

Power is the ability to influence or control the behaviours of an individual or a group, and can be exerted in a variety of means. Powerplay, however, can be defined as the action by which power is manipulated in order to gain superiority or control over another or a situation, resulting in a complex interplay of power. The notions of power and control are evident in Edward Albee's play 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf' (1962) and William Golding's novel 'Lord of the Flies' (1954), where the composers examine the complicated, dangerous, and shifting nature of power through language, speech, actions of the characters, and allusions. While both texts show different representations of power and the interplay of different types of power, the struggle for power is a feature of all human interaction.

Despite the differences between the texts and the historical figures and events of their respective times, the struggles for supremacy show several similarities.

In 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf', George and Martha are named after George and Martha Washington, the first American president and his wife, and Nick after Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union. By alluding to these historical figures, Albee connects the characters' conflicts with international ones, as this signifies the powerplay between USA and the USSR during the Cold War. This is most clearly shown in the play when George and Nick are fighting about genetics. George complains that with the rise of genetics "There will be...a certain loss of liberty [...] diversity will no longer be a goal [...] ants will take over the world". George's reference to "ants" denotes the cooperative social structure of an ant colony, representing a model for a communist society, with the Soviet Union taking over the world. George also adds to his lecture of the horrors of genetics by saying, "I will not give up Berlin!". By directly referencing Berlin, where the German capitol was divided between the America and the USSR, Albee reinforces the heated tension of these nations during the midst of the Cold War.

In the same way, the struggle for the position of chief between Ralph and Jack in 'Lord of the Flies' strongly resembles the fight for power over the Soviet Union between Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin respectively. From the beginning, political allegory is used to illustrate the conch shell as a symbol of democratic power, and when the boys are asked who they want as their leader, they reply "Him with the shell." "Ralph! Ralph!" "Let him be chief with the trumpet-thing." Envy of the character that has the authority, Jack struggles to get hold of power. A similar pattern emerged in the struggle for power between Trotsky and Stalin, as Stalin was determined to overthrow Trotsky and take over the Bolshevik party. As Stalin began to increase his power, he eventually killed Trotsky, gaining control over the nation due to his use of propaganda to undermine Trotsky. Likewise, at the end of novel when "[...] the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist.", the use of imagery reveals the terminated democracy and broken civilisation, with the power shifting to the dictatorial rule as a result of Jack's corrupt actions. Therefore, power has been fought over and abused by society's leaders for centuries, and authors remind individuals of the complex and variable nature of power, playing a big role in our lives and in literature as a reflection of real life.

In 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf', Albee accentuates the shifting nature of power and the characters' crave for power, where George and Martha play in a series of verbal 'games', struggling to maintain power through language and speech. From Act one, Martha becomes determined to degrade George and insult him. She succeeds in rousing George's temper by increasing face threatening acts such as calling George "a blank, a cipher...a zero." The accumulation of synonyms of nothingness describe George as lacking identity, and Martha's further degradation by comparing him to Nick reveals her power over him. As the play progresses, George and Martha continue to struggle for power and dominance, with the power shifting from one to another. However, the power struggle that has driven the action of the play ends when George destroys the illusion of their son. When the guests leave, George sings "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf, [...]", and Martha replies with "I...am...George...I...am...". The repetition of the song conveys the finality of the illusion, and the use of many ellipses in Martha's dialogue conveys her loss of power and the devastation she feels now that there is no illusion, just the truth and reality that there is no son. In this last scene, the couple appear defeated (more so Martha) as they are both quiet and contemplative. Thus, through George and Martha's attempts to gain conversational dominance and power, Albee conveys that the fight for authority results in a loss of power and control.

Similarly, in Golding's 'Lord of the Flies', characters, especially Jack, struggle greedily to own as much power as possible by means force and persuasion through the manipulation of speech and corrupt actions. From the beginning of the novel, both Ralph and Jack mistreat Piggy, calling him 'Piggy' even though he hates the nickname, and constantly tell him to shut up. Furthermore, when the boys elect Ralph as their chief, Jack tries to find other ways to gain power. When Jack flatly declares to Piggy "We don't want you," "Three's enough.", Golding uses negative imperative language to establish Jack's authority over the situation. Moreover, Ralph convinces Piggy to stay back with the others, excluding him from the superior group and preventing him from gaining control. While Ralph and Jack want power because they like the thought of being in charge, Roger wants power because he likes the idea of hurting others. After the twins, Samneric, are beaten and forced to join Jack's tribe, they speak to Ralph, who attempts to win them over to his side again, but they are terrified, "You don't know Roger. He's a terror." "And the chief—they're both—" "—terrors—" "—only Roger—". Through the use of aposiopesis, Golding emphasises Samneric's inability to express their thoughts after being overcome by fear due to Roger's corrupt actions. Hence, through the ways in which the characters act corruptly in order to gain power over others, Golding depicts humanity's strive for ultimate power and authority.

In summary, authors such as Edward Albee and William Golding address the recurring flaws of the struggle for authority in mankind, leaders, and societies, by composing texts that explore the complicated, dangerous, and shifting nature of power. Powerplay can come in many forms and can be represented through language, speech, actions of the characters, and allusions to historical figures and events. Consequently, the recurring theme of power and control is evident, shaping our understanding of events, human interaction, and situations.