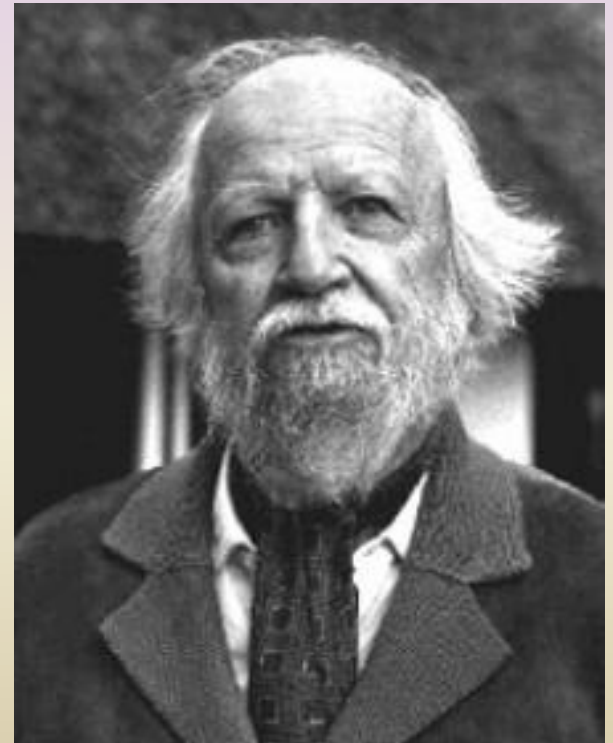


2. WILLIAM GOLDING

(Cornwall, 19th September 1911 – 19th June 1993)

British novelist, poet, playwright and Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983, he is best known for his novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

In 2008 he was ranked third on the list of “*The 50 greatest British writers since 1945*”. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1988.



Lord of the Flies (1954)

- ***Lord of the Flies*** is a novel about a group of British schoolboys stuck on a deserted island who try to govern themselves, with disastrous results: fundamentally pessimistic, it shows the moral ambiguity and fragility of civilization.
- The book subtly indicates that it takes place in the midst of an unspecified nuclear war, perhaps implicitly relating the savagery of the children characters to the warfare of adults.
- Some of the marooned characters are ordinary students, while others arrive as a musical choir under an established leader. Most (with the exception of the choirboys) appear never to have encountered one another before.

Lord of the Flies vs tradition.

- When first summoned with the aid of the conch (symbol of democracy, civility and order) and realise there are no adults on the island the boys think excitedly:

“It’s like in a book”

“Treasure Island...”

“The Mysterious Island...”

“The Coral Island...” (Ch. 2: Fire on the Mountain)

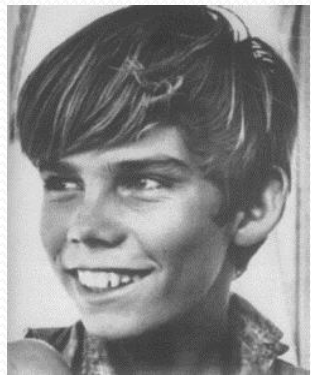
- The tropical paradises of Stevenson (1883), Verne (1874) and Ballantyne (1857) which the boys have read about, come to their mind immediately, but Ralph’s answer is significant:

“This is our island.”

In other words, everything will be different on it...

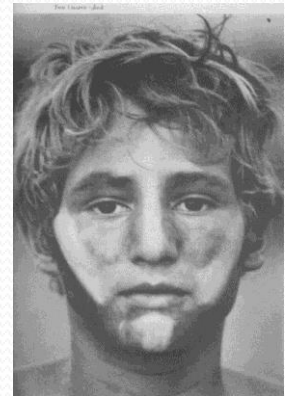
Themes.

