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The novels of William Golding: A dominance of theme.

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THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM GOLDING: A DOMINANCE OF THEME

BY

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ABSTRACT

Of English novelists to attain critical appreciation during the last ten years, William Golding has proven the most willing to explain his work to the public. He is an *engagé* in a special sense: he acknowledges using fiction to examine human nature; he would dispel what he calls man's "appalling ignorance of his own nature," by demonstrating that man is strongly prone to evil. This pre-writing intention becomes in each of Golding's novels a strong thematic overture. Theme, consequently, outweighs other novelistic qualities in Mr. Golding's first four stories.

The boys in *Lord of the Flies* degenerate into savagery even while wondering why they do so; and the adult world they would return to is involved in a savage atomic war. The New Men of *The Inheritors* are aware of a disturbing sense of guilt after slaying the older race. Pincher Martin's evil consists of a relentless and unregenerate pursuit of self-gratification; but Sammy Mountjoy of *Free Fall*, admitting his guilt, anxiously relives his past to find the cause of his lost freedom. Man, as Mr. Golding views him, is fallen from innocence and does not know it. This is the primary fact that Golding's thematic fiction would impress on the twentieth-century world.
PREFACE

The fiction of William Golding has aroused the interest and enthusiasm of the English-speaking world. It must be acknowledged, however, that the popularity of the first novel, Lord of the Flies, in North American university circles contributed very much to the attention now given to the next three; and perhaps even more so, to the reception accorded the fifth, The Spire (recently published, and not treated in this thesis). There is no doubt also that Mr. Golding's willingness to speak publicly about his books has added substantially to the interest his work now arouses. This refreshing frankness and the peculiar appeal of the stories themselves largely motivated the choosing of Mr. Golding's novels as the subject of this study.

Mr. Golding has not hesitated to claim that his fiction is dedicated to a specific purpose. Accordingly it would seem logical to measure his finished product against his declared intention. Such, however, is not the purpose of this examination of the four novels. Rather, accepting Mr. Golding's statements as a starting point, I will attempt to demonstrate that in each of the novels, the author's intention emerges as theme; and, consequently, that an evident thematic emphasis is a primary element of Golding's fiction to date. A reader's response to a Golding story is largely determined by his reaction to its thematic implication.

Page references in the text of this thesis are to the first Faber and Faber editions of the four novels.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In both the number and quality of novels written during the period, the nineteen fifties were a remarkable decade in the history of British fiction. During the thirties and forties there had been a tendency among reviewers and academic critics to lament what they regarded as a lack of current fiction worthy of being classed with the works of James, Conrad, Lawrence, Forster, Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. Prior to 1950, Charles Williams remained a prophet without honour in his own country; Henry Green and Lawrence Durrell were muted voices; and George Orwell, even though something of a public conscience of the time, failed to win a critical appreciation to match his popular appeal. Ivy Compton-Burnett, Joyce Cary, and C.P. Snow were only slowly gaining status as the forties ended. In general, only Elizabeth Bowen, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene were widely accepted as major novelists.

During the fifties, however, worthwhile novels seemed to appear almost monthly, until the focus of world attention, where fiction in English was concerned, shifted back to British writers from such long dominant American names as Fitzgerald, Farrell, Hemingway, and Faulkner.

Actually, over eighty more or less major novels were published in England during the decade. They were the work of older writers whose reputations were established before 1950, of novelists who were attaining critical attention during the forties, and of new writers whose first work was published after 1949. More than a dozen now major novelists comple-
ted their first fiction in the fifties, and their novels seem destined both to achieve lasting popularity and to attract favourable critical attention in the future.¹

It is today generally agreed among critics of fiction in both England and America that William Golding, the subject of this study, is outstanding among all novelists who published during the 1950 decade. He has chosen, as we shall see, a difficult specialty; yet he has been called

¹ Only the above very inadequate survey of recent British fiction is possible or practicable here, but even for this mere outline at least some statistical support seems necessary. The following listing of authors and number of novels published during the 1950’s does not pretend to be exhaustive:


This listing obviously omits others whom another writer might have included. For example, the following either have avid coteries of "fans" or have had some critical attention beyond first reviews: Compton MacKenzie, Nancy Mitford, Bruce Marshall, C. S. Lewis, Wyndham Lewis, L. P. Hartley, and J. R. Tolkien.

Two critical studies of recent British fiction have lately been published in America: Postwar British Fiction by James Gindin, and A Reader’s Guide to the Contemporary British Novel by Frederick R. Karl (see the bibliography for full references). Mr. Gindin treats at some length the novels of Roger Longrigg, Hugh Thomas and Honor Tracy. Mr. Karl’s final chapter considers briefly the fiction of Brian Glanville, Rosamunde Lehmann, Olivia Manning, Francis King, Mervyn Jones, Edmund Ward, Frank Tuohy, Denton Welsh Anthony West, Christopher Isherwood, Emyr Humphries, and V. S. Pritchett.
"Novelist of the Fifties,"² and "the most interesting imaginative novelist to have appeared in England during the last decade and a half."³ A few years ago a writer in a British literary review, in an issue devoted to contemporary English fiction, concluded an article on Mr. Golding as follows:

Despite his self-imposed limitations, he remains the most powerful writer, the most original, the most profoundly imaginative, to have turned his hand to fiction in England since the war.⁴

Many articles offering criticism, in a pejorative sense, of individual Golding novels end by praising his overall product. Typical is the final statement of a long essay by Professor Frank Kermode, an English critic whose study is one of the most comprehensive yet done on Golding:

For all that I have said against Free Fall, it is this kind of book, like the others a work of genius by a writer from whom we can hope for much more, since he is in superbly full possession of his great powers.⁵

Earlier in the same essay Mr. Kermode had said of Golding, "... the opinion that he is the most important practising novelist in English has,


⁵ "The Novels of William Golding," The International Literary Annual, 3 (1961), p. 29. This essay was collected by Mr. Kermode in his Puzzles and Epiphanies (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 198-213. Our references hereafter to this essay will be to the L.A. version, and will use its pagination.
over a period of five or six years, become almost commonplace.\textsuperscript{16}

The present study will examine Mr. Golding's first four novels. After the now much discussed \textit{Lord of the Flies} (1954), he published \textit{The Inheritors} in 1955, \textit{Pincher Martin} in 1956, and \textit{Free Fall} in 1959.\textsuperscript{7} As each novel appeared it received a mixed reception from reviewers and critics: the general praise accorded Mr. Golding as an artist of fiction was often tempered by accusations of gratuitous difficulties.\textsuperscript{8} Each of the novels, however, is being more appreciated year by year, as Mr. Kermode observes in the L.L.A. essay:

\begin{quote}
. . . Golding's books do not (if only because each is extremely original in construction) yield themselves at one reading; \textit{The Inheritors} . . . and \textit{Pincher Martin} have been better understood with the passing of time, and the same will be true of \textit{Free Fall}.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

The main burden of this thesis will be to show that theme outweighs other novelistic factors in Mr. Golding's fiction. It will be indicated that the four novels maintain a special viewpoint on the human condition:

\begin{quote}
7 For the record we should note that before 1954 Mr. Golding wrote but did not publish three other novels (see The New York Times Book Review, June 29, 1962, p. 4). Mr. Kermode comments: "There was a time, according to the author himself, when he wrote novels intended to meet the requirements of the public, as far as he could guess them; but these novels failed, were not even published." (Ibid. p. 13).
8 Mr. Golding's fifth novel, \textit{The Spire}, has been published (on April 10, 1964) since the above was written. It is receiving almost universal praise in popular and academic reviews in England and America; but, as in the case of the earlier books, it draws from many critics complaints of obscurities of intent and meaning.
\end{quote}
that Mr. Golding is singularly preoccupied with the nature of man. In
the process it will appear that a Golding plot is generally somewhat un-
usual, but it is always substantial and well-constructed; that his use of
symbolism is pervasive, intricate, and challenging, but it is not annoy-
ingly obscure or too profuse. But plot and symbolism, important as they
are in a Golding novel, are always secondary to his theme.

Professor Kermode's essay suggests a critical purpose which we
might hopefully adopt for our study of Mr. Golding's four novels:

The best course for sympathetic critics is to be a
shade more explicit, to do what the novelist himself
perhaps cannot do without injury to the books, which
grew according to imaginative laws, and cannot be ad-
justed to the extragent needs of readers. If critics
have any reason for existence, this is it: to give assur-
ance of value, and to provide, somehow—perhaps any-
how—the means by which readers may be put in poses-
sion of the valuable book. ¹⁰

This examination of the Golding stories must try, as Kermode says, "to be
a shade more explicit"; must try to deduce what Golding implies in the
premises that his novels provide, and within the limits set by our thematic
intention. The consistent attitude towards human nature that we detect in
Mr. Golding's fiction, we submit as evidence that there is implicit in the
four stories a consequent unity of theme; and that, as a result, in each
of them theme plays a vital and dominant role.

William Golding's constant focus on humanity's essential nature
has itself become a theme of the reviews and critical articles so far
written about his work. He is himself, also, much more explicit about

what he is trying to do via fiction than are most writers of our time. We will let the critics speak first, then turn to the novelist himself.

Ian Gregor, in a perceptive review of the fourth novel, Free Fall, wrote as follows:

Mr. Golding has created the standards by which he is to be judged. To say this is to stress the uniqueness of both the nature and the quality of his work. Though his novels have differed widely in their scope and presentation, their theme has been a shared one—nothing more and nothing less than the nature of man. 11

In another study of Free Fall, teamed with Mark Kinkead-Weekes, Mr. Gregor traces Golding's view of man's nature as it is treated in each novel:

In Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors the main emphasis is on the presence of evil as concomitant with the nature of man, in other words, on a state of being; with Pincher Martin . . . the emphasis shifts to the consequences of such a state. . . .

It is under these three different lenses that Mr. Golding has examined the nature of man. Lord of the Flies gives a grim endorsement to the child as "father to the man"; The Inheritors sees man in relation to the life that awaits him. What has been carefully excluded is the central relationship of Man in relation to Man. It is precisely to this subject that Mr. Golding addresses himself in Free Fall. 12

Millar MacLure and others are somewhat more specific about Golding's main thematic intention; MacLure writes, "William Golding is a Christian moralist who assumes that evil is inherent in man's nature..." 13


12 "The Strange Case of Mr. Golding and His Critics," The Twentieth Century, CLXVII (February, 1960) pp. 116-117.

Frank MacShane notes that Golding "has concerned himself . . .
with philosophical questions about the nature of man and his relationship to his surroundings." During 1963 several articles in America and The Commonweal controverted Golding's intent as to man's nature in Lord of the Flies. In a captious and sometimes caustic review article on Free Fall, Martin Green strove to denigrate Mr. Golding's merits as a writer; however, he included the "nature of man" theme in a summary of what he noted to be the claims made by Golding's admirers:

The achievement claimed for him is that he is the most original and profound of the postwar novelists in Britain, the one with something new to say . . . The exact nature of this achievement is indicated by the vocabulary of his admirers; he is said to write fables, to make brilliant use of symbolism, to deploy the findings of modern thought about man-in-society, to have a vision about the evil inherent in human nature.

Mr. Green's index of Golding's reputed merits, the Gregor-Kinkead-Weekes statement, and that of Mr. MacLure, all assume Golding's theme to be the evil of human nature; they imply that the novelist sees man as basically evil. The assumption is most relevant to the present study. Only an examination of the four novels will put us in a position to accept or to reject their judgments.

Of more importance than the opinions of his critics are Mr. Golding's


own statements. We have his word for it that he writes with a specific purpose; that he has definite views on human life, and on the qualities that make man do what he does, and be what he is. A year after the publication of Pincher Martin, and presumably while he was working on Free Fall, he made some significant statements in a symposium on "The Writer in His Age". Speaking of current affairs and the writer, he said:

The distinction between them and the general human background is vague; felt by the novelist rather than defined. But what is apparent to him—dare one say "to him rather than to most"?—is that current affairs are only expressions of the basic human condition where his true business lies. If he has a serious, an Aeschylean, preoccupation with the human tragedy, that is only to say that he is committed to looking for the root of the disease instead of describing the symptoms.

About recent developments in the fields of psychology, biology, and astronomy, Golding wrote in the same symposium:

To be aware of discoveries need not mean that we over-rate their importance—need not mean that we should show our flesh under the electron microscope when our real job is to show it sub specie aeternitatis.

Later he asks whether "the basic nature of man has changed in half a century?" His reply is an oblique but emphatic negative: "Surely the hydrogen bomb is only an efficient way of wiping out the other tribe—a pastime we've always been prone to?".

17. The London Magazine, IV (May, 1957), pp. 45-46. These statements are given in context in Appendix I.

18. In 1961 Golding echoed this idea in a book review: ". . . we can see the sack of Babylon and the blasting of Hiroshima as one and the same thing, a disease endemic but not incurable." ("Before the Beginning," The Spectator, 6935 (May 26, 1961), p. 763.
There follows the most important of Golding's statements on the underlying purpose of his fiction:

How serious is a writer? I am very serious. I believe that man suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own nature. I produce my own view, in the belief that it may be something like the truth. I am fully engaged in the human dilemma but see it as far more fundamental than a complex of taxes and astronomy.

It is evident, then that William Golding writes with a specific purpose; that he uses fiction as a mirror in which humanity can look at itself; that each of his novels is meant to show man what he is, what is endemic to his nature. It is essential at this point to keep in mind that Golding believes that man "suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own nature," and that he conceives each of his fictional portraits of Man as an aspect of the truth about human nature.

There are some facets of Mr. Golding's work, however, which must first be noted before examining the novels individually. These, mainly, are questions of what Golding does and does not do in fiction, and of the relationship between his pre-writing concept and the kind of story he achieves.

It has not been Golding's way, for example, to experiment with the form of the novel, to try to initiate new techniques as did James Joyce and Virginia Woolf earlier in the century. He uses a variety of techniques, but they are the now traditional ones, including the stream-of-consciousness mode on occasion. In this he is one with most of his contemporaries, with
Greene, Snow, or Wilson; or with almost any of the novelists mentioned earlier. Like theirs, his concern is with mankind in the modern world, not with the aesthetics or technicalities of modern fictional art.

Nor is it Mr. Golding's mood to indulge via fiction in satirical social protest, as have those writers who now deplore the too facile label, "Angry Young Men." Speaking of Lord of the Flies, Steven Marcus wrote that

Golding's notion of society, in this novel and in his others, is rudimentary, restricted, and strangely abstract. In Golding's novels, society as we know it is largely an idea, a confused memory recollected in the midst of catastrophe; while the pre-social and the post-social have become the paramount actualities.  

With Golding, society is secondary to the nature of man, and the defects of the former are the inevitable consequence of defects in the latter.

Again, we have his own word for it: speaking of Lord of the Flies, he said,

The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable.

Indeed, if Golding's fiction differs in any particular way from that of Greene and the others, it is in that, while creating settings and plot situations for his characters, his relentless concern with elemental human


20. Quoted from a publicity questionnaire from the American publishers of Lord of the Flies by E. L. Epstein in his "Notes on Lord of the Flies," in the Capricorn paperback edition of the novel, p. 189. It has not proven possible to obtain a copy of the questionnaire.
nature makes him consistently avoid depicting the circumstances of modern social, economic, or political activity. Whereas Greene and others locate their people within a typical social environment, and beset them with the problems of life endemic to that milieu, Golding (as we must see later in some detail) regularly isolates his characters in an environment and situation totally removed from modern urban or suburban society.

This isolation of his protagonists is an element common to all of Golding’s novels to date; consequently, his settings are unique, even eccentric, and they usually frame an equally particular plot situation. In one novel, _The Inheritors_, Golding all but dispenses with human society altogether: his main characters are pre-men, Neanderthal types. Their extinction as a species by the first fully human creatures is obviously intended as an important comment on the nature of the latter. In the other three stories, he contrives to locate his people well outside the circumstances of their former, ordinary lives; he places them in a sharply defined condition of isolation, unencumbered by trappings of civilized society. In each case he uses war to make the isolated situations realistic and credible.

In _Lord of the Flies_ a group of school-boy evacuees from a future atomic war find themselves crash-landed on a remote coral island, without adults. In _Pincher Martin_ the main character is a naval officer drowning in mid-Atlantic; and the central figure in _Free Fall_ for most of the book reviews his past life from the enforced seclusion of a prisoner of
war camp. The actions and reactions of the marooned boys, and the attitudes and characters of the adults, are the premises wherefrom Golding invites his readers to deduce his specific view of man.

There are, it is true, some lengthy scenes in Pincher Martin and Free Fall which depict the former urban environment of the main characters. These, however, are passages of "flashback" or recall; Free Fall, in particular, is almost a book-length monologue, shifting only occasionally from flashback to the prison camp "present". But what we see of society and its routines and people, we see only as Pincher and Sammy Mountjoy recall it, not objectively, nor for its own sake. The viewpoint is consistently their limited, subjective one. They reveal themselves through their flashes of memory. Only their roles and characters remain in focus for the reader. Golding, in other words, keeps his emphasis on theme, on the nature of man; and is not drawn aside to depict either the beauties or the flaws of human institutions.

