

Lord of the Flies – The Sound of the Shell

1. Characters

Ralph

Ralph is an attractive, vivid young boy:

- fair: “The boy with fair hair” (11)
- twelve years of age: “twelve years and a few months” (15)
- tall: “he might make a boxer” (15); there was his size” (30)
- attractive: “attractive appearance” (30)
- mild: “a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil.” (15)
- agile: “stood on his head [...] jumped down to the beach” (15)
- good swimmer: “You can’t half swim” (18 and 19)
- fun-loving and easy-going boy: “laughed delightedly again and stood on his head, knelt and swept a double armful of sand into a pile against his chest. Then he sat back and looked at the water with bright, excited eyes” (15); lay there laughing” (17); ignoring Piggy’s ill-omened talk, he dreamed pleasantly” (20)
- excited by the prospect of adventure without the restrictions of grown-up authority: “‘Aren’t there any grown-ups at all?’ – ‘I don’t think so.’ The fair boy said this solemnly; but then the delight of a realized ambition overcame him [...] ‘No grown-ups!’” (12)
- Ralph represents a model son, he is a product of British middle class with a happy family background: “‘I could swim when I was five. Daddy taught me. He’s a commander in the Navy.’” (19)
- After the vote Ralph is chief of the boys: “‘I’m chief then.’” (30)
- He needs time to make decisions: “‘I’ve got to have time to think things out. I can’t decide what to do straight off.’” (31) This might weaken his leadership.
- Occasionally, Ralph shows his common sense and argues with a practical understanding: “‘Seems to me we ought to have a chief to decide things.’” (29) ; “‘We ought to draw a map,’ said Ralph, ‘only we haven’t any paper.’” (35) “‘There’s no village smoke, and no boats [...] We’ll make sure later’” (39) When Simon discovers the candle buds, Ralph says “‘You couldn’t light them.’” (40)

Piggy

Piggy is physically disadvantaged:

- short: “shorter than the fair boy” (12)
- fat: “very fat” (12)
- short-sighted: “looked up through thick spectacles” (12)
- suffers from asthma: “breathing hard [...] my asthma” (13)
- He lives with his aunt: “My dad’s dead [...] and my mum– [...] I used to live with my auntie. She kept a sweet-shop. I used to get ever so many sweets.” (19)
- Piggy can’t run: “My auntie told me not to run” (13) or swim (“I can’t swim. I wasn’t allowed.” (19)
- Piggy is very clumsy: “I can’t hardly move with all these creeper things.” (11); removed the thorns carefully (12); “sat down carefully” (15); “he sat carefully on a fallen trunk” (20); “bumbling behind them” (32) and unskilful: “You’re no good on a job like this.” (32)
- His nickname ‘Piggy’ establishes the way his peers see him: “They used to call me ‘Piggy’” (16; see also 28 and 29)
- He is unconfident: “He shrank to the other side of Ralph and busied himself with his glasses.” (28); “he went very pink, bowed his head and cleaned his glasses again” (29)
- He speaks non-standard language; he is a Cockney (working class inhabitant of the East End of London): “All them other kids” (12); “We was attacked!” (13)
- Piggy soon is an outsider: “I was with him when we found the conch. I was with him before anyone else was.’ Jack and the others paid no attention. There was a general dispersal.” (32)
- Piggy is the most rational person in the group; he is a realist and possesses qualities such as logic, reason, rationality: “we’ll want to know all their names [...] and make a list. We ought to have a meeting.” (16); “How does [Ralph’s father] know we’re here? [...] Didn’t you hear what the pilot said? About the atom bomb? They’re all dead. [...] Nobody don’t know we’re here.” (19-20); “We got to find the others. We got to do something.” (20); “what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy” (30)
- Piggy has acquired valuable knowledge and information during his life. He recognises the values of the conch: “We can use this to call the others. Having a meeting. They’ll come when they hear us–“ (22)
- Nevertheless, Piggy is unsuitable for the role of chief: “You try, Ralph. You’ll call the others.” (23)

Piggy’s physical appearance, his common sense and scientific, intellectual point of view make him the only adult-type figure on the island. He continually shatters the boys’ illusions and interrupts their desire to play.

