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LORD OF THE FLIES: WILLIAM GOLDING'S REALISM AND PETER BROOK'S CINEMATIC "REALITY"

Paola Carmagnani
(University of Turin)

Published in 1954, *Lord of the Flies* was William Golding's first novel; the one that established his reputation and that is still most widely acclaimed as his major work, capturing popular imagination and critical attention. Nominated for the *Palme d'Or* at the 1963 Cannes Film Festival, Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies* was its first adaptation, and also the cinematic debut of one of Britain's most innovative theatre directors.[1]

Brook's film was based on a deep knowledge of Golding's text and a clear understanding of the specific questions it posed for a cinematic adaptation. Page after page, Golding's imagination 'becomes the reader's reality', writes Stephen King in his *Introduction* to the novel, 'It glows, incandescent and furious.'[2] What can a cinematic adaptation do with a text that is in and of itself so visually powerful? Brook's bet was to show that the vivid images it provoked in the reader's mind were indeed so powerful that they could glow on the screen as 'incandescent and furious' as from the novel's pages. Thus, adamantly refusing to use a screenplay, Brook chose to trust the novel's narrative power and worked directly from Golding's text.[3] As we will see, through an almost obsessive adherence to the letter of the story, the formal

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1 *Lord of the Flies*, directed by Peter Brook (UK: British Lion; US: Continental Distributing, 1963). Produced by Lewis M. Allen. Photography by Tom Hollyman and Gerald Feil. Music by Raymond Leppard. Cast: James Aubrey (as Ralph), Tom Chapin (as Jack), Hugh Edwards (as Piggy), Tom Ganman (as Simon).

2 Stephen King, 'Introduction', in William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), www.oxfordsd.org, p. 3.

3 See Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point: Forty years of theatrical exploration. 1946–1987* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), pp. 192–198.

peculiarities of the novel's realism reveal themselves and find a stunning translation in a specific cinematic language.

Peter Brook's impressive filmography is entirely comprised of adaptations from the theatre, the opera, as well as from several narrative texts. Throughout all these experiences, he was concerned with finding an autonomous cinematic language that was capable of capturing each text's meaning and atmosphere. For him, the key element of that language has always been the "reality" of the image, which he considered both the cinematic medium's strength and limitation. Brook wrote that the power of the cinematic image entirely grasps the viewer: 'It is only possible to reflect on what one is seeing before or after the impression is made, never at the same moment. When the image is there in all its power, at the precise moment when it is being received, one can neither think, nor feel, nor imagine anything else.'[4]

This immersive cinematic "reality" finds a worthy challenge in Golding's literary realism. The novel's story, organized within a perfectly mastered structure that gradually takes us from an idyllic setting towards a dark core, is told by an invisible narrator who functions as a camera. Showing more than telling, the narrator leads us through the beach and jungle of an uninhabited tropical island among a group of marooned children, in and out of their different visions and thoughts, to and fro in a sort of alternate editing of simultaneous events. It is indeed a "cinematic narrative", which provokes in its reader a deeply emotional, immersive response, very similar to the viewer's reaction to the "reality" of the actual cinematic medium. As Stephen King recalled:

> I was […] unprepared for what I found between the covers of *Lord of the Flies*: a perfect understanding of the sort of beings I and my friends were at twelve or thirteen […]. To the twelve-year-old boy I was, the idea of roaming an uninhabited tropical island without parental supervision at first seemed liberating, almost heavenly. By the time the boy with the birthmark on his face […] disappeared, my sense of liberation had become tinged with unease. And by the time the badly ill

4 Brook, p. 190.

> — and perhaps visionary — Simon confronts the severed and fly-blown head of the sow, which has been stuck on a pole, I was in terror. 'The half-shut eyes were dim with the infinite cynicism of adult life,' Golding writes. 'They assured Simon that everything was a bad business.' That line resonated with me then, and continues to resonate all these years later. […] No teacher needed to tell me that Ralph embodied the values of civilization and that Jack's embrace of savagery and sacrifice represented the ease with which those values could be swept away; it was evident even to a child.[5]

The ground on which Brook's images meet Golding's cinematic writing is partly that of the *cinéma vérité*, where the camera was employed as a means to create a new kind of relationship with reality, revealing it through documentary work that refused any aesthetic gratifications. The work of Jean Rouch, a pioneer of the *cinéma vérité* who used the camera as an essential tool for his ethnological research, seems to resonate throughout Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies*. Rouch's docufiction, *Les maîtres fous* (1955), chronicled the rites, which involved dancing and mimicry of the colonial power's military ceremonies, performed in a state of trance by some African tribes. As in Rouch's film, in Brook's *Lord of the Flies* the camera works as an "*agent provocateur*", stimulating the children's reactions and attitudes and developing their characters as they are being filmed. 'I believed,' said Brook,

> that the reason for translating Golding's very complete masterpiece into another form in the first place was that although the cinema lessens the magic, it introduces evidence. The book is a beautiful fable — so beautiful that it can be refuted as a trick of compelling poetic style. In the film, no one can attribute the looks and gestures to tricks of direction. Of course I had to give the impulse to set a scene in motion, but what the camera records is the result of chords being struck on strings that were already there. The violent gestures, the look of greed and the faces of experience are all real.[6]