Enough has now been said to indicate that there is a forthright boldness and originality in what Mr. Golding believes may be attempted in the modern novel. It should be noted that each story has a particular facet of interest in its original concept; each has a special point of departure. In Lord of the Flies it is the reversing of the Victorian values of the once popular book for boys, The Coral Island, by R. J. Ballantyne. In The Inheritors it is the use of man's immediate predecessors in the evolutionary scale, as they were depicted by H. G. Wells, to make a point about man.
himself. In Pincher Martin there is a forthright use of the old notion that all one's past life passes in mental review at the moment of death by drowning. Free Fall, is flashback stretched to booklength, but the deliberate recall has a definite purpose, which is the main point of the story.

The totally disparate settings and equally varying plots of Golding's stories are such daring inventions as to be rare in fiction of quality. Professor Kermode has noted that there are in Golding's work, preoccupations one would not expect in a highbrow modern novelist -- that Ballantyne was wrong about the behaviour of English boys on a desert island, or H. G. Wells about the virtue of Neanderthal man are not points many would care to dispute, but few would find in them points of departure for passionate and involved fiction.\(^1\)

These qualities of daring and rarity are verified in spite of the relationship of Lord of the Flies to The Coral Island, and its similarities to Robinson Crusoe and to Richard Hughes A High Wind in Jamaica. They are valid despite the points in common between Pincher Martin and the 1916 Pincher Martin, O. D., by H. P. Dorling ("Taffrail"), or the American short story, "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge". The Wellsian point of take off for The Inheritors does not detract from that astonishing novel, tour de force though it may be; nor is Free Fall less of an accomplishment in its use of flashback, a well-worn device indeed.

The task of interpreting a Golding novel has been to some extent simplified by the novelist's own statements. It is still possible, though,

that the novel may yield other and more meanings than those he says he intended. Mr. Kermode writes on this point that

Golding is unlike many modern writers in his willingness to state the 'programme' of his book (and also in denying the reader much liberty of interpretation); but he does not pretend that what seems to him simple must be so explicitly and directly set down that the reader will not have to work. In short, his simplicity is a quality best understood as an intellectual economy. His theme takes the simplest available way to full embodiment. But embodiment is not explanation; and all that can be guaranteed the reader is that there is no unnecessary difficulty, nothing to make the business of explaining and understanding more difficult than, in the nature of the case, it has to be.

... he begins each new book as if it were his first, as if the germination of the new theme entailed the creation of its own incomparable form. Then, with Lord of the Flies, he saw that it was himself he had to satisfy; he planned it in very great detail, and wrote it as if tracing over words already on the page. How, in pleasing his own isolated taste, and doing it in these essentially unmodish and rather private ways, has he come to so many to represent the best in modern writing? 22

Mr. Golding's scrupulous care for technical precision and also for simplicity in his writing results in an added difficulty (and an additional pleasure—as many critics note) for the reader, in that his spare and precise prose attracts in itself. He rejects, though, any attempt to find in his work meanings he hoped to exclude or which were not intended by him. He denounces D.H. Lawrence's dictum, "Never trust the teller, trust the tale." Nonsense, he says, and adds,

But of course the man who tells the tale, if he has a tale worth telling, will know exactly what he is about; and this business of the artist as a sort of starry-eyed, inspired creature, dancing along with his feet above the surface of the earth, not knowing what kind of prints he is leaving behind him, well, it's nothing like the truth. 23

To quote Mr. Golding here is not to agree wholeheartedly with his statement, which admittedly is somewhat extreme. The question of interpretation is relevant now only because to demonstrate the importance of theme in the novels under study, it will often be necessary to take Golding at his word. This faith in the author, though, definitely does not mean that all other interpretations are to be regarded as invalid or superfluous.

A rather important aspect of Mr. Golding's fiction must now be discussed. Steven Marcus, speaking of the modern British novel, comments on its brevity and on its "almost exclusive direction of skill towards the dramatic rendering of theme through form. In the writing of William Golding, ... this development is strikingly represented." 24 On examining Mr. Golding's work, it is very evident that it is a notable example of "the dramatic rendering of theme through form." We must, therefore, face the problem of the "form" of a Golding novel. The following exchange between novelist John Wain and Professor Kermode is a useful and apposite introduction to the problem, and, I believe, a sufficient justification for

23 In an interview with Frank Kermode broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme, The "unscripted discussion" was printed as "The Meaning of It All," in Books and Bookmen (October, 1959), pp. 9-10. Future references to this interview will use only the published title, "The Meaning of It All." See Appendix II for the complete text.

using the term "problem" in discussing the kind of novel Golding writes.

WAIN: Not all my novels come equally close to being more or less readable and successful, and in one particular case, which is a very bad book, I did impose a certain interpretation upon the events I was going to write about before I wrote about it [sic], and my perception of the way characters work and exist, and the way things really work out, was tied from the beginning to an intellectual concept.

KERMODE: What about the odd exception, or apparent exception, as in William Golding, for example, where a series of events clearly suggests a myth, and a myth suggests a series of events which don't in their extent go very much beyond the scope of that myth--at least that would seem to be the way he works?

WAIN: William Golding, a writer I admire enormously, is not a novelist as far as I can see. He is an allegorist. He has certain perceptions about the human condition which he, I should imagine at a guess, goes ahead and creates an allegory to represent.

KERMODE: But you were saying how loose the novel, and how undefined a thing it is; is there no reason why this kind shouldn't be included presumably as well as the kind you've been describing?

WAIN: You go a long way before you reach a frontier in the novel, but you do finally reach one; and at the point where you ultimately come up against a frontier, Mr. Golding's work is still beyond it, I think.25

Mr. Golding himself prefers the term "myth" for his work.

Mr. Kermode opened his BBC interview with Golding by referring to a Kenyon Review article in which John Peter, 26...

... introduces a distinction between fable and fiction and


puts you very much on the fable side, arguing, for example, that in Lord of the Flies you incline occasion-ally not to give a full body presentation of people living and behaving, so much as an illustration of a particular theme—would you accept this as a fair comment on your work?

Golding’s reply rambles somewhat, but he makes his point clear:

Well, what I would regard as a tremendous compliment to myself would be if someone would substitute the word "myth" for "fable" because I think a myth is a much profounder and more significant thing than a fable. I do feel fable as being an invented thing on the surface whereas myth is something which comes out from the roots of things in the ancient sense of being the key to existence, the whole meaning of life, and experience as a whole. 27

Mr. Golding, of course, sidesteps the distinction between fiction and fable made by Mr. Peter and brought up by Kermode. The problem, then, is still whether to regard a Golding novel as an allegory, a fable, or even as a parable. Golding merely introduces a new term, and a new question; that is, the role of myth in his work, whatever its form. To revert to Mr. Marcus’ wording, Golding definitely does render theme through form. He does with conspicuous success what Mr. Wain apparently was not able to do in his "very bad book"; he does "impose a certain interpretation on the events" he is going to write about; they are pre-conceived to carry a particular theme. To use Mr. Wain’s words again, Golding’s preconception of "the way characters work and exist" is always "tied from the beginning to an intellectual concept." The direction of that concept is indicated by what Golding

said about his preconception; namely, that man "suffers from an
appalling ignorance of his own nature." Golding's teachings to
counteract that ignorance are, I believe, embodied in the four novels
as themes. These themes, Golding's preconceived "intellectual
concepts" dictated not only the forms of the novels, but the characters,
settings, and events as well; in short, the total "myth" of each.

The variety of terms used for Golding's novels, and the
quantity of comment that has already been offered by critics can easily
lead to an exaggerated view, to the creation of a problem where there
should be none. Each of the terms is applicable in its own way,
and each within its own limits delineates an aspect of Golding's work.
These terms are more indicative of the approach of the critic than
that of the writer; they should not, therefore, merely because they
are partially applicable, be used as norms with which to discern
muddled intention or confused execution on the part of the author. Novel-
ists do not set out merely to submerge the form of allegory or fable in
a planned story, deliberately disguising it under a camouflage of modern
language and the author's selection of modern problems and tensions. When
critics find these resemblances post factum, it does not mean that the writer
permitted or intended, or even foresaw them; and he should not be
judged as if he did. Mr. Golding's introduction of the word "myth" to
avoid accepting John Peter's "fable" is an understandable preference for
a term that does not force him into the position of defending his work.
in a context that he did not intend.

It is quite possible, therefore, to show that William Golding's novels have some of the qualities of both fable and allegory; and even V.S. Pritchett's use of "parable" is justifiable in a wide, metaphorical sense. John Peter defined fables as,

those narratives which leave the impression that their purpose was anterior, some initial thesis or contention they are apparently concerned to embody and express in concrete terms. Fables always give the impression that they were preceded by the conclusion which it is their function to draw, though of course it is doubtful whether any author foresaw his conclusions as fully as this...28

Golding himself, as we have seen, has made it abundantly clear that his "purpose was anterior"; he need not now be quoted again. His novels may, therefore, be called fables to that extent; but to stop with this term is to do Golding much less than justice. John Wain's statement that 'Golding is not a novelist is true only in the very narrow sense that the context of the conversation with Kermode gave it.

A writer anxious to convey an idea or support a thesis by the medium of an invented story may still be a novelist even though his work has qualities in common with fable and allegory; unless, of course, his departures from accepted norms are sufficiently extreme to exclude him on the grounds of classification and logic, not to say


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common sense. The idea, the anterior purpose, imposes on him the specific novelistic requirements he will use— the particular characters, setting, time, and plot circumstances that he finds will best carry out this purpose; all of which, in turn, as handled by him, may or may not result in a work with some of the qualities of fable or allegory. Their presence may well be, and in Golding definitely is, an added dimension of artistry, and an additional source of pleasure for the perceptive reader; but he need not on discerning them decide that the work in hand is not a novel, much less that it is not fiction. A "fable" such as Lord of the Flies is successful for what it contains beyond its fabulous basis or frame; that is, as fiction, as a novel. If Orwell's 1984 is more strictly fable, and Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises is more evidently fiction, Lord of the Flies comes somewhere in between them. The terms are not mutually exclusive, and the very evident success of Golding's stories as novels is ample proof of this fact. The general critical approval of Mr. Golding's work is not only, and not merely, evidence of his superior ability with words, and a tribute to that ability, but it also indicates the general acceptance of his stories as "...a more or less faithful reflection of the complexities, and often of the irrelevancies, of life as it is actually experienced," to quote Mr. Peter's delineation of what makes fiction. 29

A novelist in each work must create a world of his own and in so doing must exclude much of what exists in reality. What he retains, though, as suiting his purpose, must conform to "life as it is actually experienced."

29 Op. cit., p. 577. The short quotations in the following paragraph are from the same source, pp. 577-578.
When Mr. Mr. Peter says that... Fables, starting from a skeletal abstract, must flesh out that abstract with the appearances of 'real life' in order to render it interesting and cogent," he states what Mr. Golding does surprisingly well, surprising, in view of his eccentric settings and unusual characters. His work avoids what Peter points out as the particular weaknesses of both fiction and fable: it is not "...so richly faithful to the complexity of human experience as to lose all its shape and organization"— the chief weakness of such fiction as William Gaddis' *The Recognitions* and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Nor is it "bare and diagrammatic, insufficiently clothed in its garment of actuality" and "extra-aesthetic and narrow" in its appeal -- the fault of such fable-fiction as Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

It may, therefore, be concluded that Mr. Golding's novels do partake of the quality of fable, but not to a debilitating extent. The term is too narrow, too restrictive to convey the full complexity of a Golding story; it applies only to certain aspects of his novels, the preconception which set the story in motion and shaped its events and their outcome.

Fable is also applicable to a Golding story in that the total picture, the world he invents for each story, is deliberately narrowed to a minimum necessary for his purpose. *Lord of the Flies*, for example, is drastically limited in its setting, the exotic coral island; it is equally limited in its characters, young boys only (excluding the officer at the end); and it is purposefully limited in its handling of the ancient conflict of good and evil.
in man; its approach is to consider the conflict radically, as most fundamental to human nature. Not that the actions of the boys appear to be symbolic only; Golding, of course, in his plots supplies adequate motives for the doings of the boys, but his ultimate concern is to reveal the root inspiration of the actions, the basics of human nature which produce both motives and actions.

There are similar limitations in each of Golding's four novels, as we shall see later. In each case the limited reality which is retained is most cleverly exploited to evince more than is actually included. We forget, for instance, in the suspense and terror of "the cry of the hunters" at the end of Lord of the Flies that we are following the actions of a group of mere boys; and we unconsciously transfer our reactions to this horror to the adult world. Our instinctive conclusion is, "This is man, untrained by society and convention." This intuitive transfer is what is expected and intended in fable and allegory. Golding achieves in fiction this same quality of symbolic implication, so Mr. Peter and Mr. Wain call him 'fabulist and allegorist.'

Mr. Golding's stories also partake of the nature of fable and allegory in another way: his indifference to particularization of time and place. The future of Lord of the Flies is as indefinite as the past of The Inheritors, and there is no historical realism in establishing the wartime dates and places for the misfortunes of Pincher Martin and Samuel Mountjoy. As a result there does not arise from Golding's fiction that sense of immediacy
of action that follows from meeting recognizable places and familiar events. A case might possibly also be made to the effect that Golding's characters are not identified or individualized enough with a full, ordinary name. Either only one name is used, or, as in the latter two novels, the name chosen has symbolic implications. In either case one suspects a function beyond mere identification of persons.

Golding himself has plainly stated that _Lord of the Flies_ is a symbolic novel: "The whole book is symbolic in nature except the rescue at the end where adult life appears...enmeshed in the same evil as the symbolic life of the children on the island." The symbolic quality of the other three novels is equally as evident as that of the first.

Mr. Golding's use of symbolism, however, is not such that his novels may be labelled allegories when fable proves inadequate. His symbols are too pervasive, too well woven into the fabric of the story, too unobtrusive and casual (though obviously well thought out) to enable a reader or even a critic to establish an easy one-to-one relationship between them and their intended meaning. It is not enough to make a story an allegory to know that as a whole or in individual details it may be equated with meanings outside itself. Moreover, Golding's four novels can evoke a response of understanding and pleasure from a reader who neither detects nor looks for the symbols, from the average reader who responds to his own instincts as to a story's truth as fiction.

30 See footnote 29, page 11 of this chapter.
Golding's novels do satisfy the two main requirements of allegory and fable at their best; that is, they arouse an interest in the setting, events, and characters for themselves over and above symbolic or didactic implications, and they provoke thought and evaluation of the ideas they embody. The lack of easily established symbolic meaning is evidence of the distance Golding has moved away from allegory and fable into the realm of fiction. A Golding novel is an unusual and even fascinating story independently of any theme or preconceived idea embedded in it. What conclusions one may draw from it as applicable to human life are no more intrusively evident as one reads than similar deductions are apparent in any novel. Moreover, it must be emphasized that Golding's work is not insistently didactic as was Ballantyne's Coral Island, for example--the quality that more than any other possible in fiction leaves so bad a taste in the mouth of a modern critic that it embitters the flavour of what he has to say in evaluation. 31

Golding's dismissal of "fable" as an "invented thing on the surface" and his preference for "myth" as a term for his work is indicative of the seriousness of intention which directs his writing. That intention, as we have said, emerges in his novels as theme. The forms of his stories,

31 F. R. Karl's chapter on Golding (op. cit.) is the only evaluation which accuses him openly of intrusive didacticism, and he assumes rather than substantiates the charge. See Karl's book, pp. 259-260. For a more objective study see Margaret Walters, "Two Fabulists: Golding and Camus," Melbourne Critical Review, IV (1961), pp. 22-23.
their similarities to fable and allegory, flow naturally from his preoccu-
pation with an idea. What the idea is in the case of each novel we must
now investigate; but it must be noted that any future use in this study of
the terms fable and allegory is subject to the limitations established in
this introduction; neither term is to be taken as a definitive classification
co-extensive with a particular novel.

Mr. Golding's comment on myth as "...something which comes out
from the roots of things in the ancient sense of being the key to existence,
the whole meaning of life..." parallels and supports his stated intention to
produce his own view of man's nature to counteract an ignorance he felt to
be widespread. To analyse the nature of man is certainly getting to the
"roots of things"; and to do it in fiction is certainly something like creating
a modern mythology, one applicable to our age because drawn from its pro-
blems and tensions and expressed in its terms. Atomic warfare as the
ominous background of Lord of the Flies, and man's other inhumanities to
man in other wars as a frame for Pincher Martin and Free Fall; and, yes;
the instinctive war to the death between "the people" and the "inheritors",
definitely are appropriate ingredients for a present-day mythology. Gold-
ing's stories comprise a contemporary mythos in that, rather than only
making a point or presenting an idea--the purpose more expressly of fable
and allegory--they examine man himself as he essentially is, seeking to
base on his fundamental nature an explanation of why he acts as he does.