Martin, Stewart. *Lord of the Flies*. London: Letts Educational, 2004, p. 6.

Jack Merridew

Jack is a natural leader figure:

- “the boy who controlled [the choir]” (26)
- “tall, thin, and bony” (27)
- “his hair was red” (27)
- “His face was crumpled and freckled, and ugly without silliness” (27)
- “two light blue eyes” (27)
- “offhand authority in Merridew’s voice” (28)
- “‘Kids’ names,’ said Merridew. ‘Why should I be Jack? I’m Merridew.’” (28)
- “This was the voice of one who knew his own mind.” (29)
- “‘I ought to be chief,’ said Jack with simple arrogance, ‘because I’m chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp.’” (29)
- “the most obvious leader was Jack” (30)
- Ralph: “‘Jack’s in charge of the choir.’” (31)
- “‘We’ll get food [...] Hunt. Catch things’” (39)
- When talking about the buds of a bush, Simon objects “we can’t eat them.” (40)

Jack is a leader, but his methods are the natural opposite to those of Ralph. Jack is dictatorial and aggressive; he has a strong desire to lead and asserts himself through his prowess as a hunter, which deteriorates into lust for killing.

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The Choir

The choir is characterised by military discipline:

- “a party of boys” (26)
- “marching approximately in step in two parallel lines” (25)
- “dressed in strangely eccentric clothing” (25)
- “each boy wore a square black cap with a silver badge in it.” (25)

Maurice

- “next in size among the choir boys to Jack” (29)
- “broad and grinning all the time” (29)

Simon

There are several reasons why Simon stands out from the rest of the choir:

- “the choir boy who had fainted.” (29)
- “skinny, vivid little boy” (32)
- “straight hair that hung down, black and coarse.” (32)
- He names the buds on the mountain ‘candles’: “‘Like candles. Candle bushes. Candle buds’” (40) The candles remind us of a graveyard and represent death.
- The naming of the buds shows Simon’s sense for aesthetics (art)

Johnny

“a boy of perhaps six years” (24)

“sturdy and fair” (24)

“his only clean digit, a pink thumb, slid into his mouth” (24)

“innocent” (25)

Sam and Eric

“twins” (25)

“the eye was shocked and incredulous at such cheery duplication” (25)

“They breathed together, they grinned together” (25)

“chunky and vital” (25)

Roger

“a slight, furtive boy” (29)

“who no one knew” (29)

“kept to himself with an inner intensity of avoidance and secrecy” (29)

“dark boy” (29)

Bill, Robert, Harold, Henry, and others

These are not further described in Chapter I.

2. Themes, Motifs and Symbols

Paradise

[Often] a comparison is suggested between this island and others, from *Coral Island* onward, of schoolboy romance. (274):

“Here at last was the imagined but never fully realized place leaping into real life. Ralph’s lips parted in a delighted smile” 21)

The Heat

“Though [Ralph] had taken off his school sweater and trailed it now from one hand, his grey shirt stuck to him and his hair plastered to his forehead. All round him the long scar smashed into the jungle was a bath of heat” (11)

“always, almost visible, was the heat” (15)

“the heat hit him” (15)

“Ralph danced out into the hot air” (16)

“The water was warmer than his blood” (18)

“[Piggy] tested the water with one toe. ‘It’s hot!’” (18)

“With that word the heat seemed to increase” (20)

“enduring the sun’s enmity” (20)

“the haze of heat” (21)

“The sand trembling beneath the heat-haze” (24)

“the hot, dumb sand” (25)

“the line from heat-haze to nearer sand” (25)

“The heat of the tropics [...] had given them the complexions of newly washed plums” (26)

“the sweat that had soaked their clothes in the dark, damp heat” (36)

The heat is the first force to create a change in the boys’ usual behaviour:

“kicked his shoes off fiercely and ripped off each stocking [...] pulled off his shirt [...] lugged off his shorts and pants, and stood there naked” (15)

