



*Journal of Advances and  
Scholarly Researches in  
Allied Education*

*Vol. VI, Issue No. XII,  
October-2013, ISSN 2230-  
7540*

## **A CRITICAL STUDY ON WILLIAM GOLDING'S NOVEL 'LORD OF THE FLIES'**

AN  
INTERNATIONALLY  
INDEXED PEER  
REVIEWED &  
REFEREED JOURNAL

# A Critical Study on William Golding's Novel 'Lord of the Flies'

Vandna Hooda

**Abstract – In Lord of the Flies, British schoolboys are stranded on a tropical island. In an attempt to recreate the culture they left behind, they elect Ralph to lead, with the intellectual Piggy as counselor. But Jack wants to lead, too, and one-by-one, he lures the boys from civility and reason to the savage survivalism of primeval hunters. In Lord of the Flies, William Golding gives us a glimpse of the savagery that underlies even the most civilized human beings.**

-----X-----

## INTRODUCTION

When *Lord of the Flies* opens, a plane carrying a group of British boys ages 6 to 12 has crashed on a deserted island in the Pacific Ocean. Oops. (Also, apparently the world is at war. This matters.) With no adults around, the boys are left to fend for and govern themselves. Things start out okay. The boys use a conch shell as a talking stick, and Ralph, one of the older boys, becomes "chief."

And then trouble begins. They're afraid of a "beast" somewhere on the island, and then they decide to build a signal fire using the glasses of a boy named Piggy (who is a portly fellow, and also the most loyal friend to Ralph). But Jack, jealous of Ralph's power, decides the boys should devote their energies to hunting food (namely pigs) instead of maintaining the fire. The longer they're on the island, the more savage he becomes. Meanwhile our other key player, a wise and philosophical boy named Simon, works with Ralph to build shelters.

Eventually these latent conflicts become not so latent, and the boys who are supposed to be tending the fire skip out on their duties to kill a pig. The blood and gore of the hunt is all very exciting until they realize that, while they were out being bloodthirsty boys, the fire went out and a ship passed by without noticing them. Jack has also managed to punch Piggy in the face and break one lens of his glasses. Not good.

Right about this time a dead man attached to a parachute blows in Mary-Poppins-style to the island. The mysterious parachuting creature is mistaken for the beast, and the boys begin a massive hunt to kill it. Only Simon (and, let's face it, the audience) is skeptical, believing instead they're really just afraid of themselves. He goes off into the woods to contemplate the situation while Jack and Ralph ascend the

mountain and find the beast—but don't stick around long enough to see that it is in fact only a dead man.

Back in the group, Jack decides Ralph shouldn't be chief anymore. He secedes and invites whoever wants to come with him and kill things (like more pigs, and maybe some people if they feel like it). Most of the older kids go with him, and Simon, hiding, watches Jack and Co. hunt a pig. This time, they slaughter a fat mother pig (in a scene described somewhat as a rape), cut off her head, and jam it onto a stick in the ground. Nice.

Simon stares at the head, which he calls "the Lord of the Flies" as it tells him (he's hallucinating, by the way) that it is the beast and that it is part of him (Simon). Simon passes out, gets a bloody nose, and wakes up covered in sweat, blood, and other generally disgusting things. Despite all this, he decides to continue up the mountain to face the beast, i.e. dead guy. Then he vomits and staggers down the mountain.

By now, Ralph and Piggy (both rather ravenous) are attending (with all the other boys) a big feast/party that Jack (decorated like an idol) is throwing. It's all a frenzied reenactment of the pig hunt until Simon, still bloody, sweaty, and covered in puke, stumbles down into the center of the crazed boys. He tries to tell them about the beast, but he is unrecognizable and the boys jab at him with their spears until he's dead. Oops. Simon's body is washed out to sea that night, and the wind carries off the body of the dead parachuting man, while Ralph and Piggy convince themselves they didn't take part in murdering Simon.

It's all downhill from here. Jack's crew attacks Ralph and Piggy and steals Piggy's eyeglasses to make fire on their own. When Ralph and Piggy decide to calmly talk it out with the "savages," Roger pushes a huge

boulder off a cliff, killing Piggy. Ralph ends up running for his life, finds out that there's a head-on-stick future planned for him, and at last makes it to the shore of the island where he runs into... an officer of the British Navy. The boys are rescued from their mock war, but we're left with the image of the Navy's "trim cruiser" from the real war of the adults.

## IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF LORD OF THE FLIES:

The three most important aspects of *Lord of the Flies*:

- The major theme of *Lord of the Flies* is that humans are essentially barbaric if not downright evil. The stranded boys begin by establishing a society similar to the one they left behind in England, but soon their society has degenerated into rival clans ruled by fear and violence; before the book is over, three boys have been killed.
- The novel is an *allegory*, which is a story in which characters, settings, and events stand for things larger than themselves. For example, the island represents the world; Ralph and Jack symbolize different approaches to leadership.
- William Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies* following World War II, during which the Nazis exterminated six million Jews and the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. In this context, the novel's profound pessimism is understandable.

## PLOT

In the midst of a wartime evacuation, a British plane crashes on or near an isolated island in a remote region of the Pacific Ocean. The only survivors are boys in their middle childhood or preadolescence. Two boys—the fair-haired Ralph and an overweight, bespectacled boy reluctantly nicknamed "Piggy"—find a conch, which Ralph uses as a horn to call all the survivors to one area. Due largely to the fact that Ralph appears responsible for bringing all the survivors together, he is quickly elected their "chief", though he does not receive the votes of the members of a boys' choir, led by the red-headed Jack Merridew. Ralph asserts two primary goals: to have fun and to maintain a smoke signal that could alert passing ships to their presence on the island. The boys declare that whoever holds the conch shall also be able to speak at their formal gatherings and receive the attentive silence of the larger group.

Jack organises his choir group into a hunting party responsible for discovering a food source; Ralph, Jack, and a quiet, dreamy boy named Simon soon form a loose troika of leaders. Though he is Ralph's only confidant, Piggy is quickly made an outcast by his fellow "biguns" (older boys) and becomes an unwilling

source of laughs for the other children. Simon, in addition to supervising the project of constructing shelters, feels an instinctive need to protect the "littluns" (younger boys).

The semblance of order quickly deteriorates as the majority of the boys turn idle, giving little aid in building shelters, and begin to develop paranoid ideas about the island, referring to a supposed monster, the "beast", which they believe to exist on the island. Ralph insists that no such beast exists, but Jack, who has started a power struggle with Ralph, gains control of the discussion by boldly promising to kill the beast. At one point, Jack summons all of his hunters to hunt down a wild pig, drawing away those assigned to maintain the signal fire. A ship travels by the island, but without the boys' smoke signal to alert the ship's crew, the ship continues by without stopping. Angered by the failure of the boys to attract potential rescuers, Ralph considers relinquishing his position, but is convinced not to do so by Piggy.

While Jack schemes against Ralph, twins Sam and Eric, now assigned to the maintenance of the signal fire, see the corpse of a fighter pilot and his parachute in the dark. Mistaking the corpse for the beast, they run to the cluster of shelters that Ralph and Simon have erected and warn the others. This unexpected meeting again raises tensions between Jack and Ralph. Shortly thereafter, Jack decides to lead a party to the other side of the island, where a mountain of stones, later called Castle Rock, forms a place where he claims the beast resides. Only Ralph and Jack's sadistic supporter Roger agree to go; Ralph turns back shortly before the other two boys. When they arrive at the shelters, Jack calls an assembly and tries to turn the others against Ralph, asking for them to remove him from his position. Receiving little support, Jack, Roger, and another boy leave the shelters to form their own tribe. This tribe lures in recruits from the main group by providing a feast of cooked pig and its members begin to paint their faces and enact bizarre rituals including sacrifices to the beast.

Simon, likely an epileptic,<sup>[5][6]</sup> wanders off on his own to think and finds a severed pig head, left by Jack as an offering to the beast. Simon envisions the pig head, now swarming with scavenging flies, as the "Lord of the Flies" and believes that it is talking to him. The pig's head tells Simon that the boys themselves "created" the beast and claims that the real beast is inside them all. Simon also locates the dead parachutist who had been mistaken for the beast, and is the sole member of the group to recognise that the "monster" is merely a human corpse. Simon, hoping to tell others of the discovery, finds Jack's tribe in the island's interior during a ritual dance and, mistaken for the beast, is killed by the frenzied boys. Ralph, Piggy, Sam, and Eric feel guilty that they, too, participated in this murderous "dance."