Mr. Golding, then, did not consciously write either fables or
allegories, nor did he try to conceal in fiction what he conceived as fable or allegory—had he done so, "the cracks would show". But his work leans towards these modes because his main intention was to convey a personal conviction: "I produce my own view, in the belief that it may be something like the truth." Theme, therefore, is a major element of a novel by Golding; and just as he renders it via fiction which thereby has fabulistic or allegorical leanings, so also do these leanings in turn render his stress on theme more evident.
CHAPTER II

LORD OF THE FLIES: MANKIND'S ESSENTIAL ILLNESS

William Golding's first story was selected by E.M. Forster as the "Outstanding Novel of the Year" for 1954. It has since beguiled the majority of its reviewers and critics into an unusually harmonious chorus of praise. *Lord of the Flies* has aroused a fever of interest which even yet, almost a full decade later, has not abated. In fact its current popularity in university circles in North America seems a guarantee that it will be noticed in scholarly journals for an indefinite future period.¹

The pertinent question now, of course, is why this international excitement, why this intense and sustained interest? To answer this question adequately would be to complete one phase of our present task; for, I believe, the very aspects of *Lord of the Flies* which provoked and continue to feed that interest are those which are crucial to this study.

It is not only that Mr. Golding shows an altogether consummate control of the novel form--his best contemporaries rival him in this mastery without arousing a similar intensity of public and critical interest. Nor is it merely his effective challenging of the smug didacticism and Victorian chauvinism of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, a perennially popular book

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for boys, first published in 1858. The lingering popularity of this story is not a sufficient explanation for the attention now accorded *Lord of the Flies*, not even in England, and certainly not in America. Golding's novel goes so much beyond its *Coral Island* point of departure that it evidently is much more than a satirical reversal of Ballantyne's idealization. That "more" is primarily the Golding view of the Ballantyne situation, his belief that boys left alone on an island would not behave "...like God-fearing English gentlemen." What Golding did on Ballantyne's island is his version of what he believed would actually happen; what he did to Ballantyne's idyl resulted from his conviction that "...man suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own nature"; he felt a strong need "...to produce my own view, in the belief that it may be something like the truth." This fundamental dichotomy of viewpoints, Golding's and Ballantyne's, is the only aspect of the relationship between the two books that needs emphasis here.

The *Coral Island* is patently didactic. It was written to edify; its moralizing is sugar-coated as an adventure story. It was meant to inculcate the moral and (even more so) the patriotic virtues to which the "Establishment" of the 1850's paid voluble lip-service: Be brave, obedient, and honourable; read the Bible and pray daily: above all, be British. "Be good Christians," it seemed to say, "but in the British way." Strongly implied


3 Quoted by Kermode, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
is the idea that the recommended conduct would ensure easy surmounting of all dangers and misadventures.

Accordingly, the boys Ballantyne contrived to place on a Pacific island were implausibly noble, fearless, efficient lads to whom a shipwreck and abandonment were a thrilling challenge. Their island life was idyllic; Ralph and Peterkin obeyed the energetic and manly Jack: the three took over the island as expeditiously as any empire-builder ever did in real life. As Mr. Kermode states it, they were "...cleanly (cold baths recommended) and godly-regenerate, empire building boys, who know by instinct how to turn a paradise into a British protectorate." 4

The island was their paradise. When happy-go-lucky Peterkin learns that they can get both food and drink from coconuts, his conduct emphasizes the idyllic possibilities of the island:

"Meat and drink from the same tree!" cried Peterkin; "washing in the sea, lodging on the ground,--and all for nothing! My dear boys, we're set up for life; it must be the ancient Paradise,--hurrah!" and Peterkin tossed his straw hat in the air, and ran along the beach hallooing like a madman with delight. (p. 42)

The "Be British" note persists, though, in spite of any boyish behaviour; to call each other a Briton was the ultimate in compliments: "I say, Jack, you're a Briton--the best fellow I ever met in my life." (p. 41) Fortunately, though, this chauvinism is less evident as the story progresses.

As long as the boys remain on their coral island, however, the situation

4 Op. cit., p. 17. See Ballantyne, pp. 122-123, for the cold baths recommendation, and a typical didactic digression.
seems a kind of Victorian British boys' utopia, over-idealized and overtly sentimental.

When danger and evil threatened this dreamy existence, it came not from anything within the boys themselves, not from human nature. Or so, at least, would Ballantyne have us see it, casually ignoring the fact that cannibals, pagan and barbaric though they were, and even cruel, degenerate pirates, were also humans. Cannibals, of course, could hardly be expected to know better, they were unbaptized; and pirates who had long ago given up their Christian faith were hardly humans at all. Ballantyne revealed these preconceptions by eventually having the vicious pirates killed off by the native islanders, and the latter suddenly converted to Christianity.

During a century The Coral Island gradually became enshrined in the hearts and attitudes of Englishmen as a kind of literary idol for juveniles. Mr. Golding read it in his youth as a matter of course. His rewriting of the coral island myth is deliberately iconoclastic. His adult insights led him to believe that Ballantyne's story was fundamentally false in its concept of the nature of man and its view of what would happen if its basic situation were realized in real life. Among other things, his personal experiences in World War II and his observations of human conduct as the years of the cold war passed on into the horrifying possibilities of the nuclear age led him to reject the Coral Island picture as flagrantly

5 See Golding's statements in Douglas M. Davis, "A Conversation With Golding" (answer to question three), The New Republic (May 4, 1963), p. 28; and Time (June 22, 1962), p. 41, in which he is quoted as
unrealistic. Mr. Kermode explains the genesis of Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors by saying that Golding,

...thinks of the books of his childhood--The Coral Island and Wells' s Outline of History--and observes that they are wrong about the world, because they thought cannibals more wicked than white men and Neanderthal man less worthy than his conqueror. These books have, in his own figure, rotted to compost in his mind; and in that compost the new myth put down roots. When it grows it explains the ancient situation to which our anxieties recall us: loss of innocence, the guilt and ignominy of consciousness, the need for pardon.  

Lord of the Flies is realistically anti-utopian. It does to The Coral Island what Nathanael West' s A Cool Million did to the American Horatio Alger stories, but without West' s disillusionment and often bitter satire. His preoccupation is with "the loss of innocence, the guilt and ignominy of consciousness, the need for pardon," the human condition, as he sees it, of modern man. Ballantyne' s boys had been, as Kermode remarks in a moment of facetiousness, "...sent out from Arnoldian schools certified free of Original Sin."

In trying to rectify what he saw as Ballantyne' s misconceptions, Golding did not set out to write another adventure story for boys, nor to devise a realistic picture for adults. Coral Island, as we have already said, was but a point of departure for Lord of the Flies. Its anti-utopian saying, "Before the war most Europeans believed that man could be perfected by perfecting his society. We all saw a hell of a lot in the war that can't be accounted for except on the basis of original evil."


7 Ibid., p. 17.
reversal of many of the aspects of Island is a necessary concomitant of what Golding set out to do, but no more than that. The details borrowed from Island are only those needed to identify the relationship between the two books. Lord of the Flies has no vein of British nationalism. Indeed, at the story's close, the unconsciously ironic reference by the befuddled Navy officer to "British boys," apt as it is in its context, may well be a parting jibe at Ballantyne's propaganda.

For Ballantyne's shipwreck Golding substitutes a modern instance to isolate his boys in the Pacific. A plane evacuating English children during an atomic war is attacked, and an unspecified number of boys survive; no adults are left alive. Three of the survivors are obviously meant as counterparts of Jack, Ralph, and Peterkin of Coral Island; for Golding retains the first two names, and Peterkin becomes Simon. "Simon, called Peter" Golding himself states, but no identifiable further use is made of the allusion, unless it be the parallel between Saint Peter's martyrdom trying to bring the Christian truth to Rome, and Simon's "martyrdom" trying to tell his frenzied companions the truth about the beast on the mountain and the more urgent truth about themselves. At any rate, the name change appropriately follows on the very different character of the "new Peterkin."

Golding's island landscape is deliberately similar to that described by Ballantyne (as Kermode aptly states, it is the "moral landscape" that is altered). Life on Golding's island has the same paradisal possibilities

8 "The Meaning of It All," p. 10.

as depicted by Ballantyne for his fruit easily obtained on trees and
shrubs, wild pigs to be killed for meat, a pleasant lagoon for swimming,
the sun-and-glass method of making fire. These points of similarity,
however, do not really matter here. The details that Golding deliberately
excluded are more significant by their omission than those he adapted and
included. The changes he introduced, moreover, have an even greater
potential for thematic meaning.

For Golding's purpose the trappings of the adventure story were
entirely superfluous. Lord of the Flies has no penguins mislocated in the
Pacific, no pirates, no cannibals, no missionary, no captive Samoan maid
to be saved from conversion into a "long pig" (p. 309). Kermode writes,

If you dropped these boys into an Earthly Paradise "they would
not behave like God-fearing English gentlemen" but "as like as
not...find savages who were kindly and uncomplicated.... The
devil would rise out of the intellectual complications of the three
white men." Golding leaves the noble savages out of Lord of
the Flies, but this remark is worth quoting because it states the
intellectual position in all its simplicity. It is the civilised
who are corrupt, out of phase with natural rhythm. Their guilt
is the price of evolutionary success; and our awareness of this
fact can be understood by duplicating Ballantyne's situation,
borrowing his island, and letting his theme develop in this new
and more substantial content. Once more every prospect pleases;
but the vileness proceeds not from the cannibals, but from the
boys, though man is not so much vile as "heroic and sick." 10

That the vileness should proceed, "not from the cannibals, but
from the boys" is an essential element of Golding's correcting of the
Coral Island idealization. Steven Marcus in Partisan Review and Frank

10. Op. cit. The quotations within this passage are from "The Meaning
of It All," p. 9.
MacShane in The Dalhousie Review summarize in similar passages the regression of Golding's young Englishmen into sheer savagery:

The action of the novel concerns the way in which the boys go about arranging their island life together; it describes in vivid, poignant detail how the conventions, restraints and taboos of civilized society are gradually sloughed off. That the boys have just been saved from a world destroying itself is a choice ironic background. . . . Inexorably the boys revert to primitive habits of thought and belief, and to primitive, savage customs, though there is no external necessity for their doing so, 11

. . . the children have to face the task of survival by themselves. Mr. Golding's reason for using children in this outlandish situation is quite simple, for children are normally considered to be unsullied by the uses of this world, and thus the possibility is raised of creating a miniature republic peopled only by innocents. Using this natural supposition as a backdrop, Mr. Golding concocts a tale that is both terrifying and ironic, for in a remarkably short period of time these children retrace the whole history of the downfall of mankind. From initial innocence and camaraderie they relapse, first only through carelessness, but later by quite conscious means, into a state of complete savagery. Reason and intelligence give way to brutality and sadism so that, by the end of the novel, the children are behaving like wild beasts. 12

Mr. MacShane's accounting for Golding's use of boys in Lord of the Flies is something of an oversimplification. The boys may, indeed, be "unsullied by the uses of this world," but Golding did not conceive his island as "a miniature republic peopled only by innocents." Ballantyne's boys, for his purpose, had to be paragons; Golding's run-of-the-mill youngsters suited his specific intention. His are younger than the Coral Island trio, and there are many more of them, ranging in age from about

six to thirteen. Except for Simon, they are very ordinary boys, with no supercharge of courage, nobility of character, knowledge or wisdom; and they are no more innocent than Golding's perception of human nature wants them to be. As a schoolmaster, Golding knows boys well enough to be certain that their regression into savagery is not implausible; to know that children can be inhumanly cruel to each other; to be able "to see them as the cannibals." Objectively innocent, guiltless of evil deeds the boys may at first be, but radically innocent, no; their potential for evil is the same as that of adult mankind. Always implicit in this novel, therefore, is the idea that adults would have behaved in the same way. This is another "choice ironic background" (to requote Mr. Marcus' phrase) for the story; it is an awesome realization to have to face the truth that the same regression could take place among a group of adult survivors of an atomic war. The admission, of course, makes fallen human nature itself an even more effectively ironic background for the novel. That is Mr. Golding's point, and to maintain otherwise is to weaken the thematic force of Lord of the Flies. This ugly implication makes the novel an ultra-modern allegory, and is perhaps its most significant overall symbolic meaning.

The use of young boys, then, was a convenience in planning an allegorical story, not merely a necessity as a parallel to the Coral Island situation. Indeed, it is possible that Mr. Golding first decided to isolate the boys on a remote island, without adults, and only then saw the possibility

13 Kermode, Op. cit., p. 17. The emphasis on "them" is Mr. Kermode's.
of a reversal of Ballantyne's story. As a most perceptive and alert
story-builder, Golding would be happy to offer his English readers this
challenge to their memories; and, at the same time, to incorporate into
his work an additional and effective artistic device.

The absence of adults and the isolated setting, moreover, were further
conveniences towards allegory. The first allowed him to show the regression
of the boys into primitive conduct without needing to have them circumvent
adult authority to carry out their "fun and games," as the perplexed Navy
officer said with innocent irony (p. 246). The remote setting freed Golding
from having to grapple with the complications of modern society, as noted
in Chapter One. "Mr. Golding...is examining what human nature is really
like if we could consider it apart from the mass of social detail which gives
a recognizable feature to our daily lives."[14]

Perhaps a shift of emphasis is needed at this point: the term "reversal"
as used so far in this study may imply too much. Mr. Golding's main pre-
occupation in Lord of the Flies was not to reverse Ballantyne's story; it
was to present a personal study of basic human nature—personal, in the
sense of arising from strong personal conviction. The Coral Island offered
a convenient and familiar precedent of setting and initial situation; its over-
idealization fell victim to Mr. Golding's purpose, but was not itself the
main object of attack. Ian Gregor and Mark-Kinkead-Weekes have put it
this way:

14 Ian Gregor and Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "Introduction" to Lord of
the Flies, the Faber and Faber School Edition, p. iii.
This is not a question of turning Ballantyne inside out, so that where his boys are endlessly brave, resourceful and Christian, Mr. Golding's are frightened, anarchic and savage; rather Mr. Golding's adventure story is to point up in a forceful and economic way the terrifying gap between the appearance and the reality. We do not need to know Coral Island to appreciate Lord of the Flies, but if we do know it we will appreciate more vividly the power of Mr. Golding's book. 15

Coral Island emphasized the outward appearance of things as Mr. Ballantyne wanted his young readers to see them; Lord of the Flies seeks to get at such profound realities as "the darkness of man's heart" that dawned on Ralph as he faced rescue from his pursuers and from the island (p. 248).

It is now necessary to trace in some detail the process of the regression of the boys from their first happy expectation of a brief stay in a paradisal situation to the savagery of their final manhunt. Some aspects of the story must be emphasized in order to establish their thematic significance and to determine a specific theme for the novel.

Most brief recapitulations of the story by critics (those by Steven Marcus and Frank MacShane were quoted earlier in this chapter--p. 23) are very similar in emphasis. The degeneration of Golding's boys into barbarism was abbreviated into a chillingly accurate capsule by one of the early reviews of the novel:

In these good, well brought-up little boys is worked out a whole passage of human history--through brief primeval innocence, through the making of fire, and the hunting of

15 "Introduction," to Lord of the Flies, p. iv. The division of the novel into three sections, which now follows in the text, is based on one made in this introduction.
food, to the tribal dance, to fear and anger and blood-lust. This actually is the whole story in one sentence. It is important to keep this unanimity of emphasis in mind as we approach the problem of thematic interpretation.

For convenience in discussion, Lord of the Flies may be considered in three stages. The first (Chapters 1 to 5) establishes the boys in their refuge; emphasis is on the edenic qualities of the island, the happiness of the boys, especially of Ralph and Piggy, as it dawns on them that they survived without adults, as they discover the lagoon and swim in it, and find the conch shell; their first talk is of home and relatives and hope of eventual rescue. They find out how to blow the conch, and in their first assembly with the whole group, Ralph tries to get some semblance of "law and order." Ralph, Jack, and Simon set out to explore the island, to determine whether they are on an island, whether it is inhabited--there are many deliberate echoes of Ballantyne in these pages. Food is plentiful, swimming in the lagoon is pleasant and safe; the island is, in fact, "...the imagined but never fully realized place..." of schoolboy day-


17 Details of the boys' landing are scattered throughout the first chapter. The boys were being evacuated from England (after an atomic attack--p. 20) in an aircraft with a detachable passenger tube. Flying via Gibraltar and Addis Ababa (p. 28) to some Pacific refuge, the pilot, under attack, released the tube, which crashed on the coral island, and later, after most of the boys had left it, was swept out to sea in a storm (p. 13). The aircraft itself was in flames when Piggy last saw it as they came down (pp. 13 and 44-45).
dreaming (p. 21). The three boys play and whoop with delight as they
make their way to the mountain to view the whole island. Then on reporting
back to the whole group they realize, by pooling their knowledge of what had
happened to them, that their location is not likely to be known by anyone;
they may be alone on the island for a long, long time. Rescue will come
by chance of a passing ship: "If a ship comes near the island they may not
notice us. So we must make smoke on the top of the mountain. We must
make a fire!" (p. 49). In the meantime, as Ralph insists, to quell the fears
of the "littluns":

"While we're waiting we can have a good time on this island."