“[Piggy] began to take off his shorts” (18)

“Some were naked and carrying their clothes: others half-naked, or more-or-less dressed, in school uniforms” (25)

Fruit

The fruit gives the boys diarrhoea. This is the first hint that their Garden of Eden may not be as perfect as it at first seems:

“decaying coco-nuts” (14), “skull-like coco-nuts” (15)

“Them fruit [...] I’ll be out again in just a minute” (14)

“I’m sorry I been such a time. Them fruit” (15)

“The expression of pain and concentration returned to Piggy’s face. ‘Half a sec.’ He hastened back into the forest” (17)

“his face covered with a sticky mess of fruit. His trousers had been lowered for an obvious purpose and had only been pulled back half-way” (24)

“Three small children [...] had been gorging fruit in the forest” (25)

The Conch Shell

At the outset, the conch shell replaces the megaphone and helps establish order:

“Where’s the man with the megaphone?” (15)

“A conch he called it. He used to blow it and then his mother would come. It’s ever so valuable—” (21)

“We can use this to call the others. Having a meeting. They’ll come when they hear us—” (22)

“The children gave [Piggy] the same simple obedience that they had given to the men with megaphones.” (25)

Piggy: “We got to do something.” (20) “Something was being done.” (25)

Jack: “Where’s the man with the trumpet?” (26)

The Pig

“something squealed and ran in the undergrowth” (23)

“they heard the noises – squeakings – and the hard strike of hoofs on a path. [...]”

They found a piglet caught in a curtain of creepers” (40)

Illusion

Ironically, short-sighted Piggy often is the only one to see clearly, the others often are deceived by illusions:

“Sleep enveloped him like the swathing mirages that were wrestling with the brilliance of the lagoon.” (19)

“the creature stepped from mirage on to clear sand” (26)

“towards the end of the afternoon, the mirages were settling a little. They found the end of the island” (34)

“the view was not robbed of sharpness by mirage” (38)

The Mountain

Mountains occur many times in the Bible and are often regarded as holy places in a number of religions. Mountains have to be climbed to find the truth. At the outset Ralph, Jack and Simon climb the mountain to find out the truth about their whereabouts.

Being a Group

The choir as “a party of boys” (26)

“For the moment the boys were a closed circuit of sympathy with Piggy outside” (29)

“The circle of boys broke into applause. Even the choir applauded” (30)

“I was with him when we found the conch. I was with him before anyone else was.’ [...] There was a general dispersal.” (32)

“Again came the solemn communion of shining eyes in the gloom.” (36)

“[Ralph, Jack and Simon] were lifted up: were friends.” (39)

Democracy

Ralph: “Seems to me we ought to have a chief to decide things.” (29)

Roger: “Let’s have a vote.” (30)

Civilisation vs. Savagery

The first time the conch is blown, it heralds the birth of civilised order on the island: “The children gave him the same simple obedience that they had given to the men with megaphones.” (25)

“‘They could be the army—’ ‘Or hunters—’” (31)

“They found a piglet [...] He raised his arm in the air. There came a pause, a hiatus” (40)

“They knew very well why he hadn’t [stabbed the piglet]: because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood.” (41)

“Next time there would be no mercy.” (41)