5 King, p. 2.
6 Brook, p. 197.

With a cast of children who had never acted before, the film was shot on a tropical island off Puerto Rico in rough conditions and with poor technical means. Using several cameras at the same time, leaving them to run even as he was talking to the children and filming sequentially as per the novel, Brook ended up with sixty hours of unbroken screening to be edited. The result was a film where the rough, black and white images, the often-confused camera movements and the improvised performances intentionally display its documentary nature. Consequently, Brook's unadorned work-in-progress somehow reconnects with the sociological experiences of the novel's origins, when Golding was a schoolteacher and he studied the dynamics of children playing. 'Many of (the children's) off-screen relationships,' recalls Peter Brook,

> completely paralleled the story, and one of our main problems was to encourage them to be uninhibited within the shots but disciplined in between them. We had to cake them with mud and let them be savages by day, and restore prep-school discipline by the shower and the scrubbing at night. Even the wise and calm Piggy came to me one day close to tears. 'They're going to drop a stone on you,' the other boys had been telling him. 'That scene on the schedule, Piggy's death. It's for real. They don't need you anymore.' My experience showed me that the only falsification in Golding's fable is the length of time the descent to savagery takes. His action takes about three months. I believe that if the cork of continued adult presence were removed from the bottle, complete catastrophe could occur within a long weekend.[7]

Golding's novel, however, cannot be summed up as a sociological experience, and Brook's adaptation goes far deeper than that, capturing the text's truth within its very literary form. Cleverly handling the potential of its own cinematic "reality", the film indeed manages to bring out the symbolic essence that is embedded in the realistic fabric of Golding's narrative as an organic part of it.

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7 Brook, p. 198.

Golding's story begins with the arrival of Ralph and Piggy on the island, — 'the boy with fair hair' and 'the fat boy'[8] with spectacles and asthma — explaining through fragments of their dialogue the background of this opening situation (a nuclear war that had caused the evacuation of a group of English schoolboys and a plane crash that has left them on the island without any grown-ups to take care of them). The film instead, summarizes the story's background in a sort of *incipit,* through a series of blurry half-tone still images over which the opening titles roll. An old public school, a long-ago class photograph, scholars bent over their desks and then seen singing in a choir. We hear a bell ring, a somber and distant voice teaching geometry and reciting Latin verses, and then, while the images of the choir are appearing, we hear the melodious, remote sound of children's voices singing the *Kyrie Eleison*'s liturgy — 'Lord, have mercy' — that will become the film's musical leitmotiv.

Opening

8 William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), pp. 1–2.

Some stills of a cricket match complete this set of tokens, evoking a distant life regulated by well-established, long-time traditions that are abruptly interrupted by entirely different kinds of images: missiles and nuclear weapons, accompanied by the menacing sound of percussion. For several seconds, the cricket match and the sinister weapons alternate rapidly on the screen, before giving place to a third set of stills: war planes in the London sky, a blackboard announcing the school's evacuation, the boys smiling in their uniforms and holding a photograph of a plane, aircrafts in flight, a stormy sky, a map of the Pacific ocean off the Australian coast and then, accelerating the images and the soundtrack's rhythm, the plane crash. A gong sounds, and then a final still image of dark palm trees blowing in the wind ends this opening whose purpose is to crystallize the novel's main theme: the presence of evil within the deceivingly reassuring heart of civilization. Throughout the entire written narrative, we are systematically reminded that the violence and chaos gradually developing among the children are simultaneously raging within the adult world; a civilization in ruins fighting its terrible war outside the island. This civilization is identified by the novel with a western world that is, more specifically, English. Thus, the boys bring with them to the uninhabited island the weight of their colonial pride; the implicit and explicit references to R. M. Ballantyne's *Coral Island* (1858) function here as a symbolic subtext, setting Golding's dark adventure against the colonial ideology embodied in traditional adventure stories. Brook insists on this cultural aspect, firmly establishing in the film's opening the story's English roots, and also highlighting a class issue that was not so explicitly present in the novel. The still images of the school clearly situate the boys within a social elite. In particular, Jack's character is strongly determined as a result of his belonging to that context. Leader of the choir, endowed with an instinctive commanding attitude, Jack declares at the beginning of the novel: 'We'll have rules! Lots of rules! Then when anyone breaks 'em —' (32); 'After all, we're not savages. We're English; and the English are best at everything' (42). Brook's version retains these lines and the boy who plays Jack speaks with a marked upper-

class accent ironically connoting his further development into the brutal, face-painted leader of the 'savages'.[9]

The effect produced by the film's opening deeply modifies the emphasis the novel puts on the deceivingly bright and innocent adventure that the island seemed to offer at the beginning of the story. In the first chapter of Golding's narrative we see Ralph overcome by 'the delight of a realized ambition'[10] with no grown-ups and an island full of enchantments: 'the green shadows from the palms and the forest sliding over his skin' (5), and a lagoon that looks 'like an incredible pool' (7) with warm water that he plunges into it with delight. Here, on the contrary, we are immediately confronted with the grim backdrop of the story, whose uncanny effect is enhanced by the blurry still images which convey an irretrievable past into the flowing present tense of cinematic language: a lost world of school boys in uniforms, angelic choirs and cricket matches, where everyone could still pretend to be innocent. The viewer is therefore emotionally prepared for the dark story he is about to watch, as the buzz of some invisible flies significantly accompany Ralph and Piggy's arrival on the beach.