Ralph waved the conch.

"This is our island. It's a good island. Until the grownups
come to fetch us we'll have fun." (p. 45)

This prospect of endless fun and games is mere boyish enthusiasm
and an outward show to put others at ease. It is all too soon disrupted by
three simultaneous circumstances; namely, the need to work, fear, and the
character of Jack. The signal fire must be kept burning to attract any
passing ships; and huts must be built to provide shelter from rain and as
the semblance of homes to help quiet the night-fears of the smaller boys
(pp. 66-67).

The fear which begins to grip the boys is a nameless, primordial,
and very human one:

...Mr. Golding creates his first sense of unease through
something which is familiar to every child in however protected
a society--the waning of light. It is the dreams that usher in
the beastie, the snake, the unidentifiable threat to security.\textsuperscript{18} One of the little boys mentions a snake-thing, a beastie, which he believes he saw in the jungle, and although the bigger lads try to laugh it off as imagination and dreaming, the fear of the unknown takes hold on all gradually until even Ralph and Jack accept the possibility of something sinister with them on the island.\textsuperscript{19} Ralph tries to face it down by bringing up the topic at an assembly: "We'll get that straight. So the last part, the bit we can all talk about, is kind of deciding on the fear" (p. 102).

The necessity of daily work, building the shelters and gathering wood for the signal fire, brings on the first disagreement between Jack and Ralph. Jack has an inordinate passion for hunting; he must kill a pig and spill blood or live in an agony of frustration. His arrogant self-promoting character is made evident from the first: he bullies the choir boys with a kind of dictatorial, military regimen; he wants to be known by his surname only, and openly asks to be elected chief:

"Kid's names," said Merridew. "Why should I be Jack? I'm Merridew." (p. 28)

"I ought to be chief," said Jack with simple arrogance, "because I am chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp." (p. 29)

\textsuperscript{18} Ian Gregor and Mark-Kinclead-Weekes, "Introduction" to \textit{Lord of the Flies}, p. v.

\textsuperscript{19} One of the wonders of Golding's story-telling ability appears in his gradual and subtle build-up of this fear until it becomes even for Jack and Ralph one of the facts of life of the boys' island existence (pp. 46-67).
As head boy Jack already had a coterie of followers. Ralph, on being elected chief states with instinctive diplomacy: "Jack's in charge of the choir. They can be--what do you want them to be?" Jack's reply, "Hunters," is an explicit yielding to his mania to kill a pig, though later he volunteers to have some of his choir-hunters take charge of the signal fire (p. 55).

Jack's hunting is maddeningly unsuccessful at first. In spite of fear and weariness he once allows the others to return to the beach, and answers his lust to kill by braving the jungle alone. On his return he tries to excuse his not working with Ralph on the shelter-building by claiming their need for meat:

Jack flushed.
"We want meat."
"Well, we haven't got any yet. And we want shelters. Besides, the rest of your hunters came back hours ago. They've been swimming."
"I went on," said Jack. "I let them go. I had to go on. I--"
He tried to convey the compulsion to track down and kill that was swallowing him up.
"I went on. I thought, by myself--"
The madness came into his eyes again.
"I thought I might kill."

Soon Ralph and Jack were shouting at each other, both overcome by emotions they little understood.

Shortly thereafter, the rift is made more dangerous. The dream of the boys of seeing a ship passing is suddenly realized; Ralph sees it first, and Piggy, Simon, and a few others surround him as he shouts. The practical, shortsighted Piggy turns to look at the mountain, but cannot see their own smoke signal. Simon and Ralph do not even wait to assure him, but run,
naked (they have been swimming), and hopelessly to the mountain. The fire is out. Jack had taken all the choir members and a few others to hunt the wild pigs. Ralph yields to frustrated tears, and calls hopelessly after the ship's smoke, "Come back. Come back." Jack returns at that moment triumphant, his face painted grotesquely as a camouflage for hunting, the twins, Samneric carrying a slain pig, but Jack swaggering in the lead, timing the others in a horrid and portentous chant, "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood." (p. 86).

Ralph and Jack quarrel, of course, this time more bitterly than before. Ralph's first words to him were coldly accusing, "You let the fire out." Jack finally understands about the ship; his excuse that he needed all the boys to surround the pigs is ignored. Nor daring to attack Ralph, he takes out his frustration on poor Piggy, breaking the latter's spectacles. "Jack stood over him. His voice was vicious with humiliation" (p. 89).

Golding subtly states the new situation: "Not even Ralph knew how a link between him and Jack had been snapped and fastened elsewhere" (p. 91); fastened, that is, between Ralph and Piggy. Later in an emergency meeting called by Ralph to reorganize their crumbling discipline and routines, Ralph reveals the depth of his disappointment and bafflement by the vehemence of his appeal for order and the need to keep the fire burning:

"Look at us! How many are we? And yet we can't keep a fire going to make smoke. Don't you understand? Can't you see we ought to--ought to die before we let the fire out?"
"You hunters! You can laugh! But I tell you the smoke is
more important than the pig, however often you kill one. Do all of you see?" He spread his arms wide and turned to the whole triangle.
"We've got to make smoke up there—or die." (p. 101)

Moments later the breach is widened more, made permanent. Jack openly defies Ralph's orders in assembly, and stalks off with some of his hunters, and ignoring Ralph's pleas for work on the shelters and fire, re-enacts the kill on the beach. "The sound of mock hunting, hysterical laughter, and real terror came from the beach." (p. 114).

It was during this assembly that Ralph tried to get all the boys to act sensibly about the "beast"; they talked openly for some minutes about it. The littluns were genuinely fearful; their terror was catching. Only Simon had the insight to propose the obvious solution:

"Maybe," he said hesitatingly, "maybe there is a beast."
The assembly cried out savagely and Ralph stood up in amazement....
Ralph shouted.
"Hear him! He's got the conch!"
"What I mean is...maybe it's only us."...

"We could be sort of...."
Simon became inarticulate in his effort to express mankind's essential illness. (p. 111)

After the assembly breaks up, Ralph, Simon, and Piggy remain alone discussing the situation, especially the unreasonable fear that plagues them. Ralph is despondent over losing control over the group, wants to surrender his role as chief. The others urge him to hold on in order to control the vagaries of Jack. Piggy's intuition tells him of his personal danger from Jack; he has been a sickly boy, and says, about Jack,
"I been in bed so much I done some thinking. I know about people. I know about me. And him. He can't hurt you; but if you stand out of the way he'd hurt the next thing. And that's me." (p. 116)

Simon urges Ralph to remain as chief. Then the boys yield to their inward longings and wish for the presence of their elders, "If only they could get a message to us," cried Ralph desperately. "If only they could send us something grownup... a sign or something" (p. 117),

The second stage of the story (Chapters 6 to 9) advances the situation rapidly into open revolt and anarchy. Ralph's wish for a sign from the world of adults is answered with the grimmest piece of irony of the book. Only direct quotation will do justice to Golding's introduction of the crystallization of the boys' fear of a beast into something real to fear:

A sliver of moon rose over the horizon, hardly large enough to make a path of light even when it sat right down on the water; but there were other lights in the sky, that moved fast, winked, or went out, though not even a faint popping came down from the battle fought at ten miles height. But a sign came down from the world of grown-ups, though at the time there was no child awake to read it. There was a sudden bright explosion and a corkscrew trail across the sky; then darkness again and stars. There was a speck above the island, a figure dropping swiftly beneath a parachute, a figure that hung with dangling limbs...

The figure fell and crumbled among the blue flowers of the mountain side, but now there was a gentle breeze at this height too and the parachute flopped and banged and pulled. So the figure, with feet that dragged behind it, slid up the mountain. Yard by yard, puff by puff, the breeze hauled the figure through the blue flowers, over the boulders and red stones, till it lay huddled among the shattered rocks of the mountain top...

... the figure sat, its helmeted head between its knees, held by a complication of lines. When the breeze blew, the lines would strain taut and... lifted the head and chest upright... Then, each time the wind dropped, the lines would slacken and

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the figure bow forward again........... So as the stars moved across the sky, the figure sat on the mountain-top and bowed and sank and bowed again. (pp. 118-119)

Samneric, the energetic twins, taking their turn at night to keep alive the signal fire, awaken at dawn to see the bowing apparition. They flee speechless with terror to tell the others. The nameless thing on the mountain is accepted by all as a reality, as an objective, physical embodiment of the "beast" and of their fears.

Events now move quickly to the horrendous climax; they are too detailed for full summary. A party including Ralph, Jack, and Roger verify the twins' story; the trio gape momentarily in rigid horror at the dead airman, but it is too dark for them to know what it is. The mountain signal fire must now be abandoned (for, as Ralph says, "And now that thing squats by the fire as though it did not want us to be rescued . . .") (p. 155). Jack tries to have Ralph deposed as chief, but gets no open support; he stalks off alone, humiliated and furious. While Ralph and his friends start a new fire near the shelters, Roger and almost all the others sneak off to join Jack. The inevitable has happened: now on the lovely coral island are two bitterly opposed factions -- Ballantyne's idyl of togetherness is shattered by the age-old clash of fanaticism and reason.

The painted savages led by Jack begin their separated life by killing a huge sow and offering its head as an appeasement to the beast, impaled on a pointed stick: "Jack spoke loudly. 'This head is for the beast. It's a gift." (p. 170). An orgy of feasting follows. The fresh meat lured everyone to Jack's camp. When a long-threatening thunderstorm breaks in a down-
pour, Jack starts up the old routine of their "tribal dance," re-enacting
the killing of the pig, again leading the barbaric chant, "Kill the pig! Cut
his throat! Spill his blood!"

Piggy and Ralph, under the threat of the sky, found themselves
eager to take a place in this demented by partly secure society.
They were glad to touch the brown backs of the fence that hemmed
in the terror and made it governable. (p. 187)

For a while Roger enacted the role of the pig; then,

The circle became a horseshoe. A thing was crawling
out of the forest. It came darkly, uncertainly. The shrill
screaming that rose before the beast was like a pain. The
beast stumbled into the horseshoe. (p. 188)

The sticks fell and the mouth of the new circle crunched and
screamed. The beast was on its knees in the center, its arms
folded over its face. It was crying out against the abominable
noise something about a body on the hill. . . .

Then the clouds opened and let down the rain like a
waterfall. . . . Presently the heap broke up and figures stagge-
red 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. (pp. 188-189)

The "beast" was Simon. The final horror on Golding's island was murder,
an unreasoning, ritualistic, savage murder.

The storm filled the dead airman's parachute and lifted the body from
the mountain, carried it down over the beach to terrify the boys again, and
". . . bumped it over the reef and out to sea" (p. 189). Only the sow's head
set up on a stick in the glade where they killed her remains on the island as
a reminder of the fearsome beast. 20 The symbolism of this "... propiti-

20 The impaled head, blackened with gorged carrion flies, is the
"lord of the flies" of the novel's title. "Baalzebub was the Philistine,
Lord of Flies; the Jews transmuted his name to mean Lord of Dung or
Filth; by the time of the New Testament he was Lord of the Devils, a
generalized Satan" (Peter Green, op. cit., p. 66).
ation to the unknown and actually non-existent beast-god of the island will be discussed later in this chapter. In the meantime we must turn our attention again to Simon.

The death of Simon ends the second stage of Lord of the Flies. His role has been deliberately skimped until now in order to give it full emphasis in the one place: Simon always is set apart in the story. We see him first as one of Jack's choir boys, the one who faints; and we learn that he often has fainting spells (pp. 28-29). Later, in the "interview" between Simon and the "Lord of the Flies," there is an indication that the boy may be an epileptic:

Simon's head wobbled. His eyes were half-closed as though he were imitating the obscene thing on the stick. He knew that one of his times was coming on. The Lord of the Flies was expanding like a balloon . . .
Simon was inside the mouth. He fell down and lost consciousness. (p. 178)

There is a suggestion here of the sickly mystic, the visionary, a man of superior intelligence and keener insights who cannot easily communicate his knowledge to others. The other boys recognize that Simon is different; Ralph speaks to Jack about him, but cannot offer anything better than the boyish diagnosis, "He's queer. He's funny" (p. 69). Simon is timid before others; speaking in the assemblies causes him to choke up (pp. 110-111). He has a secret place screened by thickly matted creepers ("Just a place I know. A place in the jungle" -- p. 106). Here he hides from the other to be alone to think and to indulge his "dreaming." Ralph's judgment and this

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21 Frank MacShane, op. cit., p. 173.
hide-out added to the boy's fainting, his bright-eyed gaze and small stature, are the first warnings given by Golding that Simon is set apart, differently treated as an invented characterization; that the boy is a mythic rather than a full-fledged fictional character;

Simon's visionary powers are shown when he predicts to Ralph, "You'll get back to where you came from." Ralph belittles the suggestion, but Simon insists, "I just think you'll get back all right." He exercises the prophet's right not to explain how he knows what he announces (pp. 137-138). This curious detail is not connected with other events, but is a gratuitous offering to underline Simon's special qualities.

Above all Simon is endowed with a forthright and uncomplicated common sense, and an ability to see intuitively into the heart of matters which confuse others. He alone has no doubts that the beast is a figment of superstition and imagination. He is not shaken in his opinion even when Ralph and Jack assert that they saw the beast themselves; whatever it is, its beast-reality is spurious, conferred on it by boyish fear and credulity. He accepts his grim duty -- "What else is there to do?" (p. 180) -- and goes alone to the mountain top to seek the truth. He discovers "the mechanics of this parody" and in spite of retching at the stench untangles the lines of the parachute from the rocks. "The beast was harmless and horrible; and the news must reach the others as soon as possible" (p. 181). But having identified and destroyed the power of the trouble-making chimera, Simon himself becomes the beast. His death is almost too cruel an irony for fiction;
it has the harsh, symbolic quality of an allegorical event.

Mr. Golding has made Simon his own voice in the story, a device for which he has been criticized. The boy's strange conversation with the "pig's head on a stick" (as Simon so forthrightly identifies it) is a key scene in any attempt to interpret the story. If Simon's actions seem often to be motivated, not by the dramatic demands of plot, but by thematic implications which Golding takes pains to insert by endowing the boy with "a mysterious authority and insight," and by an "obtrusive stress on the boy's role as some kind of a saviour," as Margaret Walters claims, then for our present purpose Simon is all-important. What Golding says through him, in other words, is important in interpreting the novel, not how artistically it is introduced. Simon's thematic role is unquestionable. The boy is a special invention, a deliberately unique characterization. As such, he alone is ample evidence of how dominant theme is in this Golding novel.

The final stage of Lord of the Flies (Chapters 10 to 12) is a sequence of guilt and terror, blood lust and death. The guilt is Ralph's and Piggy's; though they try to rationalize and deny their presence at the orgiastic ritual which ended in Simon's death. Jack and his followers decline into unmitigated savagery. The boy Maurice is tied up for hours and tortured merely to satisfy a whim of the new "chief" (pp. 196-197). The "tribe" (as Golding

22 See, for example, the articles listed in the bibliography for the following: F.R. Karl, John Peter, and Margaret Walters.

now calls them, as well as "savages" and "painted savages") retires
to the castle rock; guards are placed, and enormous rocks balanced on
the rim of the "fort" are made ready to be levered down to crush any
approaching "enemy." Roger finds a sadistic pleasure in being tortu-
er and "executioner" (pp. 222, 224 ff.). In order to have fire to cook
new kills they raid the old shelters at night and steal Piggy's glasses,
leaving him almost totally sightless. Piggy's indignation and hopeless lot
drive him and Ralph to visit the tribe to demand that the glasses be
returned.

The denouement is coldly horrifying. Piggy is killed by Roger
who "with a sense of delirious abandonment" leaned his weight on the
lever which sent a monstrous boulder rolling down:

The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to
knee: the conch exploded into a thousand fragments and
ceased to exist. Piggy, saying nothing, with no time for even
a grunt, travelled through the air sideways from the rock,
turning over as he went. The rock bounded twice and was
lost in the forest. Piggy fell forty feet and landed on his back
across that square red rock in the sea. His head opened and
stuff came out and turned red. Piggy's arms and legs twitched
a bit, like a pig's after it has been killed. Then the sea brea-
thed again in a long, low sigh; and when it went, sucking back
again, the body of Piggy was gone; (pp. 222-223).

