

CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE CHARACTERS OF LORD OF THE FLIES

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Abstract

The author of Lord of the Flies, Sir William Gerald Golding was a British novelist, playwright, and a poet. He is best known for his debut novel Lord of the Flies which was written in 1954. Lord of the Flies, it is a triumph over a gentle race by deceit and violence. His 1956 novel Pincher Martin records the thoughts of the drowning sailor. He explores the issue of free choice as a prisoner held in solitary confinement in a German POW camp during World War II looks back over his life. The Spire follows the building of a huge spire onto a medieval cathedral; the spire symbolizing both spiritual aspiration and worldly vanity. In the midst of a raging war, a plane evacuating a group of schoolboys from Britain is shot down over a deserted tropical island. Two of the boys, Ralph and Piggy, discover a conch shell on the beach, and Piggy realizes it could be used as a horn to summon the other boys. Once assembled, the boys set about electing a leader and devising a way to be rescued. They choose Ralph as their leader, and Ralph appoints another boy, Jack, to be in charge of the boys who will hunt food for the entire group. Ralph, Jack and another boy, Simon, set off on an expedition to explore the island. When they return, Ralph declares that they must light a signal fire to attract the attention of passing ships. The boys succeed in igniting some dead wood by focusing sunlight through the lenses of Piggy's eye glasses. However, the boys pay more attention to playing than to monitoring the fire, and the flames quickly engulf the forest. A large swath of dead wood burns out of control, and one of the youngest boys in the group disappears, presumably having burnt to death.

Keywords: *race, Violence, spiritual aspiration, Ralph, Jack, Piggy...*

CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE CHARACTERS OF LORD OF THE FLIES

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Sir William Gerald Golding was a British novelist, playwright, and a poet. Best known for his debut novel *Lord of the Flies* which was written in 1954. He would go on to write over a dozen novels in his life time. In 1980, he was awarded the Booker prize for *Rites of Passage*, the novel in what became his sea trilogy, *To the Ends of the Earth*. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1983.

His first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, triumphing over a gentle race by deceit and violence. His 1956 novel *Pincher Martin* records the thoughts of the drowning sailor, *Explores the issue of free choice as a prisoner held in solitary confinement in a German POW camp during World War II looks back over his life. The Spire follows the building of a huge spire onto a medieval cathedral; the spire symbolizing both spiritual aspiration and worldly vanity.*

The Plot

In the midst of a raging war, a plane evacuating a group of schoolboys from Britain is shot down over a deserted tropical island. Two of the boys, Ralph and Piggy, discover a conch shell on the beach, and Piggy realizes it could be used as a horn to summon the other boys. Once assembled, the boys set about electing a leader and devising a way to be rescued. They choose Ralph as their leader, and Ralph appoints another boy, Jack, to be in charge of the boys who will hunt food for the entire group.

Ralph, Jack and another boy, Simon, set off on an expedition to explore the island. When they return, Ralph declares that they must light a signal fire to attract the attention of passing ships. The boys succeed in igniting some dead wood by focusing sunlight through the lenses of Piggy's eye glasses. However, the boys pay more attention to playing than to monitoring the fire, and the flames quickly engulf the forest. A large swath of dead wood burns out of control, and one of the youngest boys in the group disappears, presumably having burnt to death.

At first, the boys enjoy their life without grown-ups and spend much of their time splashing in the water and playing games. Ralph, however, complain that they should be maintaining the signal fire and building huts for shelter. The hunters fail in their attempt to catch a wild pig, but their leader, Jack, becomes increasingly preoccupied with the act of hunting.

When a ship passes by on the horizon one day, Ralph and Piggy notice, to their horror that the signal fire –which had been the hunters’ responsibility to maintain has burned out. Furious, Ralph accosts Jack, but the hunter has just returned with his first kill, and all the hunters seem gripped with a strange frenzy, reenacting the chase in a kind of wild dance. Piggy criticizes Jack, who hits Piggy across the face. Ralph blows the conch shell and reprimands the boys un a speech intended to restore order. At the meeting, it quickly becomes clear that some of the boys have started to become afraid. The little boys, known as “littluns,” have been troubled by nightmares from the beginning, and more and more boys try to convince the others at the meeting to think rationally, asking where such a monster could possibly hide during the daytime. One of the littluns suggests that it hides in the sea – a proposition that terrifies the entire group.