The use of long shots and slow pans translates onto the screen the novel's vivid descriptions of a perennial and indifferent nature. Human figures often appear as small and irrelevant details that develop into narrative characters as the camera gradually draws closer.

> Within the diamond haze of the beach something dark was fumbling along. Ralph saw it first, and watched till the intentness of his gaze

9 Tom Chapin, the boy who played Jack, was dubbed over by another actor because he had lived in the United States for some time and didn't possess the proper upper-class British accent. See Matthew Dessem, '#43: Lord of the Flies', in *Lord of the Flies* (New York: The Criterion Collection, 2013), www.criterion.com. On the film's class issue see also Geoffrey Macnab, '*Lord of the Flies*: Trouble in Paradise', in *Lord of the Flies*: 'The reason Jack so despises Piggy is not just appearance but also the fact that he is not of the right caste. Yes, Piggy is fat, wears spectacles, and looks like Billy Bunter, but the real problem is that he's from Camberley. He's suburban, lower-middle-class — an outsider among all these blue-blooded chorists.' (Ibid.).

10 Golding, p. 2.

> drew all eyes that way. […] The creature was a party of boys, marching approximately in step in two parallel lines and dressed in strangely eccentric clothing. […] Each boy wore a square black cap with a silver badge in it. Their bodies, from throat to ankle, were hidden by black cloaks which bore a long silver cross on the left breast and each neck was finished off with a hambone frill.[11]

An aerial shot shows the gentle curve of the white beach, with a dark, indistinct mass advancing from the far left singing the *Kyrie Eleison* as a sinister military march. Carefully translating the novel's point of view, the image of the advancing group is preceded by a shot of Ralph, clinging to the trunk of a bent palm while gazing intently towards the beach with the sun in his eyes. The camera follows the dark mass as it approaches and gradually appears as a group of boys, carefully reproducing every detail of their choir cloaks from the novel. As it has been remarked by Geoffrey Macnab, the contrast between the natural whiteness of the tropical beach and the long dark cloaks, belonging to an incongruous faraway world of schools and rules, adds a striking 'strain of surrealism'.[12]

The arrival of the choir

11 Golding, p. 15.
12 Geoffrey Macnab, '*Lord of the Flies*: Trouble in Paradise'.

The choir is guided by a taller figure, dressed in the same way; he will later present himself as Jack Merridew and he will become Ralph's competitor for the role of chief. Nevertheless, it is Ralph who will be elected, and he will generously leave to Jack the command of the hunters. However, the rivalry between the two boys and the contrast of Ralph's democratic rule to Jack's violent and totalitarian tribe will develop into one of the main narrative threads. By showing Ralph and Jack symbolically separated by the trunk of the palm tree, which obliquely cuts the frame, Brook immediately sets the stage for their rivalry. Then, a close-up of Jack shot from below lends him a powerful and fierce aspect, offering a first glimpse of a character that will be further developed throughout the following sequences narrating the first expedition through the island.

Tom Chapin (Jack)

> The three boys walked briskly on the sand. The tide was low and there was a strip of weed-strewn beach that was almost as firm as a road. A kind of glamour was spread over them and the scene and they were conscious of the glamour and made happy by it. They turned to each other, laughing excitedly, talking, not listening. The air was bright.[13]

On the screen we see Jack, Ralph and Simon, three of the four main characters of the story, walking away on the beach and then climbing up a mountain in a sunny landscape, happily eating fruit from the trees and laughing as they push a great rock down the hill — 'Like a bomb!' they scream in the novel (25). When they arrive at the top of the mountain, they pause to look out at the island and sea. 'This belongs to us,' says Ralph in the novel (26), expressing the great expectations of a boy in a traditional adventure story who is to be tragically deceived by the subsequent developments. Here, we see the three of them looking out in silence, the camera closing in on Jack's face, then on Simon's, and finally moving behind the nape of Ralph's neck, offering a semi-subjective shot of the wide ocean at their feet. Three boys like any others, their faces like blank pages onto which the destiny of each has yet to be written.

As in the novel, their descent from the mountain opens the way for the development of Jack's and Simon's characters, confronting each of them with their own deep nature.

> They found a piglet caught in a curtain of creepers, throwing itself at the elastic traces in all the madness of extreme terror. Its voice was thin, needle-sharp and insistent. The three boys rushed forward and Jack drew his knife again with a flourish. He raised his arm in the air. There came a pause, a hiatus, […] and the blade continued to flash at the end of a bony arm. The pause was only long enough for them to understand what an enormity the downward stroke would be.[14]

After a first close-up of the three boys looking down from a rock at the piglet, the film shows a prolonged image of Jack's suspended gesture, intently gazing downwards while pointing

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13 Golding, p. 22.
14 Golding, p. 28.

a knife at the animal's neck. Here, as consistently throughout the entire film, the camera directs the viewer away from the overwhelming adventure and towards something at a deeper emotional level, to which the young actors' stiff awkwardness contributes.