Ralph is now alone, facing the murderous tribe. Jack, "Viciously,
and with full intention, ... hurled his spear" (p. 223). Ralph, wounded,
has no choice but to flee into the jungle to be hunted like a wild pig. The
twins, captured and forced to join the savages, later warn Ralph of his
imminent fate: on Jack's orders, "Roger sharpened a stick at both
ends" (p. 234). The chief's blood-lust now demands nothing less than human sacrifice. The fleeing Ralph, crashing into the sow's head on its stick, recognizes his fate if he is captured: his own head on Roger's stick would be the demonic Jack's next offering to the beast.

To flush Ralph out of a thick bramble below the rock, Jack sets fire to the jungle. Ralph races away in terror, pursued by the maniacal cries of the hunters. They are all driven to the beach by the raging fire, and Ralph is forced to turn at bay, "... down, rolling over and over in the warm sand, crouching with arm up to ward off, trying to cry for mercy" (p. 246). At this point, Golding re-introduces the world beyond the island in the persons of a naval officer and ratings landing to investigate the ironic flames.

Mr. Golding once used the word "gimmick" as a term for the endings of first three novels. 24 The epithet has since returned to haunt him, used somewhat in scorn by a few critics. 25 It can be shown, however, that the ending of Lord of the Flies is not necessarily a gimmick, not a mere deus ex machina to ring down the curtain on a spent drama. It is, in the first place, sufficiently tied to the dramatic events which bring the main plot to a close by the last of several ironic twists in the

24 The immediate context of this usage is as follows: Golding: "It's a gimmick, you see, it's an idea, it's a way of doing it.... I... first put it so graphically in my way of thinking that you identify yourself with it; and then in the end I'm going to put you where you are, looking at it from the outside" ("The Meaning of It All," p. 10).

25 See, for example, the chapter on Golding in James Gindin's Postwar British Fiction, pp. 196-206.
story; namely, that the smoke from the "burning wreckage of the island" (p. 248) brought rescue, whereas all the efforts of the dogged Ralph did not. The thematic implication of the ending, moreover, in itself justifies its use; and since this implied meaning really involves the whole story, it will serve now as an apposite beginning for a thematic examination of the novel.

Re-introducing the "outside world" is a logical conclusion in that it returns us to a circumstance that was explicit as the story opened. The first few pages of Lord of the Flies inform us that its action is posed against a world involved in atomic warfare; and throughout the story there are reminders from time to time of this important fact. When, for example, Golding describes Roger's throwing stones at little Henry so as not actually to hit him, we are told,

Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law. Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilization that knew nothing of him and was in ruins. (p. 78)

Then the arrival of the dead airman and all subsequent references to the body and parachute (pp. 118-189) keep the outside world before a reader's mind. Therefore, to return to that world to conclude the novel is no mere nick-of-time device to save Ralph's life (as in a typical "Western"--the last minute arrival of the U. S. cavalry to save the wagon train from the Indians!). It is, rather, a well integrated and thematically necessary

26 See footnote 17, p. 38, of this chapter.
final scene; in tone and mood it keeps alive to the final sentence the 
latent but vigorous undercurrent of irony and the island-adult world 
tension which were delicately but unmistakably established by the ope-
ning chapter.

In the publicity questionnaire returned to his American publisher, 
Mr. Golding made specific reference to the ending of Lord of the Flies, 
and what he said is also an important statement regarding the novel's 
theme:

The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society 
back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the 
shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the 
individual and not on any political system however apparently 
logical or respectable. The whole book is symbolic in nature 
except the rescue at the end where adult life appears, digni-
fied and capable, but in reality enmeshed in the same evil as 
the symbolic life of the children on the island. The officer, 
having interrupted a man-hunt, prepares to take the child-
ren off the island in a cruiser which will presently be hunting 
its enemy in the same implacable way. And who will rescue 
the adult and his cruiser? 27

The statement also shows clearly that Lord of the Flies is not 
merely a vehicle to carry schoolmaster Golding's convictions of the 
nature of young boys and how they would behave if isolated from adult 
society. It is ultimately a study of Man; in this novel, truly, "The Child 
is father to the Man." The limited world of the coral island and its few 
dozen boys is a microcosm of the adult world of the officer and his cruiser. 
The switch of viewpoint from that of a reader swept up by the cry of the 
hunters to that of the uncomprehending officer is a resourceful and effective 

27 See footnote 29, p. 11 of this thesis.
device to remind us that the horror of man hunting man to death is
being enacted by mere boys. Suddenly all we see is "A semicircle of
little boys, their bodies streaked with coloured clay, sharp sticks in
their hands, . . . standing on the beach making no noise at all" (p. 246).
The symbolic life of the boys on the island (to use Golding's own words)
at that moment dissolves into reality; and a reader is jolted into facing
another reality, Golding's reality about man, made known through the
unhappy and sobbing Ralph. What dawns on Ralph as he stood before the
officer is what Golding wants to dawn on his fellow men: "Ralph wept for
the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart." Poor little Ralph
might be weeping for "...the fall through the air of the true, wise
friend called Piggy," but he certainly would not be exercised at that mo-
ment by any philosophical regrets about the essential evil of human nature.
Golding, it would seem from the context of this insertion of the author's
voice, would question the fact of even radical innocence in the boys, and
would emphasize the "darkness of man's heart." "...so when Ralph
weeps for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart . . . he weeps
for all the human race." 28

The imagined life of good fiction must first of all be a reasonably
ture reproduction of real life, even when its controlling force is an anterior
idea or when it is overtly symbolic in method. It has already been noted
that Mr. Golding's fiction moves away from fable and allegory by being

28 C. B. Cox, "Lord of the Flies", "The Critical Quarterly, II
(Summer 1960), p. 117.
absorbing in its own right, independently of any embodied idea, and by not yielding upon examination a corresponding factor in reality for each of its symbolic characters, episodes, or objects. _Lord of the Flies_ has in abundance the qualities of good fiction: appealing and convincing characterization, a fascinating setting, an engrossing conflict developed in a well-paced plot with dramatically sustained suspense; and, as a bonus to retain interest, a complacency shattering tension between the story's world and the reader's. Perhaps it is because he felt that his thesis was being too much absorbed by his fiction that Golding from time to time steps in to make more explicit the analogy between his story's world and the world at large. And each entrance by the author is a re-emphasis of theme.

Again it is not our concern in this study whether or not the "omniscient author" should intrude to reveal his special knowledge or intention. The confrontation of the two worlds as Ralph wept before the officer was apparent enough without comment, but Golding felt it necessary to explain that Ralph wept "... for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart..." The most noticeable use of this tactic in _Lord of the Flies_ occurs in the author's use of the boy Simon.

Golding's special care with the character of Simon and his use of the boy as his own voice in the story have already been touched upon. These make the intelligent and visionary boy, with his strong intuitions of how things actually are, a thematic signpost which cannot be ignored.
Through the boy's fate it emerges that Golding is expressing in *Lord of the Flies* his "... sense of evil forces at work in the human soul, against which reason and its constructs are finally hopeless." 29

The first evidence we find that Simon's few statements will repay careful examination occurs when Ralph tries to restore order and sanity during the assembly which openly discussed the beast. Even the assembly, under the spell of unknown fears, goes badly; to Ralph, it, . . . seemed the breaking up of sanity. Fear, beasts, no general agreement that the fire was all-important; and when one tried to get the thing straight the argument sheered off, bringing up fresh, unpleasant matter. (p. 110)

He blew the conch loudly to shock the boys into order, and at that moment Simon's timid voice was heard; "Maybe," he said hesitantly, "maybe there is a beast." Ralph called out for silence in the general disagreement that followed:

Ralph shouted,
"Hear him! He's got the conch!"
"What I mean is . . . maybe it's only us." . . .
"We could be sort of ---!"
Simon became inarticulate in his efforts to express mankind's essential illness. (p. 111)

First fear, unnameable, inexplicable; then the "beastie," the beastly figment of overwrought and fearsome childish imagination, but a powerful destroying force nonetheless. Now this -- the beast is the boys themselves, "... only us." The voice of the commentator then makes it explicit:
Simon is trying to find words to express "mankind's essential illness."

29 Margaret Walters, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
Later, as Golding tells of the boys' halting procession to the mountain top to investigate the disheartening report of Samneric, he once more associates the beast with man himself; again, he uses Simon as the medium through which to convey the identity:

Simon, walking in front of Ralph, felt a flicker of incredulity -- a beast with claws that scratched, that sat on a mountain-top, that left no tracks and yet was not fast enough to catch Samneric. However Simon thought of the beast, there rose before his inward sight the picture of a human at once heroic and sick. (p. 128)

This association is supported moments later by Simon's statement, "I don't believe in the beast." Shortly thereafter, in starkly ironic answer to Ralph's plea for "... something grownup --- a sign or something,"

... a beast is created in good earnest, and defined in a wonderful narrative sequence. The emblem of this evil society is the head of a dead pig, fixed, as a sacrifice, on the end of a stick, and animated by flies and by the imagination of the voyant, Simon. 30

In the strange colloquy of Simon with the "Lord of the Flies" (pp. 177-178), further information is offered towards the eventual identification of the beast:

Simon's head was tilted slightly up. His eyes could not break away and the Lord of the Flies hung in space before him.

"What are you doing out here all alone? Aren't you afraid of me?" Simon shook.

There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast."

Simon's mouth laboured and brought forth audible words.

30 Kermode, op. cit., p. 18.
"Pig's head on a stick."
"Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill," said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. "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?"...
"Come now," said the Lord of the Flies. "Get back to the others and we'll forget the whole thing."...
"This is getting ridiculous. You know perfectly well you'll only meet me down there--so don't try to escape!"

Simon found he was looking into a vast mouth. There was blackness within, a blackness which spread.
"-- Or else," said the Lord of the Flies, "we shall do you. See? Jack and Roger and Maurice and Robert and Bill and Piggy and Ralph. Do you. See?" 31

Including Piggy and Ralph among those who will "do" Simon removes any inclination on our part to limit the identity of the beast to those who are evidently evil.

"... I am the Beast"; "I am part of you": this intriguing dialogue could have been devised by Golding just to include these two statements. Simon's intuition that nothing tangible in the jungle comprised the beast is here verified. His factual and blunt reaction ("Pig's head on a stick.") to the claim of the Lord of the Flies recalls what that gruesome symbol actually was: an external, physical extension of Jack's atavistic and

31 This scene has been both praised and condemned by critics. It is puzzling and unrealistic, though most effective in its context and purpose. Margaret Walters says that it is "... dramatically unconvincing and obscure, and at the same time overexplicit" (op. cit., p. 23). I find it obscure and unrealistic in that it is highly implausible as an actual event, but in the dimension of allegory it is credible if we look at it as induced by Simond's fevered imagination: "... one of his times was coming on," and he was approaching delirium. It is overexplicit in that the author's voice is again heard telling us what to think. C.B. Cox find it most effective (See quotation and footnote, pp. 59-60 infra).
savage urge to placate the "evil spirit" causing the contagious, ineffable fear that surfaced in the boys. "You knew, didn't you? I am part of you," said the head; "... things are what they are" with the boys because the nature of man is such that no ideal state of mutual support and simple friendship is possible on the island, even with the daily more urgent need of rescue. Jack's unreasoning rebellion against order and routine work, his lust for power, and (even more) his primitive urge to kill, are all outward signs of the beast within man. These symptoms in varying degrees of seriousness quickly spread to the other boys; even Ralph and Piggy almost took part in the frenzied re-enactment of the pig-killing which brought death to Simon.

Like any orthodox moralist Golding insists that man is a fallen creature, but he refuses to hypostatize evil or to locate it in a dimension of its own. On the contrary Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies, is Roger and Jack and you and I; ready to declare himself as soon as we permit him to. 32

C.B. Cox finds Simon, "...the one weakness in the book," and says that "...alone among the characters his actions at times appear to be motivated not by dramatic action, but by the symbolic implications of the story"; however, he asserts that

... the scene where he confronts the lord of the flies is most convincing. In this pig's head covered with flies, he sees "the infinite cynicism of adult life." He has the courage to face the power of evil, and, knowing that the beast is in all of them, he climbs the hill to find out the truth about the dead parachutist. 33

32 John Peter, op. cit., p. 583.
There is no need to dwell extently on the symbolic identity of the dead airman. This time the beast actually is a man, and the corrupting of the dead body (on which Golding dwells: "Simon . . . examined the white nasal bones, the teeth, the colours of corruption. He saw how pitilessly the layers of rubber and canvas held together the poor body that should be rotting away" -- p. 181) symbolizes "man's essential illness."

Mr. Kermode does not accept Golding's own interpretation of the dead pilot in Lord of the Flies.

GOLDING: There's a point . . . where these children . . . have got themselves into a hell of a mess . . . its the things that have crawled out of their own bones and their own veins, they don't know whether it's a beast from sky, air, or where it's coming but there's something terrible about as one of the conditions of existence.

At the moment when they are all most anguished they say, "If only grown-ups could get a sign to us, if only they could tell us what it's what" -- and what happens is that a dead man comes out of the sky. Now that is not God being dead, as some people have said, that is history. He's dead, but he won't lie down. 34

Of this explanation Kermode says that there are meanings which Golding cannot veto, that,

... some of his own views on the book may be in a sense wrong. The interpretation of the dead parachutist is an example. This began in the 'programme' as straight allegory; Golding says that this dead man 'is' History. 'All we can give our children' in their trouble is this monstrous dead adult, who's dead 'but won't lie down'; an ugly emblem of

34 "The Meaning of It All," p. 9.
war and decay that broods over the paradise and provides
the only objective equivalent for the beast the boys imagine.
Now this limited allegory . . . seems to me not to have got
out of the 'programme' into the book; what does get in is
more valuable because more like myth -- capable, that is,
of more' various interpretation than the rigidity of Golding's
scheme allows. 35

Mr. Kermode is right, I think, in pointing out that the dead parachutist
can represent things other than the past -- "history" -- pushing forward
its evil to influence the present. The very use which Golding makes of
the dead body -- to give substance to the beast and thereby to the boys'
fear -- fits it very aptly into the all-over pattern of his allegory: the
corpse is both the beast and man, and man's nature is to have a capacity
for evil, the corruption of human nature. And this new embodiment of
the beast is another thematic link between the island and the world at
large:

". . . only Simon has the courage to face the horror
and discover the truth -- that the evil they all fear is only
human, and that the 'Beast' itself is a human being, a
victim of the same chaos into which the children are
descending." 36

In other words, to see the island world as an analogue of the world
of adults is now not difficult, and because human nature, young or old, has
an element of corruption, both worlds are involved in the evil of war, or
man killing man. The boys escaped from England from an airport that


36 Margaret Walters, op. cit., p. 22. See also John Peter, op. cit.,
pp. 583-584.
shortly afterwards was enveloped in the flames of an atomic explosion (pp. 19-20); they leave behind them in their second escape "the burning wreckage of the island" to return once more to the greater conflict. It is a vicious circle. We remember Mr. Golding's question, "Who will rescue the officer and his cruiser?" The answer of Lord of the Flies is that no rescue is possible until man recognizes the beast within himself and learns to control it. In this context of a world background reflecting the evil within man, Golding's explanation of the dead airman as "History" seems more acceptable:

All we can give our children is to pass on to them this distressing business of a United States of Europe, which won't work, because we all grin at each other across borders... And if you turn round to your parents and say, "Please help me," they are really part of the old structure, the old system, the old world, which ought to be good but at the moment is making the world and the air more and more radio-active. 37

Some facets of Lord of the Flies have so far escaped full examination by critics. Golding's use of irony, as one instance, and his profuse symbolism, as another, and combinations of both, pervade the whole story, and these have yet to be studied in detail. They are important in this present work only in their interplay with thematic elements. This interplay is intricate and continuous, and too complicated for anything like an adequate investigation now. Golding's manipulation of ironic situation, for example, is constant and adept; and is often (as was already noted regarding the closing scene) a vivid and memorable support for the

thematic direction of a particular incident or situation. Irony often also underlies the basic dichotomy between what seems on the surface to be good or innocent and what actually has an element of evil when all is known. Thus the energetic character of Jack seems at first to be an asset to the group. Looking back from "the cry of the hunters" at some apparently innocent happenings at the beginning of the story refocuses these for us in a totally different perspective from that in which they first occurred. In retrospect they take on a dimension of disturbing irony; often they turn out to be ironically innocent parodies foreshadowing grim events to come. Ralph, for example, helps to lever huge balancing rocks down the mountain when the boys first find these, and revels with the others in the fun (pp. 36-37); at the story's close this is one of the devices by which Jack tries to kill the deposed chief. Roger throws small rocks at little Henry so as to miss hitting him (p. 78); he had no such scruples ("High overhead, Roger, with a sense of delirious abandonment, leaned all his weight on the lever" -- p. 222) when he pried loose the monstrous boulder that killed Piggy. Jack at one early assembly blandly insists: "We got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things" (p. 55). These reversals of what seems at the time innocent are part of the intricate pattern of many devices.

38 There is in this speech, of course, a sly and satirical echo of Ballantyne, which makes Jack's words all the more sharply ironical in view of the later full revelation of his character.
by which Golding continuously builds up the theme of sub-surface evil:
nothing relating to man is quite what it outwardly seems.