Not long after the meeting, some military planes engage in a battle high above the island. The boys, asleep below; do not notice the flashing lights and explosions in the clouds. A parachutist drifts to earth on the signal-fire mountain, dead. Sam and Eric, the twins responsible for watching the fire at night, are asleep and do not see the parachutist land. When the twins wake up, they see the enormous silhouette of his parachute and hear the strange flapping noises it makes. Thinking the island beast is at hand; they rush back to the camp in terror and report that the beast has attacked them.

The boys organize a hunting expedition to search for the monster. Jack and Ralph, who are increasingly at odds, travel up the mountain. They see silhouette of the parachute from a distance and think that it looks like a huge, deformed ape. The group holds a meeting at which Jack and Ralph tell the others of the sighting. Jack says that Ralph is a coward and that he should be removed from office, but the other boys refuse to vote Ralph out of power. Jack angrily runs away down the beach, calling all the hunters to join him. Ralph rallies the remaining boys to build a new signal fire, this time on the beach rather than on the mountain. They obey, but before they have finished the task, most of them have slipped away to join Jack.

Jack declares himself the leader of the new tribe of hunters and organizes a hunt and a violent, ritual slaughter of a sow to solemnize the occasion. The hunters then decapitate the sow and place its head on a sharpened stake in the jungle as an offering to the beast. Later, encountering the bloody, fly-covered head, Simon has a terrible vision, during which it seems to him that the head is speaking. The voice, which he imagines as belonging to the Lord of the Flies, says that Simon will never escape him, for he exists within all men. Simon faints. When he wakes up, he goes to the mountain, where he sees the dead parachutist. Understanding then that the beast does not exist externally but rather within each individual boy, Simon travels to the beach to tell the others what he has seen. But the others are in the midst of a chaotic revelry-even Ralph and Piggy have joined Jack’s feast- and when they see Simon’s shadowy figure emerge from the jungle, they fall upon him and kill him with their bare hands and teeth.

The following morning, Ralph and Piggy discuss what they have done. Jack's hunters attack them and their few followers and steal Piggy's glasses in the process. Ralph's group travels to Jack's stronghold in an attempt to make Jack see reason, but Jack orders Sam and Eric tied up and fights with Ralph. In the ensuing battle, one boy, Roger, rolls a boulder down the mountain, killing Piggy and shattering the conch shell. Ralph barely manages to escape a torrent of spears.

Ralph hides for the rest of the night and the following day, while the others hunt him like an animal. Jack has the other boys ignite the forest in order to smoke Ralph out of his hiding place. Ralph stays in the forest, where he discovers and destroys the sow's head, but eventually, he is forced out onto the beach, where he knows the other boys will soon arrive to kill him. Ralph collapses in exhaustion, but when he looks up, he sees a British naval officer standing over him. The officer's ship noticed the fire raging in the jungle. The other boys reach the beach and stop in their tracks at the sight of the officer. Amazed at the spectacle of this group of bloodthirsty, savage children, the officer asks Ralph to explain. Ralph is overwhelmed by the knowledge that he is safe but, thinking about what has happened on the island, he begins to weep. The other boys begin to sob as well. The officer turns his back so that the boys may regain their composure.

Characterization

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel about a group of school boys stranded on a deserted island without any adult supervision. Free from the restraints of society, the boys form their own civilization, which quickly descends into chaos and violence. Through this tale, Golding explores fundamental questions about human nature. In fact, each character can be interrupted as an essential element of the allegory.

Ralph

Confident, calm, and physically capable, Ralph is the novel's protagonist. He runs around the island effortlessly and is able to blow the conch at will. This combination of good looks and physical competence makes him the natural leader of the group, and he assumes this role without hesitation.