'Why didn't you —?' asks Ralph in the novel after the piglet has run away. 'I was going to,' answers Jack, 'I was choosing a place. Next time —!'. 'He snatched his knife out of the sheath,' says the narrator, 'and slammed it into a tree trunk. Next time there would be no mercy. He looked round fiercely, daring them to contradict.' (29). In the film, Jack's violent frustration is elaborated on in contrast with the first presentation of Simon's character, making reference to a preceding passage of the novel:

> They scrambled down a rock slope, dropped among flowers and made their way under the trees. Here they paused and examined the bushes around them curiously. Simon spoke first. 'Like candles. Candle bushes. Candle buds.' The bushes were dark evergreen and aromatic and the many buds were waxen green and folded up against the light. Jack slashed at one with his knife and the scent spilled over them. 'Candle buds.' […] 'Green candles,' said Jack contemptuously, 'we can't eat them. Come on.' (28)

After the piglet's flight, we see the boys scrambling down a slope and Simon approaching some Birds of Paradise bushes. The contrast between Jack's frustration and Simon's instinctive closeness to the world of Nature is conveyed through two back-to-back images. The first is of Jack, in profile with the knife caressing his nose, and then Simon, also in profile, caressing and smelling the plant.

Tom Chapin (Jack)

Tom Ganman (Simon)

The focus of the narrative is thus transferred from Jack towards Simon. Jack abruptly cuts off one of the plant's leaves with his knife and it descends very close to Simon's face, almost touching it. Simon slowly turns towards the camera and the sequence ends with his close-up, looking at us with a quizzical expression, while we once again hear the ominous buzz of invisible flies.

This ability to crystallize the different aspects of the novel into images and sounds appears particularly striking in the sequences adapting the very core of Golding's story: Simon's confrontation with the Lord of the Flies and his subsequent death, narrated in the eighth and ninth chapters. The film shows Simon climbing up the mountain, where a parachutist's dead body — 'If only they (the grown-ups) could send us something grown-up… a sign or something'[15] — has been seen and identified by the children as 'the beast'. While Ralph and Piggy had previously tried to rationalise the spreading fear, and Jack had catalyzed the hunters' violent urges on an imaginary and terrifying antagonist, Simon says that, maybe, the beast is 'only us' (96). He must now go to the top of the mountain and confront it, embarking on a path of initiation towards the awareness of mankind's hidden evil: 'What else is there to do?' he asks, both in the novel[16] and in the film, offering another quizzical look into the camera.

In the meantime, following the novel's structure, Jack and his hunters are in the forest, on the pig's trail. The film shows them running, accompanied by the sound of percussion that grows faster and louder while Jack pulls out his knife and strikes a pig hidden by vegetation. We hear the pig squealing and a fast panning shot shows the hunters in a motionless half circle, their faces painted and spears raised in a suspended attack. Here, the immersive and intrusive reality of the cinematic image is manifestly played down by concealing the novel's brutal details of the sow's slaughtering and offering instead one of those sequences where the violence of the story is deliberately stylized and contained.

Returning to Simon, we see him half concealed by the vegetation and wearing a stunning white shirt.

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15 Golding, p. 102.

16 Golding, p. 141.

Tom Ganman (Simon)

He is standing near the same bushes we had seen at the end of the exploration sequence and is witnessing the pig's killing, his head bowed while we still hear its desperate squeals. The pig is dead, and the camera shows us Jack's hands crafting Golding's famous stick sharpened at both ends. While the stick is rammed into the ground, the sound of percussion resumes and the camera focuses on the motionless, painted face of one of the hunters while we hear Jack's voice, 'This head is for the Beast. It's a gift.'[17]

17 Golding, p. 151.

A hunter

The Lord of the Flies

It is a quick close-up, that will be followed later on by a second one, even quicker, in which the head appears covered with flies. Between these two close-ups, there is another image of the Lord of the Flies, shown in an almost theatrical setting: a long medium frontal shot of the lush forest with the head in the foreground merging with the vegetation, as in a sort of allegorical painting. In the background, we first see the hunters marching with the skewered pig's carcass and singing *Kyrie Eleison*. Then Simon appears. At first he's a small, faraway figure emerging from the dense-forest background. Then, as he pauses in the midst of the vegetation, he creates a diagonal axis with the pig's head, revealing its almost-hidden presence. Relegated to a supporting role, the Lord of the Flies is indeed the least impressive aspect of these stylized sequences, as if the realness of its images couldn't convey its symbolic appeal without having to resort to other elements (human figures or lush vegetation). On its own, the image of the Lord of the Flies cannot linger too long on the screen, otherwise it risks becoming simply a 'pig's head on a stick',[18] as Simon discovers later on.