A more complicated instance of this same device, and a much
more subtle one, is worth some comment. Early in the novel, when
Ralph, Simon, and Jack first climb the mountain to ascertain whether
they are on an island, there is a happy moment when they survey their
new environment; Ralph declares,

"This belongs to us."

Ralph spread his arms.

"All ours."

They laughed and tumbled and shouted on the mountain.

(p. 38-39)

A descriptive passage in this section pictures the island as a boat, moving
slowly through the ocean; the island

... was roughly boat-shaped; humped near this end with
behind them the jumbled descent to the shore... The
tide was running so that long streaks of foam tailed away
from the reef and for a moment they felt that the boat was
moving steadily astern. (p. 38)

There is a suggestion here of the "voyage of life" metaphor so common in
literature. 39 Here, though, the boat moves portentously "slowly astern"
as if to prefigure the regression of the boys into savagery, which is
shortly to begin. At this stage of the story, everything is "wizard," as
Ralph says: the beauty, peace, and plenty of the island promise a
cornucopia of boys' pleasures, and an exciting, happy "voyage." The

39 See, for example, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar (IV.iii. 234 ff.),
and many of the poems of Matthew Arnold.
terror, violent strife, and brutal deaths which occur later make the moment in retrospect one of grim and poignant irony.

These few examples of the function of irony in Lord of the Flies are typical, and they are probably not the best that the story offers; they have been chosen somewhat at random with the intention of avoiding instances already mentioned in this study, and those most frequently noted in the various articles quoted in the course of this work. I am confident that it would not be an exaggeration to say that few memorable novels of the English language are so permeated with irony as is William Golding's Lord of the Flies, and rarely in the fiction of any language is irony so consistently and effectively employed as an underlying support, sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, for a thematic intention implicit in the whole story and explicit in many of its details, and made more explicit still by the public statements of the author about his book.

In a manner similar to his use of irony, Mr. Golding employs symbolism to contribute to thematic implication. Again, a few examples will have to suffice as indicative of method and effect. The most obvious use of symbolism is in characterization and the use of certain emblems such as the conch and Piggy's glasses.

A novel that qualifies as excellent fiction though an allegorical structure and meaning are also evidently part of the writer's purpose will have strong leanings towards merely symbolic characterization. This is true of Lord of the Flies, but definitely not to a debilitating extent; the appeal of Golding's boys is such as to render untrue any charge that they

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are not convincing as persons, as real boys. Simon is the weakest characterization in the book; his "mysticism," the ambiguity of his role, already touched upon, are apparently deliberate on Golding's part; but it cannot be said that he is merely a symbolic figure; there is realistic description of his physical appearance in several places. His coarse dark hair, his equally dark complexion and heavy tan, his brightness of eye, his very real fear of public notice, and perhaps especially his natural wisdom make him knowable as a person and recognizable as an individual. Simon stands for innate wisdom in humanity, and that kind of private courage which faces up to fearsome actions because of an inner conviction that they are necessary and right; thus he alone could name the beast for what it was and had the courage to try against all odds to prove his knowledge. His inability to communicate his intuitive convictions to others makes him suffer their scorn and contempt, and leads to persecution and martyrdom. Perhaps, as Mr. Golding says, Simon is a kind of saint, the man who"...embraces his fate," who, "...out of all the people on that island who would ascend the mountain...was the one who saw it was the thing to do, and actually did it."  

Ralph and Jack are, of course, the poles of the novel. Ralph is decent, though not very intelligent, and has qualities of leadership, but it is Jack who finally dominates the other boys. He is arrogant, brave, boastful, unscrupulous and finally murderous. He and Ralph feel a continual attraction and antipathy; in the last chapter Ralph realizes this fatal truth -- "Then there was that

indefinable connection between himself and Jack; who therefore would never leave him alone; never" (p. 226). 41

Ralph seems to be a symbol of natural goodness in man, not an incapacity for evil, for he has moments of weakness too; but an inclination to seek and do what is right. He stands for those average good men who recognize evil and would avoid it, but who have not the ability to control it. But he too degenerates into evil on the occasion when Robert played the role of pig-victim (p. 142), and by his presence and attitude during the frenzied, diabolical ritual which brought death to Simon; his lapses proclaim that all humanity, even good men, can succumb in moments of dire temptation to the inner evil. His subsequent shame distinguishes in symbol those who recognize their lapses as wrong; he alone afterwards recognizes Simon's death as murder.

Jack, viewed morally, is evil incarnate; "... the proto-Fascist, full of animal fury and pride, a simple mind that finds ferocity the easiest way." 42 His all too easy surrender to the call of the wilder, irresponsible attitudes possible for humans is Golding's strongest emphasis on the beast within man. There is a grim irony in his reversal from a leader of a religious group, the choir, to the sadistic hunter who kills so easily; his second role as leader is lawless, bloody, and blindly cruel. Mr. MacLure's calling Jack a proto-Fascist is appropriate and contemporary;


modern history emphasizes its truth: with Jack and his tribe, "...the savages existed all the time under the choir robes..." and all that was needed to bring out this aspect of evil man was the proper circumstances. Jack showed a genuine and superior capacity for organization and leadership, but not for necessary routine work or dull, daily chores which are beneficial to society but not exciting nor offering glory to one of strong pride and rebellious instincts; but modern man may be forgiven for asking, "Are not these qualities typical of the Nazis and other dictatorial forces?" "I hope this book is being read in Germany," wrote V.S. Pritchett.

Where Ralph is goodness and Simon wisdom, Piggy is intelligence of a practical rather than speculative bent. He is a more real than symbolic character; his fat, asthmatic body and near-sightedness, his frequent appeals to his aunt's admonitions, and his tendency to nag others all make him unique and different. His very strong sense of what is right and of good order as an indispensable ingredient in society make plain what he stands for; but like many of his type in any society, he is quickly liquidated when anarchy replaces reason and rule. He is a victim of barbarism as was Simon; for when the beast is in control, imagination, intellect, and goodness are superfluous: modern totalitarian barbarism has proven this many times.


Samneric, the willing, cheerful twins, have received scant attention from critics of this novel, though they also provide an interesting analogue. Do they not represent that mass of humanity which follows docilely when superior forces dictate? Their "antiphonal chant" of fragmentary dialogue neatly symbolizes the sporadic, uncertain voices of protest from the masses, voices which in reality, as in their case, do not prevail; but are swallowed and lost in the popular clamour, must yield to the forces in power or be annihilated.

The allegorical significance of each of these boys forms as neatly dovetailing a picture as do the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. The role of each boy consistently matches his realistic and allegorical characterization; and the picture that emerges when all characters and roles are fitted together in the novel is that of Man himself, with lights and shadows, bright colours and dark: Mr. Golding sought thereby to illumine for examination and recognition the "darkness of man's heart."

The conch shell is the most interesting symbolic emblem in the story. Greek enthusiast Golding may have found the idea in the course of his studies; the conch may be "... an equivalent of the Homeric sceptron, the staff put by the herald into the hands of him who would speak in council (Odyssey, II, 37)," and it is so used by Golding; "It is very fragile but it has a great voice; it is the symbol of reason and order."45 The conch is associated with Ralph as an extension of his authority as chief; indeed

45 Millar MacLure, "Allegories of Innocence," p. 150.
it influenced his election:

But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size and attractive appearance; and most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch. The being that had blown that, and had set waiting for them on the platform, with the delicate thing balanced on his knees, was set apart.

(p. 30)

The shell was an object of beauty in its own right, apart from its rational use; its colour was a "deep cream, touched here and there with fading pink... eighteen inches of shell with a slight spiral twist and covered with a delicate embossed pattern" (p. 22). C.B. Cox sees the conch as part of Golding's "fresh delightful response to the mystery of nature with its weird beauty and fantastic variety," as exemplified in the lovely coral island, and his further comment on the shell and its function in the story is ample and appropriate:

The conch which Ralph and Piggy discover in the lagoon and use to call the children to assemblies is not just a symbol of order. From the beginning Golding does justice to the strange attraction of the shell, with its delicate, embossed pattern, and deep harsh note which echoes back from the pink granite of the mountain. When towards the end of the story the conch is smashed, we feel the sadness which comes when any object of exquisite beauty is broken. The symbolic meaning, that this is the end of the beauty of justice and order, is not forced upon us, but is reflected through our emotional reaction to the object itself.

46 In retrospect, because of the gruesome deeds which occur on it, the coral island becomes a sombrely ironic setting for the story. A wry comment by Millar MacLure adds a new aspect to the irony of this situation: "I wonder if Mr. Golding knew that Paracelsus recommended that coral be worn about the necks of children as a sovereign preservative against fits, sorcery, charms, and poison?" -- "William Golding's Survivor Stories," p. 65.


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Piggy's glasses are tied in with the boy himself as a symbol; they are very closely associated with him, and with the making of fire. It is noticeable that the decline of the group into savagery parallels Piggy's increasing blindness. One glass is broken amid circumstances which are the first definite steps in regression: Jack and his hunters have just been blooded by their first killing of a pig and begin their blood-thirsty chant and re-enactment; Jack and Ralph have their first openly antagonistic quarrel because a ship has passed while Jack had the fire-watchers hunting. The later theft of the glasses reduced Piggy to almost total blindness, and thereafter the tribe becomes unreservedly barbaric. The savages' inability to detect their own slow descent into primitive brutality is itself a symbolic blindness. Piggy's "specs" may symbolize the figurative light or "sight" of reason; Jack's wearing them only at his belt as a trophy points up his moral blindness as a savage. It would be easy, though, to make too much of the glasses and all connected with them.

The signal fire which is to attract a passing ship is a symbol of hope, a kind of prayer for rescue. Appropriately it is out when barbarism first appears in full strength among the boys; and it is all but dead when the twins discover the airman's body, and the beast's reign on the island begins in earnest. The fire flares high or burns low in keeping with the boys' spirits and hopes; accordingly it is entirely dead during the horrendous denouement.

Thematically these symbolic emblems are reinforcements of characterization and of event; as such, they add to the story's realistic attraction as fiction at the same time that they serve their symbolic role. Like the boys
themselves and their island-boat, they are "... figures in a parable or fable which like all parables or fables contain an inherent tension between the innocent, time-passing, story-telling aspect of its surface and the great 'dimly appreciated' depths of its interior."

This reading of Lord of the Flies so far seems to favour an entirely pessimistic view of human nature. In this it follows the position taken by many critics of Golding's works, as the many quotations used have shown. Perhaps Philip Drew and John Peter started the trend, writing respectively in 1956 and 1957, before Mr. Golding's own statements became current after 1959. It is, however, important to note that Mr. Golding in this first novel does not extend his thematic conclusions beyond the fact of evil in man. He does not go further to proclaim, even by implication, that man, because of the darkness of his heart, is doomed to make of this world a "burning wreckage," as the boys did to the island; he does not deny the possibility of human happiness: in short, it is not his intention to apply his sombre findings to man's future. This novel exposes man's heart of darkness by dramatically demonstrating in an intense allegory one way that it could work, but he does not go beyond that to predict its inevitable triumph. To charge Mr. Golding with an unrelieved pessimism about man's future would, then, be unwarranted; and such a charge would introduce possibilities beyond the scope of his thematic intention in Lord of the Flies. This limitation of theme is very evident in Golding's public

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49 The essays of both these critics have already been cited.
statements about this story (already sufficiently cited). The novel itself offers internal evidence in that once the theme is sufficiently established by the actions of Jack and his savages and by the lapses of Piggy and Ralph (and the demands of fiction met by the apt crescendo of "The Cry of the Hunters"), the plot proceeds no further, other than to show the adult world involved in the same evil.

Mr. Golding's is a "fallen universe," and his man has fallen especially from the grace of self-knowledge, the knowledge that he is fallen: he knows not his own "essential illness." It is on this point that Mr. Golding would enlighten him. Because Ralph and Jack and the others lacked this self-knowledge, their assemblies did not solve anything; they could not communicate with each other because they did not know what the real trouble was. If there is a defect in Mr. Golding's "philosophy," it is the possibility that he equates knowledge of the problem with its solution; but, again, it may be said that he does not go that far.

It follows, then, that Mr. Golding does not rule out the possibility of human goodness co-existing with human evil; his concern is indicating to modern man that today's problems are rooted in an element of evil in human nature which man in our time ignores or knows nothing about. To say that man has that within him by which he is capable of dreadful evil is not to say that he is essentially depraved; nor is it to say that he will never know, and

always will yield to the evil. To a critic who pointed out that goodness was also an "exclusive human concept," and also part of human nature, Golding asserted, "Good can look after itself. Evil is the problem."  

_Evil is the problem in Lord of the Flies as far as its theme is concerned._ Mr. Golding took considerable care in this novel to make evil a concomitant of human nature. He created a special character -- the unique Simon -- to say so *in loco auctoris*; he invented a pair of boy-demons -- the savagely insensible Jack and Roger -- to demonstrate how evil man could be; and at the risk of being accused of using an inept _deus ex machina_, he retained the controversial ending in order to apply the evil of the boys to the adult world -- to Man. All these he did and more to give prominence to his theme. Our concern with the novel has been to indicate that its other novelistic qualities are always subservient to its thematic purpose; it is, we think, obvious that this is so. We leave it to others to debate whether Golding blesses man with an optimistic future or damned him to the modern ultimate pessimism -- atomic flames.  

Golding went on in his later novels to explore particular aspects of man's nature; each story is, we hope now to show, a chapter in his continuing effort to produce his own view of man's "appalling ignorance of his own nature." His dedication may or may not prove beneficial for his fellow man, but the powerfully thematic _Lord of the Flies_ will not soon be forgotten.

51 Quoted by Peter Green, _op. cit._, p. 63.

52 It is, therefore, beyond our present scope to analyze the optimism vs. pessimism discussion in _America_ and _Commonweal_ (see text and footnote, page 7 of this study).
CHAPTER III

THE THREE LATER NOVELS: TOWARDS PARADISE LOST

I

Many writers have been concerned, as a matter of argument, with what is rhetorically called "the dilemma of modern man," and have given us, as it were, lantern slide lectures on the anarchy of a poisoned future; they are really essayists sitting in comfort. Golding, on the other hand, scarcely uses an argument or issues a warning. He simply shakes us until we feel in our bones the perennial agony of our species. By their nature, his subjects -- prep-school boys on a desert island in a world war, the calvary of a sailor who gave the right order but whose half-conscious body is being washed about the gullies of an Atlantic rock, the conflicts of a handful of Neanderthals -- could easily become the pasteboard jigsaw of allegory, pleasing our taste for satire and ingenuity; but the pressure of feeling drives allegory out of the foreground of his stories. He is a writer of intense visual gift, with an overpowering sense of nature and an extraordinary perception of man as a physical being in a physical world, torn between a primitive inheritance and the glimmer of an evolving mind. A dramatic writer and familiar with the strong emotions that go with the instinct of self-preservation -- blind love for his kind, hatred, fear and elation -- he is without hysteria. He is not cooking up freakish and exotic incident; he is not making large proclamations about man against nature, God, destiny, and so on; he is seriously and in precise individual instances gripped -- as if against his will -- by the sight of the slow and agonizing accretion of a mind and a civilized will in one or two men, struggling against their tendency to slip back, through passion or folly, and lose their skills in panic. And there is pity for the pain they feel.¹

A great deal has been written about Mr. Golding's fiction, but not much of it is as accurate as the above somewhat rhetorical tribute by Mr. Pritchett. Written in 1958 before the publication of Free Fall, it nevertheless applies as accurately to that novel as to the earlier two we

¹ V. S. Pritchett, op. cit., p. 146.
must now consider with it: The Inheritors (1955) and Pincher Martin (1956). The publishing dates of these novels belie the chronology of their subject matter. As Millar MacLure points out, the "darkness of the world" is explored in the past in The Inheritors, in the present in Pincher Martin, and in the future in Lord of the Flies. This has led at least one Golding commentator to speculate that The Inheritors was written first, but published only after the success of Lord of the Flies. Peter Green notes what the first two books have in common as theme:

It is clear that there is a close thematic connection between The Inheritors and Lord of the Flies: Mr. Golding has simply set up a different working model to illustrate the eternal human verities from a new angle. Again, it is humanity, and humanity alone, that generates evil; and when the new men triumph, Lok, the Neanderthaler, weeps as Ralph wept for the corruption and the end of innocence. What The Inheritors owes to H. G. Wells was discussed in the Kermode-Golding dialogue on the BBC's Third Programme:

KERMODE: May I . . . ask you whether there is anything in the genesis of The Inheritors comparable to the position that Ballantyne has in the development of Lord of the Flies?