Jack and his band of "savages" decide that they should possess Piggy's glasses, the only means of

starting a fire on the island, so they raid Ralph's camp, confiscate the glasses, and return to their abode on Castle Rock. Ralph, now deserted by most of his supporters, journeys to Castle Rock to confront Jack and secure the glasses. Taking the conch and accompanied only by Piggy, Sam, and Eric, Ralph finds the tribe and demands that they return the valuable object. Turning against Ralph, the tribe takes Sam and Eric captive while Roger drops a boulder from his vantage point above, killing Piggy and shattering the conch. Ralph manages to escape, but Sam and Eric are tortured until they agree to join Jack's tribe.

The following morning, Jack orders his tribe to begin a manhunt for Ralph. Jack's savages set fire to the forest while Ralph desperately weighs his options for survival. Following a long chase, most of the island is consumed in flames, drawing the attention of a passing naval vessel. Ralph suddenly runs into an officer from the warship and bursts into tears over the death of Piggy and the "end of innocence". The other children arrive and, now realizing what they have done, also spontaneously erupt into sobs. The officer awkwardly turns away to give them a moment to pull themselves together.

Roger, at first, is a simple "bigun" who is having fun during his stay on the island. Along with Maurice, he destroys the sand castles made by three small children. While Maurice feels guilt for kicking sand into a child's eye, Roger begins to throw stones at one of the boys. The book states that Roger threw the stones to miss, and felt the presence of civilization and society preventing him from harming the children.<sup>[22]</sup> Later, once he feels that all aspects of conventional society are gone, he is left alone to his animal urges. During a pig hunt, Roger shoves a sharpened stick up the animal's rectum while it is still alive.<sup>[23]</sup> He kills Piggy with a boulder that was no longer aimed to miss, and becomes the executioner and torturer of Jack's tribe. He also tortured Sam and Eric into joining Jack's tribe. In the final hunt for Ralph at the end of the novel, Roger is armed with "a stick sharpened at both ends,"<sup>[24]</sup> indicating his intentions of killing Ralph and offering his head as a sacrifice to the "beast". He represents the person who enjoys hurting others, and is only restrained by the rules of society.

Simon is a character who represents peace and tranquility and positivity. He is often seen wandering off by himself in a dreamy state and is prone to fits of fainting and hallucination, likely epileptic in nature. He is in tune with the island, and often experiences extraordinary sensations when listening to its sounds. He loves the nature of the island. He is positive about the future. He has an extreme aversion to the pig's head, the "Lord of the Flies", which derides and taunts Simon in a hallucination. After this experience, Simon emerges from the forest to tell the others that the "beast" that fell from the sky is actually a deceased

parachutist caught on the mountain. He is brutally killed by the boys, who ironically mistake him for the beast and kill him in their "dance" in which they "ripped and tore at the beast". It is implied that Ralph, Piggy, Sam and Eric partake in the killing. The final words that the Lord of the Flies had said to Simon vaguely predicted that his death was about to occur in this manner. Earlier in the novel Simon himself also predicts his own death when he tells Ralph that he will "get back all right",<sup>[26]</sup> implying that, of the two of them, only Ralph will be saved. Simon's death represents the loss of truth, innocence, and common sense. Simon is most commonly interpreted as a Christ figure because of his ability to see through misconception, unlike the rest of the boys, and the events he experiences in the book that parallel those of Jesus' life.

## REFERENCES

1. "Bound books – a set on Flickr". Retrieved 10 September 2012.
2. "100 most frequently challenged books: 1990–1999". *American Library Association*. 2009. Retrieved 16 August 2009.
3. Grossman, Lev; Lacayo, Richard (6 October 2005). "ALL-TIME 100 Novels. Lord of the Flies (1955), by William Golding". *Time (magazine)*. ISSN 0040-781X. Retrieved 10 December 2012.
4. "BBC – The Big Read". BBC. April 2003, Retrieved 18 October 2012
5. James Rupert Baker and Arthur P. Ziegler, ed. (1983). *William Golding's Lord of the Flies*. Penguin. p. xxi.
6. Rosen field, Claire (1990). "Men of a Smaller Growth: A Psychological Analysis of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*". *Contemporary Literary Criticism* **58** (Detroit, MI: Gale Research). pp. 93–101.