- The book portrays the gradual descent of the boys into savagery: left to themselves the well-educated children regress to a primitive state.
- The central theme is the conflict between **civilization** (live by rules, peacefully and in harmony) and ***the will to power***:



- **Ralph**, who has "*the directness of genuine leadership*", embodies good intentions in the implementation of reason though he ultimately fails to execute his plans soundly;

- **Jack**, a natural leader, epitomizes the worst aspects of human nature when unrepressed or untempered by society;



- **Piggy**, brainy but fat and shortsighted, represents the rational, adult world which doesn't stand a chance on the island.

Lord of the Flies: symbols.

- “*Lord of the Flies*” is the literal **English translation** of **Beelzebub**, a demonic figure that is often considered synonymous with Satan.
- In the novel it is a **pig's head** that has been cut off by Jack, put on a stick sharpened at both ends and stuck in the ground.
 - Created out of fear, the *Lord of the Flies* used to be a mother sow who, though at one time clean, loving, and innocent, has now become a sneering, bleeding, last image of horror.
- It has been left as an offering to “*the beast*” ...





The “beast”...

What is the **beast**?

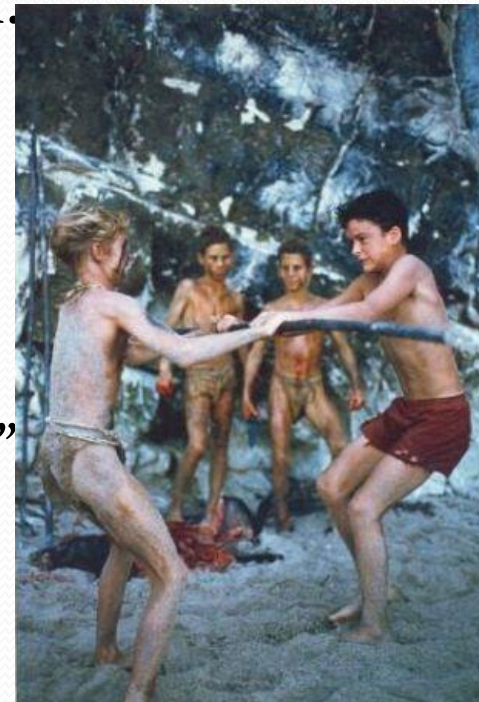
It is the corpse of a fighter pilot ejected from his aircraft whose parachute becomes entangled in the jungle foliage in such a way that sporadic gusts of wind cause the chute to billow and the body to move as if still alive.

- But the **real beast** is not without: it is **within**.

“... You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?” (Ch. 8: Gift for the Darkness : the voice of the beast within, to Simon)

... and it leads the boys to murder:

*“...**Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!**” then] “There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws.” [till] “Simon's dead body moved out toward the open sea...”* (Ch. 9: A View to a Death)



... and its indelible effects.

- Rescued at last, no longer hunters and savages but boys once more (with two murders on their conscience).



“... A semi-circle of little boys, their bodies streaked with coloured clay, sharp sticks in their hands, were standing on the beach making no noise at all...”

(Ch. 12: Cry of the Hunters)

- The naval officer expresses disappointment at the state the boys got themselves in:

“... I should have thought that a pack of British boys... would have been able to put up a better show than that...” (Ch. 12)

- What has been lost on the island is irretrievable...

*“... Ralph wept for **the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy.**”* (Ch. 12)

Civilization vs savageness.

- The conflict between **civilization** and *man in his savage state* used to be represented by the opposition civilized (English) people vs savages (as in Defoe) or vs pirates (as in Ballantyne or Stevenson).
- In Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, for example:
 - the “**civilized** heroes”, i.e. Jim Hawkins, Dr. Livesey or Captain Smollett, stand for loyalty, truthfulness, faith, discipline;
 - the “savage pirates” suffer from *drunkenness, impiety* and *mutual betrayal*: they tend to seize immediate gratification on the premise that *life is short and uncertain*.
- Here, instead, Ralph apart, **the boys** – who should represent innocence, purity, goodness – drift towards the savageness of pirates, *uncertain about the future*, ready to **lie, betray** and **even murder**.