GOLDING: Yes, there's the brash optimism that H. G. Wells exhibits in the Outline of History . . . Wells' . . . played a great part in my life because my father was a rationalist, and the Outline of History was something he took neat. . . . Wells' Outline of History is the rationalist gospel, in excelsis I should think. I got this from my father, and by

3 Frank MacShane, op. cit., p. 174.
and by it seemed to me not to be large enough. It seemed to me to be too neat and too slick. And when I re-read it as an adult, I came across his picture of Neanderthal man, our immediate predecessors, as being these gross brutal creatures who were possibly the basis of the mythological bad man, whatever he may be, the ogre. I thought to myself that this is just absurd. What we're doing is externalizing our own inside.

Golding uses as an epigraph to his novel one brief passage from Wells' Outline which he wishes most to challenge; it approves a most capricious speculation that the physical appearance of Neanderthals passed on by some kind of race-memory," may be the germ of the ogre in folklore . . .":

. . . We know very little of the appearance of the Neanderthal man, but this seems to suggest an extreme hairiness, an ugliness, or a repulsive strangeness in his appearance over and above his low forehead, his beetle brows, his ape neck, and his inferior stature. . . Says Sir Harry Johnston, in a survey of the rise of modern man in his Views and Reviews: "The dim racial remembrance of such gorilla-like monsters, with cunning brains, shambling gait, hairy bodies, strong teeth, and possibly cannibalistic tendencies, may be the germ of the ogre in folklore. . ." 6

Frank Kermode analyzes Golding's reaction to Wells as follows:

The difference between Golding and the Wells of the Outline is simple; to Wells the success of the high-foreheaded, 

5 "The Meaning of It All," p. 10.

6 This passage is given as in the epigraph. For the context and omissions, see The Outline of History (New York, The MacMillan Company, 1921), pp. 69-70.

Sir Harry Johnston's book was published in 1912, and the Outline in 1920; both were influenced by studies in evolution and anthropology, following the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859. This study cannot concern itself with the scientific precision from the viewpoint of evolutionary theory of Golding's locating pre-men and actual men in the same time setting. He follows Wells in this (pp. 65-70).
weapon bearing, carnivorous homo sapiens was progress, but to Golding it was the defeat of innocence, the sin of Adam seen in terms of a new kind of history.  

This statement will be much clarified as more is reviewed of the details of The Inheritors. But first it must be noted that some of the incidents of the novel make it appear that Golding had also another Wellsian work in hand as he worked, a short story called "The Grisly Folk." In it Neanderthal-type "men" meet homo sapiens for the first time, just as it happens in The Inheritors. The short story reeks with the "progressivism of evolutionary science" (as Peter Green calls it) of the first decade of our century; all Wells' sympathies are with the new, more progressive animal in his struggle with the huge, half-witted brutes he contrives as the Neanderthals. One of the latter steals a human baby; Wells seems to have concocted that incident just to exult in the hunting down and destroying of the "monsters." . . . with a last flick of malice at Wells, Golding ends his story by making the New Men abduct a Neanderthal baby. Similarly, in The Inheritors, he reverses the Wellsian account of how the older race cruelly treated its aged; the novel shows the great kindness of Lok and Fa and the old woman to the aged Mal who dies early in the story. But The Inheritors in no sense is as complete a reversal of Wells as Lord

10 Ibid., p. 68
11 See The Outline, p. 61, and The Inheritors, chap. 4.
of the Flies is of Ballantyne; as his reply to Mr. Kermode shows, Golding was more interested in rectifying the Wellsian attitude than in upsetting the details of the Outline and the short story.

Samuel C. Chew has said of H. G. Wells that,

His early training in biology (which he studied under Huxley) accounts for his confidence that scientific progress will bring about the social millenium, his basic error in understanding the force of irrational impulses in man, and his persistent denigration of the arts. ¹²

This statement very succinctly expresses the Wellsian hubris against which Golding reacted. It must not be thought, however, that The Inheritors is only vehement anti-Wells propaganda; on the contrary, the tone of the novel is subdued, its language, incident, and plotting always under tight control.

Lord of the Flies deals with the imagined events of a "post-historic future"; Inheritors peers into the very dim reaches of the "pre-historic past," to use terms applied to the time setting of these novels by Steven Marcus. ¹³ Golding attempted the almost impossible in The Inheritors; he has managed in each of his books to set himself a new and difficult technical problem. If the problem of Lord of the Flies -- to make a myth of human duality which will at the same time be a true version of schoolboy consciousness -- seems difficult, the problem of his second novel seems impossible. For here he assumed as his point of view the pre-consciousness of Neanderthal man. ¹⁴

¹⁴ Sam Hynes, op. cit., p. 674.
The difficulty was basic to the pre-writing concept that Golding wanted to illustrate, as we shall see later; and it was complicated by how he tried to do it: to tell the story of the last days on earth of a small band of the creatures immediately before man in the evolutionary scale (according to theory in Wells’s day), and to tell it, as Hynes said, "from the point of view of the pre-consciousness of Neanderthal man." Everything in the story, then, except the final episode, is told as seen by these pre-humans ("the people," as Golding has them know themselves), who have not yet developed a human intelligence.

"The People" have such simian characteristics as thick-set physiques, sloping foreheads, receding chins, reddish fur rather than hair, a tendency to run on all-fours, and prehensile feet ("The foot rose, the leg bent, and presented an object to the lowered hand" -- p. 219); and a great fear of the water of the river near their cave-home. They know their environment as does an animal; they have especially acute senses of hearing and smell, and seem to possess strong night-vision; but their reactions are more those of instinct than of intelligence. It is a major problem to convey realistically their manner of communicating with each other; though they converse, can express terror and hunger and some emotion, their speech is most rudimentary because they are incapable of a logical sequence of thought. They depend instead on a kind of communal and individual memory, and on something like an animalistic telepathy; they have "pictures" instead of ideas. Golding's efforts to maintain their viewpoint, to give no more information
than is available through the eyes and "minds" of these pre-men can
now best be illustrated by some examples and quotations. As one ins-
tance, there is the almost agonizing mental process involved in getting
a log and setting it in place across a stream (pp. 15-17). Their telepa-
thetic sense is indicated in paragraphs such as this one:

Quite without warning, all the people shared a picture
inside their heads. This was a picture of Mal, seeming
a little removed from them, illuminated, sharply defined
in all his gaunt misery. They saw not only Mal's body
but the slow pictures that were waxing and waning in his
head. One above all was displacing the others, dawning
through the cloudy arguments and doubts and conjectures
until they knew what it was he was thinking with such dull
conviction.

"Tomorrow or the day after I shall die." (pp. 38-39)

Old Mal remembers a terrifying forest fire of his younger days:

"I have a picture. The fire is flying away into the
forest and eating up the trees. . . ."
"That is a picture of long ago. That is all done.
You have seen it in your sleep." (p. 45)

Lok's attempt to tell Fa about being shot at with bow-and-arrow by the
new people, the "others" who come to the area, shows well the limita-
tion of idea and understanding:

"They threw this twig across the river into the
dead tree."
"?"
Lok tried to make her see a picture with him but his
head was too tired and he gave up. (p. 114)

Lok is astonished to see one of the new men remove a fur garment:

Pine-tree did not move any of the bundles for a while; he
put one hand to his shoulder, pulled a piece of hide and
stepped out of his skin. This hurt Lok like the sight of
a thorn under a man's nail; but then he saw that Pine-tree
did not mind. . . (p. 143)

The story opens with the small tribe -- six adults, a small girl
and an infant -- trudging from a coastal region ("from their winter cave
by the sea" -- p. 28) to their upland summer area of dark forests, a ri-
ver and a waterfall; an annual migration, it seems. They know that they
are fewer in number than formerly but they do not know why. Their sen-
ses warn them before long that there is a new kind of creature in the area.
Then their best hunter does not return from a foray for food; and the wo-
man who had been with him tries to express in a series of bewildering
"pictures" what had happened. Shortly afterwards the newcomers raid
the summer cave of the people; they kidnap the little girl and the infant,
after killing all they found there; only the dull Lok and an adult woman,
Fa, are left alive.

The invaders are a more erect and less hairy race; they are men,
homo sapiens, at a stage of civilization similar to that of the Indians
when Europeans first settled in America. They are, as was noted, armed
with bows and arrows; and are not afraid of water, for they travel in dug-
out canoes.

Each race reacts in terror of the other, though the innocent, non-
suspicious Neanderthals at first would be friends with the evil-knowing
new men; Fa has trouble making Lok see their danger even after what
has happened:

"Listen, do not speak. The new people took the log
and Mal died. Ha was on the cliff and a new man was on the cliff. Ha died. The new people came to the overhang. Nil and the old woman died. (p. 133)

The invaders think that their hairy predecessors are devils, evil spirits of the dark forest region, and leave gifts of food and honey to placate them (pp. 199-200). The fear of the devils is too much, though, and soon the new people flee from the encampment, taking with them the two kidnapped young ones. They do not know that they have killed all the primitive people except the brutish Lok (Fa was killed as she and Lok tried to steal back the children). When we last see him, he is injured, lying down to die in the old home-cave, curled up in the burial posture (a detail Golding apparently took from Wells), while the fiery eyes of hyenas glow with menace in the outside darkness.

At the end of the story, as in Lord of the Flies, Golding switches the viewpoint. Here he assumes the author-narrator mode to picture the new men sailing upstream, having portaged one canoe around the waterfall; fearful lest the stream will prove stronger than their poor skin-sail, and bear them back to the mountains and the devils of the black forest; they believe they are escaping. They feel safe in the middle of the wide river-lake they have reached, because,

"The devils do not like the water." . . .

"They cannot follow us, I tell you. They cannot pass over water." . . .

"They keep to the mountains or the darkness under the trees. We will keep to the water and the plains. We will be safe from the tree-darkness." (pp. 227, 229, 231).
Through desire for the role as headman and for the leader's woman, one of the stronger hunters, Tuami, plans to kill the older man, Marlan; as they float on the stream, Tuami sharpens a piece of ivory as a knife. The stolen infant "devil" crawls around in the boat near its new "mother" -- Vivani. The tribe laughs at its antics, but fear it as an evil spirit, and seem even to worship it ("The people shrank and adored, giggled and clenched their fists" -- p. 231). Tuami feels overpowered by the presence of evil, symbolized by the "devil brat" and by the darkness of the forest area; his mind becomes confused about his course of action for the future:

They made adoring and submissive sounds, reached out their hands, and at the same time they shuddered in repulsion at the too-nimble feet and the red, curly hair. Tuami, his head full of swirling sand, tried to think of the time when the devil would be full grown. In this upland country, safe from pursuit by the tribe but shut off from men by the devil-haunted mountains, what sacrifice would they be forced to perform to a world of confusion? They were as different from the group of bold hunters and magicians who had sailed up the river towards the fall as a soaked feather is from a dry one. Restlessly he turned the ivory in his hands. What was the use of sharpening it against a man? Who would sharpen a point against the darkness of the world?

It is the voice of the author-commentator again insisting on his theme; telling us as he did through Simon, and through Ralph, the pre-writing concept that shaped his story. The darkness of the world is evil and guilt, "the darkness of man's heart" which overwhelmed Ralph on the beach, and which now overwhelms Tuami. Golding makes that clear again on the final page. Tuami, clutching his half-finished knife, sees
a solution to the problem of Vivani and her little red devil, which at that moment clung, rump upwards, to the hood of fur at the back of the woman's head:

The rump and the head fitted each other and made a shape you could feel with your hands. They were waiting in the rough ivory of the knife-haft that was so much more important than the blade. They were an answer, the frightened, angry love of the woman and the ridiculous, intimidating rump that was wagging at her head, they were a password. His hands felt for the ivory in the bilges and he could feel in his fingers how Vivani and her devil fitted it. (p. 233)

First Marlan must be killed; then, perhaps, the woman and her little simian devil (after he had carved their likenesses into the ivory haft -- another detail suggested by the Wells account --), if there was no other way to be rid of the fear-provoking devil-imp. Is there to be no end to the dark deeds that must be done? To the terror and evil and guilt? As the book ends, the guilty future of these men (Golding sees them as our ancestors -- as us) is again symbolized by the fearsome darkness of the forest shoreline:

Holding the ivory firmly in his hands, feeling the onset of sleep, Tuami looked at the line of darkness. It was far away, and there was plenty of water in between. He peered forward past the sail to see what lay at the other end of the lake, but it was so long, and there was such a flashing from the water that he could not see if the line of darkness had an ending. (p. 233)

A poignant irony of the story is that the older race is exterminated because the new people do not see them as humans at all, are terrified of them as evil spirits, and then are "... haunted, bedevilled, and full of strange, irrational grief ..." after killing them (pp. 224-225). Though
the primitives had a crude code of behaviour (they would not kill animals for food, but would eat what they could snatch from other animals — "A cat has killed the deer and sucked his blood, so there is no blame" — p. 37), and an elemental kind of religion (they offered meat-sacrifice to placate an ice-goddess, Oa), they were still more simian than human because of the severe limitation of their intelligence. They thus had no moral sense; good and evil were ideas too abstract for their dim minds.

In the family circle, each had his place and function, carefully defined and arranged by the tribal elder; there was mutual respect, and no quarreling. Guilt was therefore unknown to them: they were the innocents, innocent because they could not know guilt. Those who inherit the earth after exterminating the people, those who are capable of judging right and wrong, they are the guilty ones. Golding subtly underlines this point in the novel by having us watch the newcomers with Lok and Fa from their hiding place in a great, dead tree thickly matted with climbing vines (pp. 136-174). We see the quarrelsome natures, the foul tempers, the mutual suspicions and mistrust, the fighting, drunkenness, and wife-stealing of the new people. Later we see Marlan cruelly beat the others with a whip, the women included, to make them move the cumbersome dugout faster during the portage round the falls. The older folk he shows us to be kindly, gentle, and without deceit; they do not kill, and have only what instinct of right and wrong their obscure intelligence permits; very little, if any, it seems. It is only after long watching of the new men that Lok and Fa are
capable of drunkenness and quarrelling, as happens when they try the fermented honey left by the newcomers to placate their "devil" enemies.

The Inheritors is about the accumulation of guilt that necessarily attended the historical success of homo sapiens; the intellectual superiority of man over his simian victim is precisely measured by the cruelty and guilt which dominate his life and are relatively absent from his predecessor's. 15

The Inheritors, by going back to man's first rationality, reaches the same ground as did Lord of the Flies: the "darkness of man's heart" began, it suggests, when he was first capable of evil. Kermode and Hynes both arrived at this conclusion:

Golding is fascinated by the evidence—that human consciousness is a biological asset purchased at a price; the price is the knowledge of good and evil. This evil emanates from the human mind, a product of its action upon the environment. 16

The new people can use their minds to reason, to make weapons and utensils, and to kill; they are the inheritors of paradise, humans, and therefore touched by evil and guilt. One might say that the novel is an alternative Garden of Eden myth, using the materials of anthropology instead of the Book of Genesis—a myth in which the Original Sin is man's first premeditated act. 17

... Golding shifts, in the last chapter, from the last innocent creature, grieving alone, to one of the new people, whose mind, full of anxieties, fears, and lust, and haunted by the death of innocence, we must recognize as our own. 17

15 Kermode, op. cit., p. 20.
16 Ibid.
17 Hynes, op. cit., p. 674.
And speaking of Lok and Fa watching the new people's actions in the clearing below their tree, Mr. Kermode concludes as follows:

What we have to be shown is that although we are experiencing these events innocently, by way of the passive, vegetarian, inhuman senses of Lok, we belong down below in the clearing, corrupt and intelligent. And at the end we abruptly leave Lok . . . observe him with our normal sight, joining the new men, our own sort. With these anxious and responsible technicians we sail away, with only a last glimpse of superceded innocence stumbling about on the shore of a dead world.18

Basically the same interpretation is offered by James Gindin and by Millar MacLure; it is also found in the articles of John Peter (The Inheritors is "an indictment of natural human depravity"), and of Peter Green ("Tuami and the rest, hunting, performing magic, placating their devils --what are they but Jack and Roger incarnate in the backwardness of time? . . . evil and knowledge have triumphed."19

The technical knowledge and creature comforts that the invaders might have passed on to Lok's people would have been bought at a fearful price: the knowledge of evil, and of its corollary, guilt. We think of the shot at Lok, how he thought it was a gift; then we remember that it was poisoned (p.106). The honey left by the new men brought on drunkenness, quarrelling, and sickness (pp. 199-204). This irony is a support for the eloquent irony implicit in the reaction of the two peoples.


19 John Peter, op. cit., p. 585; Peter Green, op. cit., p. 68.
each other. Lok's first reaction to the new men when he first saw them was a feeling of kinship and love; that of the evil-knowing Tuami and the rest towards him was a superstitious fear and hatred; they regarded the primitive innocents as devils: guilt judges innocence to be more evil than itself.