In the film, moreover, the Lord of the Flies does not speak. Thus, Simon's famous dialogue with it explicitly becomes an interior discourse, with the boy silently sitting in front of the pig's head and a series of shots and reverse-shots gradually closing in on Simon's intent gaze and the pig's grinning face. 'Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!' said the Lord of the Flies in the novel, '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?' (158). By renouncing Belzebub's suggestive voice, everything in the film is delegated to the visual power of the camera, alternately moving 'close, close, close' towards Simon's face and the pig's head. Here, the Lord of the Flies obtains at last a prolonged close-up, gradually giving way to the immense detail of its mouth, covered with buzzing flies, until Simon (together with the viewer) actually seems to fall into it: 'Simon found he was looking into a vast mouth. There was

18 Golding, p. 158.

blackness within, a blackness that spread. […] Simon was inside the mouth. He fell down and lost consciousness'.[19]

The following sequence proceeds to narrate the final part of Simon's symbolic path, higher up the mountain to see the 'beast'. Through Simon's eyes it appears now very different from the grim puppet that had previously terrified Ralph, Jack and Roger: contorted on one side, motionless, it has become nothing more than a 'poor body' on which the camera lingers for a few, long seconds, silently translating on the screen Simon's pity for that 'harmless and horrible' (162) symbol of 'mankind's essential illness' (96). Simon's epiphany is now complete and, from this moment, he takes on the role of a saint, a Christ-like figure (about which much has been written) who gives up his life for mankind's salvation: 'The news must reach the others as soon as possible.'[20] In the film, Simon's last step towards his martyrdom begins with an impressive close-up set against an immense and cloudy sky. We see him as an imposing figure shot slightly from below as he slowly recedes from the dead body into the background of the sky, as if being swallowed up by it.

Tom Ganman (Simon)

19 Golding, p. 159.
20 Golding, p. 162.

As in the novel, Simon's movement towards the 'beast' is preceded by images of the boys cooking the pig on the beach, led by Jack who has by now clearly overcome Ralph's rule. In these sequences Brook offers the most striking example of his documentary style, and the camera captures the spontaneous cries and haphazard movements of the practically naked and crudely painted children who have been set free to play.

Boys on the beach before Simon's murder

Among the almost comical, improvised realism of these images, Brook introduces a different, disquieting kind of vision: a carefully staged shot of Ralph's dark profile that has become an iconic image for Golding's story. Presiding from high upon a rock overlooking the chaos beneath him, Jack, whose face and body are heavily painted in white lines symbolically evoking the Union Jack, is wearing a kind of savage crown made from the leaf he had previously cut off near Simon's face.

Tom Chapin (Jack)

After the sequences of Simon and the ‘beast’, we are brought back to the boys on the beach who are now plunged into the darkness of the night, illuminated only by their torches as they chaotically move along the shore. The confused yelling is interrupted by another close-up of Jack’s profile. With a ferocious look, he distinctly articulates the opening lines of the hunters’ war chant, ‘Kill the beast!’, which is immediately followed by the other boys’ voices, ‘Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!’. The wild war chant is but another variation of the same *Kyrie Eleison* that we first heard in the film’s opening and then again as the marching song of Jack’s choirboys. While some of the cameras continue to follow the children’s chaotic movements, one remains fixed, filming the faces and bodies that occasionally pause in front of it, eerily addressing us with their shouts and sneers.

The following sequences alternate the images of the boys with those of Simon, explicitly connecting them through the war chant and the screaming, which we continue to hear as we watch Simon

staggering towards the beach. Simon's and the viewer's auditory perceptions are joined together and the sounds coming from the beach, which are at first diminished by the distance, grow increasingly louder as he approaches. Returning to the boys, we observe a close-up of a painted figure illuminated by torchlight pointing towards the forest. 'Look!' the painted boy shouts, and every other sound and movement suddenly stops, dramatically suspending the narrative flow, 'The beast!' During an unnaturally protracted, eerie silence, we see Simon coming through the forest and then, shifting to his point of view, the group of boys at a close distance on the beach. For a brief moment they remain in silence, motionless. Then they attack him, drawing us into their chaotic movement of ecstatic violence.

In the novel, the boys' violence was stylized in a symbolic war dance performed in two concentric circles, hypnotically turning and beating 'like a steady pulse', as 'the throb and stamp of a single organism' (168). The film renounced the stylistic virtuosities of Golding's description and, if we compare these sequences to those of the pig's slaughtering, we notice how differently Boook's cinematic translation functions here, taking the documentary realism to its very climax. The novel, moreover, narrates the entire scene by focusing on the children's perception of Simon as 'a thing' that 'was crawling out of the forest', 'the beast' that 'was stumbling in the middle of them, […] on his knees in the centre, its arms folded over its face' (168). Within the actual reality of the cinematic medium however, the viewer is forced to see Simon's terrified face and his hands raised to protect himself.

In Golding's narrative, Simon remains the 'beast' even after the violence has been consumed, maintaining that appellative beyond the children's perception in order to convey the enormity of what has been done and their confused understanding of it:

> Then the clouds opened and let down the rain like a waterfall. The water bounded from the mountain-top, tore leaves and branches from the trees, poured like a cold shower over the struggling heap on the sand. Presently the heap broke up and figures staggered away. Only the

> beast lay still, a few yards from the sea. Even in the rain they could see how small a beast it was; and already its blood was staining the sand.[21]

The film does not show us Simon bleeding on the beach but rather keeps its focus on the children's savage violence up until the end when we see them running towards the sea yelling and wielding their spears. While the camera frames the white sea foam, once again we hear Jack's voice screaming the opening words of the war chant, 'Kill! Kill!'. Another voice immediately joins in, disquietingly more childish, repeating the same words and extending the responsibility to every single child on the island, even the very little ones.