Ralph is a sensible character. As soon as the boys arrive on the island, he takes off his school uniform, recognizing that it is unsuitable for the hot, tropical weather. He is also pragmatic, showing no hesitation over this symbolic loss of their former lifestyle. In this way, he differs greatly from some of the other boys, who cling to scraps of their former lives. (Recall Littl'un Percival, who regularly chants his home address as if policeman will somehow overhear him and bring him home.)

In the novel's allegorical structure, Ralph represents civilization and order. His immediate instinct is to organize the boys by setting up a system of government. He is careful to wait for

democratic approval before assuming the role of Chief, and his orders are sensible and practical: build shelters, start a signal fire, and set up a system to ensure the fire doesn't go out.

Ralph isn't perfect, however. He is susceptible to the lure of violence just like the other boys, as evidenced by his role in Simon's death. In the end, he survives not because of his orderly authority but rather through his ultimate embrace of his animal instinct as he runs through the jungle.

Piggy

Piggy, the second character we meet in the novel, is a chubby, ungainly boy with a history of being bullied. Piggy is not very physically capable, but he is well-read and intelligent, and he frequently offers excellent suggestions and ideas. He wears glasses.

Piggy immediately allies himself with Ralph and remains his steadfast ally throughout their grueling adventure. However, Piggy's loyalty stems more from his awareness that he is powerless on his own than from true friendship. It is only through Ralph that Piggy has any authority or agency, and as Ralph's grip on the other boys diminishes, Piggy's does too.

As an allegorical figure, Piggy represents the civilizing forces of knowledge and science. It's notable that Piggy emerges shortly after Ralph on the beach, as science and knowledge require a civilizing force before they can come into fruition. Piggy's value is represented by his glasses, which the boys utilize as a scientific instrument to create fire. When Piggy loses possession and control of the glasses, he becomes less capable physically (suggesting the limits of knowledge's influence), and glasses become a magical totem instead of a scientific tool.

Jack

Jack is Ralph's rival for authority on the island. Described as unattractive and aggressive, Jack believes he should be the Chief, and he resents Ralph's easy authority and popularity. He is quickly presented as Ralph and Piggy's enemy, and he begins undermining their authority from the moment they attain it.

Of all the boys, Jack is the least bothered by the experience of being stranded on a deserted island. He seems fairly happy to be free to do as he likes, and he hates the way Ralph attempts to limit this newfound freedom with rules. Jack seeks to regain his ultimate freedom throughout the novel, first by merely breaking Ralph's rules, and then by establishing an alternative society that indulges in the physical pleasures of barbarism.

While he initially seems to represent fascism and authority-worship, Jack actually represents anarchy. He rejects any limitations on his personal desires, including the desire to inflict harm on

and eventually kill others. He is the opposite of Ralph, and from the very beginning of the novel, it is clear they cannot co-exist in a single society.

Simon

Simon is shy and timid, but has a strong moral compass and sense of self. He behaves according to his inner sense of right and wrong, even as the other boys become increasingly violent and chaotic. In fact, Simon is the only boy who does not engage in any sort of violence.

Simon represents spiritually and can be interpreted as a Christ-like figure. He has a prophetic hallucination in which he speaks to the Lord of the Flies; afterwards, he discovers that the feared Beast does not exist. He rushes to share this information with the other boys, who panic at the sound of Simon's frenzy and kill him.

Roger

Roger is Jack's second in command, and he is arguably more cruel and savage than Jack. While Jack enjoys power and title of Chief, Roger disdains authority and has a single minded desire to hurt and destroy. He represents true savagery. At first, he is held back from his worst desires by just one memory of civilization: the fear of punishment. Roger is the boy who ultimately kills Piggy, symbolically destroying sense and wisdom in favor of raw violence.

Sam and Eric (Samneric)

Sam and Eric are a pair of twins, referred to collectively by the name Samneric. Samneric are steadfast followers of Ralph until the very end of the novel, when they are captured and forcibly inducted into Jack's tribe. The twins, who cling to the old ways of civilization, are representative of the majority of humankind. They represent the faceless populations that make up large societies, particularly in the eyes of governments. Samneric do not have much agency in the story, and they are dominated by forces around them. Their transition to Jack's tribe represents the final fall of civilization.

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