Golding 138-139). Once Jack even says: “‘He isn’t a proper chief.’ […] ‘He’s a coward himself’” (Golding 138). In addition Jack has to fight something Ralph has better under control — the knowledge of what is right and wrong. From home Jack has learned what is the right thing to do in life and what is considered wrong, but his behavior on the island does not reflect this at all. He chooses a different power system to represent his wishes than the one he was used to from his childhood, even if he uses elements and certain techniques from home to his advantage. Hence he does not go completely against his upbringing, but chooses the most useful bits he can use for himself and his goals. Finally Jack finds a way to remove the social restrictions. He decides to paint his face with “Dazzle paint” so he can hide behind a mask of anonymity. After this procedure he wants to get rid of everything that reminds him of home and the restrictions connected to it. The main reminders on the island are the conch, Ralph with his power system and in a more abstract way Simon with his spiritual power, representing religion on the island. Jack’s solution is to destroy the function of the conch by speaking without holding the shell (Golding 98), and to get rid of the other two boys by killing them. First Jack makes the rest of the boys believe that Simon is the beast and after they have killed him, Jack tries to present Ralph as the new beast that has to be killed. The boys follow Jack’s leadership and start a hunt for Ralph. However they are ‘saved’ from the island before they can commit the murder. But Jack knows he “can never be free from the Ralph-in-him till Ralph is dead. It is the nightmare of ‘play’ that must go on and past nightfall, with no rules, no ‘Sir’ or Mummy or Daddy to call a halt” (Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes 43). He knows that to keep the power within his range he has to erase everything connected to the old ways of living that the boys and he were used to from home. He has to fight against the common sense in all the other boys. When Ralph talks to the boys
and explains to them, for example why the fire is important for their rescue, the boys agree and decide things together based on their knowledge. However, these decisions are very often not in Jack’s favor. So Jack’s solution in this case is to use pure violence. For example, when Piggy accuses Jack of letting the fire go out and letting the ship pass unnoticed, Jack solves this issue by hitting Piggy (Golding 75). Another problem Jack is confronted with is that he cannot convince some of the boys to join his community and follow his rules. His solution in this case is very simple as he again uses violence to force them to join in his tribe. This treatment of the twins ‘SamnEric’ are the best example for this sort of Jack’s behavior (Golding 198, 202).

Jack’s biggest personal problem, however, is his own fear of the beast. Although he convinces the majority of the other boys of being able to hunt down and kill the beast, he cannot manage to convince himself. Jack does not want to admit that he is afraid, but in reality he is. When he and Ralph are searching the island for the beast, Ralph always has to go first if there is the possibility of the beast being at that place (Golding 114, 134). He behaves like a little boy and not like a leader. He tries to overcome this fear in various ways. First of all he starts to accustom the other boys to certain rituals that make them feel like being one big group, belonging together, and therefore being strong. He also tries to accomplish this by introducing dances, transferring the other boys and himself into a sort of ecstasy. His use of violence also makes him feel and appear stronger. All of this is only to pretend to have everything under control and to minimize the fear, to make it unreal.

Summing up the problems Jack and his power system are confronted with and comparing them with Ralph’s, one can clearly say that Jack has to fight much more with himself than with the community. He learns to control the boys through violence but fighting yourself cannot be won in this way. Jack has to sort himself out first before he can take over the power. These problems are more difficult to solve than Ralph’s problems, which are more with the community and its behavior than with himself. On the other side it is much more difficult to break Jack’s power than it is to break Ralph’s. This is because Jack is not as vulnerable as Ralph with his community-integrating power system. So in this case the coterie represented by Jack wins the fight for power against the open community, which is represented by Ralph (Poppe 57).

The two power systems are clearly competing with each other in the so called microcosm, the boys’ island in the novel. But this conflict can also be seen in a different layer of the story, the world described in the novel outside of the island, the adult world (Whitley

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1 ‘Koterie’ in German: ‘geschlossene Gesellschaft’ and the opposite ‘the open community’ in German: ‘offene Gesellschaft’. (Poppe)
30). In this outer sphere the adults fight for power, like the boys. Two systems compete for authority and control, a somewhat similar fight to the one the boys are having on the island, but on a much larger scale. The island is like a smaller version of the larger world. Although the only time the adults are directly mentioned in the plot is at the end of the book, when the naval officer with his perfect fitted uniform and the trim-cruiser, a warship, comes to save the boys, they and their competition are always present in the story (Poppe 55). The reason for the boys’ journey is not a field trip planned by their teacher, but a war evacuation of the boys from their home country to a place where they were supposed to be safe, safe from a war their parents are fighting (Olson 1). And neither did the crash happen simply by accident, but the boys were shot down in their attempt to escape the violence and danger. Thus the boys being on that island is a result of the obvious competition between two power systems in the adult world. Another sign of the adult world that plays a very important role in the development of the boys’ story is the dead parachutist they find. The boys think this is the beast that everyone has been talking about, finally coming to take them. This dead parachutist really triggers off all the beliefs and fears of the boys, making them start following Jack’s power system, so his appearance moves the story to another level. Moreover this dead parachutist is also a sign of how the situation in the adult world is going. The two systems are involved in a very deadly and brutal war, showing what the boys could be capable of when they grow up. Nevertheless, the message the dead pilot is bringing could also be that the boys might be rescued from the island by adults, but they cannot escape from the continuously ongoing fight for power in the world. They will never be free of fear. This interpretation can be proven by looking at where the dead parachutist lands on the island, the top of the mountain where the boys have lit their signal fire. The dead man, or in the view of the boys, the beast, blocks the place were they place their highest hopes for rescue (Golding, “Fable” 44). But maybe this dead parachutist was only a forward glimpse of what is going to happen on the island – death and violence. This adult brutality can be seen in other ways as well. At night the boys can see exploding bombs in the air, making the fight of the systems very visible to them (Golding 103). Although there are so many signs that the adults are fighting their own real war, some boys still believe that safety comes with the rescue by the adults. Nevertheless, how can one say that the navy boat, fully equipped to fight, can bring the boys to safety? As Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes point out, “The ‘majesty of adult life’ is a childish delusion” (22). So adults are no better people than children and vice versa. This is also hinted at in the book with the symbol of the flies. They fly over both the head of the dead parachutist that is a result of the grown-up world and the head of the pig, which was stabbed onto a stick by the boys (Gregor
and Kinkead-Weekes 30). These flies stand for what humans are capable of doing when they are fighting for power. Hence the navy officer can only bring them away from their own dangers and not from the brutal competition over power.

To sum up, Golding does not paint a black and white picture of the boys being the good and innocent children that have to suffer under the bad influence of the perished adults. He shows very clearly that the desire for power and the will to fight and kill for it exists in both. Golding also shows us that both power systems, democratic and totalitarian, have their strengths and their weaknesses. He does not portray them as one being the good and the other being the bad system. His attempt is more to illustrate that it is difficult to have an absolute, perfect and ideal power system. There are always things that can be criticized and improved. However, he does indicate that certain systems are more dangerous than others. The totalitarian power system can escalate much easier into savagery than the democratic system. So, Golding prefers power systems that benefit the community rather than only the leader himself.
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