Having reached its climax, the violence gives way to the only moment of catharsis offered by Golding's dark story.

> The tide swelled in over the rain-pitted sand and smoothed everything with a layer of silver. Now it touched the first of the stains that seeped from the broken body […]. The water rose further and dressed Simon's coarse hair with brightness. The line of his cheek silvered and the turn of his shoulder became sculptured marble. […] The body lifted a fraction of an inch from the sand and a bubble of air escaped from the mouth with a wet plop. Then it turned gently on the water. Somewhere over the darkened curve of the world the sun and moon were pulling; and the film of water on the earth planet was held, bulging slightly on one side while the solid core turned. The great wave of the tide moved further along the island and the water lifted. Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellations, Simon's dead body moved out towards the open sea.[22]

In the film, we once again hear the *Kyrie Eleison*, but this time as an extradiegetic comment melodiously sung by the same white voices we heard in the opening. The prayer takes us towards the vision of Simon's transfigured body, covered with silver light and floating in a luminous sea. Then, 'turned gently on the water', it slowly drifts out of the frame. For a few seconds we are left in

21 Golding, p. 169.
22 Golding, p. 170.

front of a black screen, still listening to the prayer's song, 'Lord, have mercy', and upon whose notes the illuminated sea water reappears — mercifully indeed — lingering on the screen and literally translating Golding's redeeming light, briefly shining into the heart of darkness.

More than any other character in the film, Piggy is the very image of the boy we had in mind while reading the novel. He 'arrived by magic through the post', recalls Peter Brook,

> — a sticky *Just William* on lined paper, 'Dear Sir, I am fat and wear spectacles', and a crumpled photograph that made us cry with delight. It was Piggy, come to life in Camberley — the unique boy himself, conceived ten years before, at the very moment that Golding was wrestling with the birth of the novel.[23]

In the film, Piggy's spectacles, both a symbol of his intellectual power and his physical vulnerability, become an essential leitmotif of his tragic trajectory as a victim of Jack's brutality. Thus, the sequence in which Jack brutally seizes Piggy's spectacles in order to light the fire literally translates the corresponding scene in the novel, but then goes on to further develop it through a backlit close-up of Jack holding the lenses against the sunlight, followed by an image of Piggy, blinded and awkwardly moving a hand before his eyes ('Jus' blurs, that's all. Hardly see my hand')[24]. It is through this backlit image, which suddenly disturbs the viewer's vision, that the film establishes an immediate and unconscious association with Piggy's vulnerability.

This sequence is symbolically juxtaposed to a passage of the story in which we see Jack brutally smacking Piggy's face and breaking his spectacles. Both sequences involve a fire: in the first one, it has been made as a rescue signal; in the second one, it has gone out, forgotten by Jack and his party who have gone hunting. In the first sequence Jack is still wearing his uniform shirt and has a clean face; in the second he's almost naked and his face is painted. In the novel, between the two passages a highly symbolic event has occurred:

23 Brook, p. 195.
24 Golding, p. 40.

> Jack planned his new face. He made one cheek and one eye-socket white, then rubbed red over the other half of his face and slashed a black bar of charcoal across from right ear to left jaw. […] He knelt, holding the shell of water. A rounded patch of sunlight fell on his face and a brightness appeared in the depths of the water. He looked in astonishment, no longer at himself but at an awesome stranger. […] He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling. He capered towards Bill and the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness.[25]

We never actually see that crucial moment on the screen, but in the second sequence the painted Jack is indeed 'liberated from shame and self-consciousness'. Whatever had restrained his hand in front of the piglet is gone, and his loathing of Piggy becomes a violent urge that has to be released. The film's elision of the symbolic moment in which Jack paints his face has the effect of focusing his violence directly on Piggy, making it more realistically tangible. As with Simon in the exploration sequence, it is on Piggy that the film puts its emphasis here, showing a close-up of him wearing the broken spectacles — another image from Golding's story that has become an icon.

25 Golding, p. 66.

Hugh Edwards (Piggy)

Piggy's spectacles appear again towards the end of the story, when Jack and two of his hunters attack the few kids who have remained in the huts on the beach. As in the novel, we hear the hunters' voices whispering in the night, 'Piggy, Piggy… Where are you, Piggy? We come to get you…', and then we see them attacking the huts. In the novel, Piggy thinks that Jack's purpose must be to steal the shell, the symbolic object of Ralph's democratic rule, which was held by anyone who wanted to speak in the assemblies. But Jack is not interested in such an obsolete object within his new totalitarian order: 'They didn't come for the conch,' says Piggy after the attack, 'They came for something else. Ralph — what am I going to do?'[26] A few lines later, at the end of the chapter, we see the three hunters trotting on the beach. Leading them, Jack has become 'the Chief': 'He was a chief now in truth; and he made stabbing motions with his spear. From his left hand dangled Piggy's broken glasses.' (186). In the film Jack also mimics Piggy by wearing his spectacles and walking with an imaginary protruding stomach. That parody makes him

26 Golding, p. 186.

a less commanding and more childish figure than he was in the corresponding scene in the novel, but this further increases the grim effect of the entire sequence. It is just a game, of course, like their whispering in the night, but Jack has taken the power, he is the pig hunter and Piggy has been definitively robbed of his sight: ‘Ralph — what am I going to do?’.