3. Vocabulary: The Island

| | | |
|------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| rock (11) | the hard solid material that forms part of the surface of the earth and some other planets | Fels, Stein |
| lagoon (11) | a lake of salt water that is separated from the sea by a reef or an area of rock or sand | Lagune |
| jungle (11) | an area of tropical forest where trees and plants grow very thickly | Dschungel |
| creeper (11) | a plant that grows along the ground, up walls, etc., often winding itself around other plants | Kletterpflanze |
| trunk (11) | the thick main stem of a tree, that the branches grow from | Baumstamm |
| undergrowth (11) | a mass of bushes and plants that grow close together under trees in woods and forests | Gestrüpp, Unterholz |
| twig (11) | a small very thin branch that grows out of a larger branch on a bush or tree | (dünner) Zweig |
| thorn (12) | a small sharp pointed part on the stem of some plants, such as roses | Dorn |
| reef (12) | a long line of rocks or sand near the surface of the sea | Riff |
| branch (13) | a part of a tree that grows out from the main stem and on which leaves, flowers and fruit grow | Ast |
| foliage (14) | the leaves of a tree or plant; leaves and branches together | Laub, Blattwerk |
| shore (14) | the land along the edge of the sea or ocean, a lake or another large area of water | Küste, Meeresufer |
| palm tree (14) | a straight tree with a mass of long leaves at the top, growing in tropical countries, some produce fruit | Palme |
| bank (14) | the side of a river, canal, etc. and the land near it | (Fluss)Ufer |
| grass (14) | a common wild plant with narrow green leaves and stems that are eaten by cows, horses, sheep, etc | Gras |
| upheaval (14) | an area of land that slopes upwards (syn. rise) | Erhebung |
| coconut (14) | the large nut of a tropical tree called a coconut palm. It has a hard hairy shell containing a soft white substance that can be eaten and juice that can be drunk | Kokosnuss |
| sapling (14) | a young tree | junger Baum, Trieb, Schössling |
| surf (14) | large waves in the sea or ocean, and the white foam that they produce as they fall on the shore or on rocks | Brandung |
| coral (14) | a hard substance that is red, pink or white in colour, and that forms on the bottom of the sea from the bones of very small creatures | Koralle |
| beach (15) | an area of sand, or small stones, beside the sea or a lake | Strand |
| forest (15) | a large area of land that is thickly covered with trees | Wald |
| landscape (17) | everything you can see when you look across a large | Landschaft |

| | | |
|----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| | area of land, especially in the country | |
| jetty (17) | a wall or platform built out into the sea, a river, etc., where boats can be tied and where people can get on and off boats | Damm |
| layer of soil (17) | layer: a quantity or thickness of sth that lies over a surface or between surfaces; soil: the top layer of the earth in which plants, trees, etc. grow | Erdschicht |
| weed (17) | a wild plant growing where it is not wanted, especially among crops or garden plants | Unkraut |
| | any wild plant without flowers that grows in water and forms a green floating mass | Seegras, Meer-espflanze |
| typhoon (18) | a violent tropical storm with very strong winds | Taifun |
| pool (18) | a small area of still water, especially one that has formed naturally | Teich, Tümpel |
| ledge (18) | a narrow flat piece of rock that sticks out from a cliff | Felsvorsprung |
| high / low tide (18) | the time when the sea is at its highest / lowest level | Ebbe Flut (Gezeiten) |
| roar (19) | to make a very loud, deep sound | Getöse; Gebrüll |
| breaker (19) | a large wave covered with white bubbles that is moving towards the shore | Brecher |
| breeze (21) | a light wind | Brise |
| palm-frond (21) | a long leaf, often divided into parts along the edge, of some plants or trees, especially palms or ferns | (Farn)wedel |
| shell (21) | a sea creature | Muschel; Schale |
| conch (21) | any of various tropical marine gastropod molluscs of the genus <i>Strombus</i> , characterised by a large brightly coloured spiral shell, used as a trumpet | Schnecken- muschel |
| poor soil (21) | land that is not able to produce good crops | unfruchtbare Erde |
| mountain (23) | a very high hill, often with rocks near the top | Berg |
| crag (34) | a high steep rough mass of rock | Felsklippe |
| root (35) | the part of a plant that grows under the ground and absorbs water and minerals that it sends to the rest of the plant | Wurzel |
| bark (35) | the outer covering of a tree | Rinde |
| scree (37) | an area of small loose stones, especially on a mountain, which may slide when you walk on them | Geröll |
| slope (38) | an area of land that is part of a mountain or hill | Hang, Böschung, Gefälle |
| foam (38) | a mass of very small air bubbles on the surface of a liquid | Schaum |
| bush (40) | a plant that grows thickly with several hard stems coming up from the root | Busch |
| bud (40) | a small lump that grows on a plant and from which a flower, leaf or stem develops | Knospen |
| piglet (40) | a young pig | Schweinchen |