Piggy’s destiny was indeed written from the beginning — in his nickname and his spectacles — and in the following sequences we witness its tragic realization. From above, we see him grasping the mountain rocks leading to Jack’s new headquarters, presided over by screaming painted kids. Looking up at them with blinded squinted eyes, Piggy’s weakness is clear, but despite everything he gets to his feet and, holding the shell, delivers his final speech: ‘Which is better to be — a pack of painted savages like you are, or sensible, like Ralph is? Which is better — to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill?’. Overhead meanwhile, Roger (Jack’s sadistic lieutenant) levers an enormous rock from the mountain and, as if answering in the worst possible way Piggy’s appeal to reason, strikes him, precipitating his body into the sea below. Here, we are reminded of the first expedition, when three boys happily pushed a massive rock down into the sea. Also, we obviously think of Simon’s death, compared to which this second murder appears indeed as an anticlimax. There is no ecstasy in the act of murder, here, just Roger’s emotionless expression, Jack’s astonished look and the silent disconcertment of the painted boys. And Piggy’s body is just a dead body, floating facedown in the water. Piggy dies without having reached Simon’s dark truth, the real reason ‘why it’s no go […] why things are what they are’ (158). He dies believing in the good values of the lost world of civilization, without understanding that even the adults in the outside world have forgotten them, choosing ‘to hunt and kill’ rather than ‘to have rules and agree’.

In Brook’s version, Piggy’s character indeed crystallizes the deceptive nostalgic bond with civilization. (Ironically, Piggy is the only one who does not really belong to that upper-class world shown in the film’s opening). ‘Like a crowd of kids,’ he sighs at the beginning of the film, observing the boys who excitedly run

off to light their first fire. The 'martyred expression of a parent who has to keep up with the senseless ebullience of the children'[27] stiffly reproduced by the young actor and the stereotyped adultness of his words produce a somewhat comic effect, which makes us smile empathically with Piggy's character. Later on, when the older kids go up the mountain to see the 'beast' and he is left in charge of the little ones, Brook integrates an entirely original sequence, his only major addition to the novel's narrative. Hugh Edwards, the boy who plays Piggy, is seated in front of the children and tells them a story about his actual hometown, Camberley, and how it came to be named that way. It begins with the difficulty of getting letters delivered to a town originally called Cambridgetown, a toponym akin to the better-known Cambridge. Within the attentive silence of the audience, Piggy's pedantic narrative becomes a wonderfully absorbing bedtime story, because the problem presented by those undelivered letters deeply resounds with the tragic situation that the lost children are actually facing. Thus, the solution eventually offered by Piggy's story — the transformation of 'Cambridgetown' into 'Camberley' and the letters that are at last delivered — produces a soothing happy-ending, both for the children as well as for the viewer. 'So dignified and poignant is the scene,' writes Jackson Burgess, 'that I couldn't help feeling that any species represented by Piggy […] cannot finally be brought low by its Jacks.'[28] Yet, no matter how reasonable and dignified Piggy appears in sequences such as these, Brook's adaptation also carefully takes note of his limitations, relying on that same deceptive belief in the salvific values of civilization. As in the novel, Piggy refuses to acknowledge Simon's murder: 'It was dark. There was that — that bloody dance. There was lightning and thunder and rain. We were sacred!'. And even, with the very hypocritical voice of bourgeois respectability: 'It was an accident. He was batty, he asked for it'.

27 Golding, p. 38.

28 Jackson Burgess, 'Lord of the Flies', *Film Quarterly*, 17:2 (1963–1964), p. 32.

In both the novel and the film, Jack, Simon and Piggy are realistic figures that, however, seem to carry with them the weight of a destiny that has already been written, inscribed within their own personalities. Ralph's character instead is more contradictory and pliable, less burdened by a defined symbolic role. Among Golding's main characters, he's the only one who possesses the features of a proper novel's hero and, in fact, in the end he will be the boy who survives — having learned the island's dark lesson and bearing its weight back into the world: 'You'll get back to where you came from,'[29] Simon tells him.

He 'might make a boxer, as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went, but there was a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil':[30] Ralph is a natural-born hero and he is the elected leader, because of 'his size, and attractive appearance' (19) and also because he's the one who first blew into the shell, gathering the children together on the beach. Nonetheless, it is Piggy who explains to him how to use the shell, and Piggy again who always knows what has to be done, while Ralph experiences frequent attention lapses in which he suddenly loses contact with reality and retreats into a dream world. At first excited by the wonders of a desert island without adults, he soon grows aware of the urgency to be rescued and he generally behaves according to that priority. He's a good, generous boy, but he betrays Piggy's confidence, revealing to the entire assembly the humiliating nickname that he had been explicitly asked to keep secret, causing 'a storm of laughter' (17), 'a closed circuit of sympathy with Piggy outside' (18), and by doing so somehow contributes to writing Piggy's destiny. At the same time, he is capable of remorse and apologizes for the pain that he has inflicted; he's also the only one who is able and willing to protect Piggy from Jack's violent contempt. Ralph is instinctively drawn to Jack's adventurous nature, generously offering him the hunters' leadership, and they share happy moments of excitement and friendship. Nevertheless, he also knows when and how to stand up against him. With all

29 Golding, p. 121.
30 Golding, p. 5.

the others, except Piggy, he participates in the bloody circle that killed Simon (and Brook's camera takes care to make him fully recognizable in the night sequences), yet he is the only one who explicitly calls it a murder, fully acknowledging his own responsibility. Neither a victim nor a bully nor a saint, Ralph is just a normal, decent kid with whom it is easy to identify. In the film, Ralph's character is extremely faithful to the novel's 'normal' hero. Essential to the story's development, he's often present on the screen. But contrary to the other main characters there are no iconic images of him, as if his undetermined nature refused to be captured and fixed by the camera. After Piggy's murder, Ralph becomes the next designated victim of Jack's tribe. Both in the novel and in the film we witness his frantic escape through the forest, pursued by 'the desperate ululation' advancing 'like a jagged fringe of menace', and we finally see him stumbling, 'rolling over and over in the warm sand, crouching with arm up to ward off, trying to cry for mercy' (222).

> He staggered to his feet, tensed for more terrors, and looked up at a huge peaked cap. It was a white-topped cap, and above the green shade of the peak was a crown, and an anchor, gold foliage. He saw white drill, epaulettes, a revolver, a row of gilt buttons down the front of a uniform.[31]

Suddenly, the presence of an adult reveals the restricted vision that the novel has imposed upon its reader: 'A naval officer stood on the sand, looking down at Ralph in wary astonishment' (222). Through Ralph's gaze, slowly moving upwards from the officer's white socks, Brook translates the novel's shift. Then, following the adult's glance, we see the island in flames and the staggering figures of the naked boys on the beach. 'One of them came close to the officer and looked up. 'I'm, I'm —'.[32] It is Percival Wemys Madison, one of the little children, whom we have seen before. In the film, he appears in the beginning, among the group that gathers after the sounding of the conch shell, neatly attired in

31 Golding, p. 222.
32 Golding, p. 223.

his school uniform and scrupulously pronouncing his name and address. Later on, we see him again in another assembly, by then almost naked and with long hair, vainly trying to remember 'the incantation of his address':[33] 'Percival Wemys Madison, The Vicarage, Harcourt St. Anthony, Hants, telephone, telephone, tele —'. That incantation, which Brook had momentarily restored through Piggy's voice narrating the happy story of Camberley, is now entirely forgotten as we see little Percival looking up at the officer, silently moving his lips, 'I'm, I'm —', and then turning his gaze around, looking back at an unintelligible world.

Kent Fletcher (Percival)

The officer looks away, and following his gaze the camera shows us Jack's and Roger's painted figures, with flames burning behind them. They look small and thin, very different from the fierce, menacing figures to which Brook's images had gotten us used to seeing. The entire sequence unfolds in silence. Then, the military march that we have heard since the choir's arrival

33 Golding, p. 102.

resumes, while the camera shows us a cutter on the shore with some other men in white uniforms looking towards the beach. Just then, Ralph's back appears in the frame and, as in the novel, a semi-subjective shot frees the viewer's gaze from the adult's point of view, giving it back to Ralph.

> Ralph looked at him (the officer) dumbly. For a moment he had a fleeting picture of the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches. But the island was scorched up like dead wood — Simon was dead — and Jack had… The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. […] with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, 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.[34]

In the film, nobody explains to us what Ralph's thoughts are nor what is he weeping for. Everything is left to the two long close-ups of his dirty face looking straight at us with tears running down his cheeks.

James Aubrey (Ralph)

34 Golding, pp. 224–225.

Then he bows his head and disappears from the screen. We are reminded here of Simon's close-up looking at the slaughter of the pig and then bowing his head, but Ralph's image is devoid of that beautiful, symbolic stillness that had imprinted Simon's face in the viewer's mind. At the end of the adventure, Ralph has completed his initiation path, reaching a full awareness of mankind's inner evil as Simon had done before him. Ralph's knowledge, however, hasn't come to him as a spiritual epiphany, but through his painful material experience. He might weep 'for the end of innocence' and 'the darkness of man's heart', but here he simply appears as an exhausted, traumatized boy who weeps for something simpler and more tangible than that — perhaps 'the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy' (225). A last frame, onto which the closing credits roll, shows the beach and the palm trees enveloped by dark smoke while the military march recovers the sound of the children's voices: *Kyrie Eleison.*

After Peter Brook's film, *Lord of the Flies* has known only one other adaptation, and a bad one, entirely missing the point.[35] Perhaps, for all its cinematic qualities, Golding's writing is not so easily approachable by a real camera, as it is almost too straightforward to reproduce its visual narrative by simplifying it and leaving no place for invention. And maybe, the encounter between Peter Brook's cinematic reality and William Golding's realism was so stunning that it has made it difficult to imagine another way to recreate the essence of the novel for the screen. Brook's film and Golding's novel are indeed so organically complementary that they have become part of a single, extended, and maybe definitive text, where Golding's voice glows beside Brook's cinematic images, both truly 'incandescent and furious'.

35 *Lord of the Flies*, directed by Harry Hook (Columbia Pictures, 1990).

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