It seems thankless to try to establish an identity between the story of the inheritors and the Judeo-Christian tradition of the fall of man from the innocence of Eden. There is nothing edenic about the harsh life of Lok and his family except their innocence; and the inheritors, the fallen ones, are a different species. The statements of Hynes and Kermode that Original Sin, as deduced from The Inheritors, is man's first consciously evil act is somewhat gratuitous, valid only within the broad generality that the older people are in a state of primal innocence and the new ones capable of evil, of guilt. The Fall, as seen by Hynes and Kermode, would be biological, not theological. It would be "man himself whom Golding identifies with the Serpent and who tempts Lok:to:eat of the tree of knowledge." 20 Mr. Golding seems to try consciously in his novels to avoid so close a parallel to the teachings of Christianity that it would distract from rather than assist his thematic purpose. The point established by The Inheritors is that it is man in the full use of reason who is capable of evil. Golding explored the consequences of this evil in Lord of the Flies, and he carries on this process in Pincher Martin, another story emphasizing man as intelligent and guilty.

The forms of allegory are less evident in The Inheritors than in Lord

20 Peter Green, op. cit., p. 68.
of the Flies, but John Wain's intuition that Golding "has certain perceptions about the human condition which he . . . creates an allegory to represent" seems equally applicable to the second novel. These forms are evident in a certain thinness of plot and characterization, and in an apparently deliberate lack of realism in re-creating the dawn world of Lok and Tuami. Golding evidently did not deem it necessary to include much natural detail of the pre-historic time and place setting: animals, birds, and flora now long extinct would have made his picture of the shadowy past much more real.

The novel inclines towards allegory in the symbolism which directs our search for theme towards the characters of the fully human inheritors. Tuami, if only in the evil which is focused in his character is Jack Merridew over again, but he is also and more so a Pincher Martin; or, to reverse the approach, Martin in the evil life which he re-lives on the barren rock is a modern Tuami, as capable of stealing his neighbour's wife as of plotting the downfall of anyone who opposed him. The poisoned arrow and the fermented honey were not the most ominous gifts handed on from Tuami's age to us, the modern inheritors.

Once more the events of a Golding novel derive from its thematic emphasis. The Inheritors has no Simon to convey its author's voice, but at

21 This statement is given in context in Chapter I, p. 16.
22 Golding mentions by name only those animals and plants still known today (horses, hyenas, water rats, white owls, water hens, bees and flies, beech trees and ivy), or uses such generic names as cat, thorn bush, vines and fungi. To be more specific in details of pre-historic botany and zoology would, of course, at best only distract from thematic emphasis.
the end, in the instance already mentioned, Tuami serves as did Ralph: his thoughts are made to carry a thematic statement. Golding in this book leans heavily on impressionistic techniques to evoke his primeval world and primitive characters; and the impressionism fleshes out the tale to counterbalance the lack of realistic detail. But realism is not to Golding's purpose in The Inheritors. The people, "strange in name, vague in relationship, and dubious in nature," and the New Men, primitive moderns as we must see them, are more the characterizations of fable and myth than of fiction. We cannot evade the intuition that the whole story is not about Neanderthal man but, as the title implies, about ourselves. Mythical people in a somewhat unreal, a mythical setting, as characters in a modern novel, can serve only to convey their creator's intention. In this case the purpose is thematic: the innocence of the helpless "people" underlines the guilt, the evil, of the inheritors.

Thus Golding's story of primitives peoples reaches by irony and by the juxtaposition of good and evil, with mutual ignorance as a catalyst, into the realm of mythic tragedy; and Lok and Fa, Marlan, Tuami, and Vivani, assume the clouded identities of allegorical figures--at least to the extent that they point to a meaning beyond themselves and their pre-historic world. We leave the new people searching for the ending of darkness along a forbidding shoreline, peering symbolically ahead into the future, into the darkness of mens' hearts for which Ralph wept, and the hapless Lok curled up to die; but they cannot see if the darkness has an ending. As did Lord of the Flies

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this story, too, ends with a thematic crescendo.

The Inheritors, we may therefore conclude, is so planned and written that in it, as in the first novel, other novelistic constants are made to subserve theme without a debilitating effect on the book as fiction. The novel, it may be truly said, is as challenging as a study as it is entertaining as a story. The same may be said of the next book, Pincher Martin, Golding's third novel.

II

Pincher Martin is a naval officer who, after the torpedoing of his ship, drifts aimlessly about the Atlantic for some hours before being cast up on a small, barren, isolated rock. Here he survives for several days, living off mussels and sea-anemones and doing what he can to increase his chances of rescue, until delirium, madness, and (presumably) death overcome him. Except for a last chapter dealing with the recovery of his body, the novel is a record of his thoughts, his memories, his few positive actions, what he sees, and what he thinks he sees.  

Perhaps Mr. Amis' paragraph says too much too soon about Pincher Martin, but it is essential in the case of this novel to understand from the first its basic situation. The last few days of life of a man marooned on "A single point of rock, peak of a mountain range, one tooth set in the ancient jaw of a sunken world, projecting through the inconceivable vastness of the whole ocean. . ." (p. 30) is indeed "a fantastically narrow frame for a novel."  

It is the most rigorous application yet of the Golding technique of isolating his protagonist--of isolating Man, we now see--


to study his nature without the distractions of urban civilization. As the story progresses, it reveals that Martin was "a ruthless . . . despoiler of the cherished possessions of others, a helpless victim of his own greed and selfishness, and yet we are left in no doubt that what we are being shown is the pathetic shabbiness of humanity in general." The process by which this is done is often fascinating, sometimes puzzling. In large sections of the novel we see and understand everything of the past and present only as it is in Martin's mind. It is an indication of Golding's virtuosity as a writer that these pages of stream-of-consciousness, self analysis, and recall of the past do not become tedious. In fact, it is only through knowing Pincher's thoughts of the present and recollections of the past that we are at all able to appreciate the tenacity of his determination to live while enduring ceaseless pain and fighting off despair. His slow advance into delirium and insanity is interrupted from time to time as "fragments of his past heave themselves up into his consciousness, and though we are given no sense of the chronological shape of his life, certain images recur obsessively in his recollections and reveal a familiar kind of unpleasant character." So says Mr. Marcus, and his introduction to the now much talked-about "seaboots incident" is as accurate a statement of it as any available. Martin eventually

26 Amis, op. cit., p. 656.

27 Op. cit., p. 182. The longer quotation which follows is found on page 183.
seems to have been

swept off the rock by a storm . . . and presumably drowned. The final chapter of the story, however, throws everything into reverse again. Martin's body is swept on shore, and we learn that he is still wearing the seaboots which we had been led to believe he took off shortly after he was thrown into the sea. It suddenly appears that the entire novel takes place in the mind of a drowning man, and this elaborate story of survival, retrospection, and madness. . . . occupies the interval of time between his first sensations of drowning on page one and his last . . . delirious memory.

It is always bootless to try to read an author's mind along with his books. Mr. Golding's statements render superfluous much of the speculation about the abrupt revelation at the end of Pincher Martin. Steven Marcus' estimate accords with Golding's replies to Mr. Kermode in the BBC interview. 28 The "trick ending," as such, is a technicality for critics to evaluate, and not, once the writer's intentions are known, a matter for discussion here.

What is truly pertinent is the kind of man that Pincher Martin was. 29 In this novel, and in Free Fall, Golding uses one main character, a man as Man: his picture of humanity with Pincher as its exemplar is not a pleasant one. Pincher has not, it is emphasized by Amis and others,

28 "The Meaning of it All," p. 10. To make the ending less puzzling for readers after its mixed reception in England, the American publishers used the title, The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin.

For interesting speculation about the possible sources for the seaboots "gimmick," see the listings in the bibliography for Ian Blake, Peter Green, J. C. Maxwell, Edwin Morgan, and Owen Webster.

29 In the Royal Navy, "Pincher" is a traditional nickname with the surname "Martin," similar to "Dusty" Miller and "Nobby" Clark. See the novel, p. 94.
been a good man; with him Mr. Golding once more shows us that Man has
not been a good man either, as Wayland Young expressed it. 30

Golding's intentions with Pincher Martin's life are amply spelled out
in the interview with Kermode; and are even more explicit in a short ex-
planation of the novel he published to prepare the public for a radio dra-
matization of it:

A number of people who read my novel Pincher Martin found
the theme difficult to grasp. Now that the Third Programme
is presenting a radio version . . . my own account of the theme
may be useful to listeners as a sort of mental lifeline. Here
it is.

Christopher Hadley Martin had no belief in anything but
the importance of his own life; no love, no God. Because he
was created in the image of God he had a freedom of choice
which he used to center the world on himself. He did not be-
lieve in Purgatory, and therefore when he died it was not pre-
sented to him in overtly theological terms. The greed for life
which had been the mainspring of his nature, forced him to re-
fuse the selfless act of dying. He continued to exist separately
in a world composed of his own murderous nature. His drown-
ning body lies rolling in the Atlantic but the ravenous ego invents
a rock for him to endure on. It is the memory of an aching tooth.
Ostensibly and rationally he is a survivor from a torpedoe de-
stroyer; but deep down he knows the truth. He is not fighting
for bodily survival but for his continuing identity in face of what
will smash it and sweep it away -- the black lightning, the
compassion of God. For Christopher Martin, the Christ-bear-
er, has become Pincher Martin who is little but greed. Just
to be Pincher is purgatory; to be Pincher for eternity is hell. 31

Two main aspects of Martin's character are revealed as he suffers
his purgatory on the barren rock. One is an almost ineffable will to live,
an incredible determination to retain health and sanity in spite of the ex-


tremity of physical and mental torture. Golding projects this stubborn refusal by calling it a "center"; it is Martin's tenacious central core of rationality which strives to continue its function despite the fury of the external struggle. Golding shows the center in operation by the daily chores that Martin sets himself, by its struggles against desperate pain and the temptation to despair, and by the daily more grievous fight between reason and hallucination. The second aspect is what Golding calls (in the quotation above) Pincher's "ravenous ego." It is revealed during many sporadic flashbacks, fragments of recall which merge increasingly with hallucination as Martin's mind weakens. These reveal him to have been an extraordinarily selfish, acquisitive man who trod roughshod over the feelings and aspirations of others, who dallied shamelessly with the wife of his employer and the fiancee of his friend. This quality of self-gratification and its accompanying relentless drive to take what it wants no matter who is hurt is revealed especially in a drunken conversation with several stage people Martin knew as an actor before joining the Navy (p. 94). The harsh candor of the conversation appears as an in-vino-verbatim situation; however, no one can miss Peter's (and Golding's) opinion of Christopher Hadley Martin. Some kind of morality play is being discussed, and Martin is being offered the role of Greed:

"What's it supposed to be, old man?"
"Darling, it's simply you! Don't you think, George?"
"Definitely, old man, definitely."
"Chris-Greed. Greed-Chris. Know each other."
"Anything to please you, Pete."
"Let me make you two better acquainted. This painted bastard here takes anything he can lay his hands on. Not food,
Chris, that's far too simple. He takes the best part, the best seat, the most money, the best notice, the best women. He was born with his mouth and his flies open and both hands out to grab. He's a cosmic case of the bugger who gets his penny and someone else's bun. Isn't that right, George?"

"Think you can play Martin, Greed?" (pp. 119-120).

Under the guise of referring to the painted Greed mask, Pete makes it very clear what the others and himself think of Pincher Martin. This dialogue, of course, may be seen as another example of the author's voice directing the reader's interpretation. It also emphasizes how Golding made Pincher a most self-centered, grasping character: "I went out of my way to damn Pincher as much as I could by making him the most unpleasant, the nastiest type I could think of..." 32 It is significant that Mr. Golding believes that with Pincher Martin he made some progress in his campaign to remove man's "appalling ignorance of his own nature." Immediately after the above statement, he added, "I was very interested to see how critics all over the place said, 'Well yes, we are like that.' I was really rather pleased." The intention again is clear: once more a Golding protagonist maintains the delicate balance between believable characterization and universal implication. In the latter stance Pincher, like Ralph or Jack, Lok or Tuami, assumes the burden of allegory and signifies as a personification: he is a modern Everyman, a caption for the perusal of every man of our fearful, nuclear era. To Kingsley Amis, Everyman-Martin stood for "the pathetic shabbiness of humanity in general";

E. L. Epstein is of the same opinion: "The images that flash through the dying mind of Christopher Martin are dreadfully characteristic of him, of the personality of mankind in general." \(^{33}\) Ian Gregor and Mark Kinkead-Weekes specify the darkness of Pincher-Everyman's heart:

Ostensibly concerned with a drowning sailor in mid-Atlantic, the novel's real purpose is to show what happens when a man whose whole nature has been centered on himself, dies. The murderous nature lives on, fighting for its own identity in face of the mercy of God, a pair of claws clutched together in defiance of love, which can be seen only as a black lightning of destruction. Christopher, the Christ-bearer, has turned into Pincher, the epitome of greed and self-will. Man has constructed his own hell. \(^{34}\)

Pincher Martin's darkness, the quality which is transmuted into an adamantine will-to-live on the rock, is, as we have said, an implacable self-interest, of which greed and lust are prominent manifestations. He has stolen money (p. 153), taken other men's wives and girl-friends (pp. 88-89, 148-158), as a boy had deliberately injured a friend in a bike race (pp. 152-153); cold-bloodedly he assumed to himself whatever he wanted. In jealousy and hatred of his friend Nat (because of Nat's fiancee, Mary) he was plotting to kill him as the torpedo struck; indeed, he had just given the order which would have tumbled Nat into the sea when the explosion occurred. (pp. 184-186).

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34 "The Strange Case of Mr. Golding and His Critics," *The Twentieth Century* (February, 1960), pp. 116-117.
Mr Golding approves the interpretation of Pincher's tooth-and-claw endurance on the brutal rock as a kind of after-life immediately following upon death; its climax is then a judgment and condemnation of Martin by God. Allowing him to choose his own fate is a tremendous irony emphasizing Martin's evil, for he chose damnation. The fact that Martin is dead is all-important in interpreting the story; drowned on page two, as Golding told Professor Kermode.

... what gradually emerges (and what the contrivance of the seaboots is meant to make clear) is that this struggle for life on the island exists only in Martin's imagination and that the whole action of the novel takes place in the few seconds of his actual drowning or perhaps is some after-death state in which he is given the chance to choose salvation or damnation. 35

The pages on which Mr. Harvey bases his reading give one of Pincher's "film-trailers" of the past. Three times in the story (pp. 70-71, 155-159, 182-183), Pincher recalls portions of a conversation with Nathaniel, 36 Nat is a dreamy, religious character, vaguely delineated by Golding, apparently on purpose. Mr Kermode says of him:

Golding's Nathaniel, whose natural goodness Martin recognizes and resents...is the second of what be a band of elect, those who see and know. But Nathaniel is anything but a respectable saint; his religion has a seedy quality and it contributes to Martin's agony... 37


36 It is important to note that these conversations have to be read third-first-second to reconstruct the conversation chronologically.

37 Op. cit., p. 25:
The first of those "who see and know" was Simon, and parallels in the characters and conduct of the two are noticeable. Nathaniel, like Simon, has a secluded place to which he can retire to meditate alone; it is close to the ship's railing and thereby provides a Martin with a chance to plot Nat's death by causing the ship to lurch suddenly. Nathaniel also foretells a detail of Martin's future, just as Simon predicted Ralph's eventual rescue. The conversation Mr. Harvey refers to contains this incident. The strange, mystic Nat had been in London, lecturing on heaven; Martin had just lost his acting job, and was about to join the Royal Navy.

"How's London?"
"Doesn't like lectures on heaven."
"Heaven?"
Then the body was laughing, louder and louder, and the water was flowing again. Nat was grinning and blushing too.
"I know. But you don't have to make it worse." . . .
"Why heaven?"
"The sort of heaven we invent for ourselves after death, if we aren't ready for the real one."
"You would--you curious creature."
Nathaniel became serious. He peered upwards, raised an index finger and consulted a reference book beyond the ceiling.
"Take us as we are now and heaven would be sheer negation. Without form and void, You see? A sort of black lightning, destroying everything we call life.
The laughter came back
"I don't see and I don't much care, but I'll come to your lecture. . . ." (p. 183)

"I think you need my lecture. You're not happy, are you?"
"I'm not really interested in heaven either. Let me get you a drink."
"No thanks."
Nathaniel uncoiled from the chair and stood up with his arms out on either side, hands bent up . . .
"You could call it a talk on the technique of dying."
"And I'm going to have a damned long life and get what I'm after."
"And that is ---?"
"Various things."
"But you're not happy."
"Why do you spill this over me, of all people?"
"There's a connection between us. Something will happen to us or perhaps we are meant to work together. You have an extraordinary capacity to endure."
"To what end?"
"To achieve heaven."
"Negation?
"The technique of dying into heaven."
"No thanks. Be your age, Nat." (pp. 70-71)

At this point Nathaniel became more serious as well as more vague, and then proceeded to predict Martin's death in only a few years.

Nat's face was undergoing a change. It turned towards him again. The flush on the cheeks was painful. The eyes loomed and impended.
"---And I, have a feeling. Don't laugh, please---but I feel---you could say that I know." Below the eyes the breath came out in little gasps. Feet scraped.
"---You could say that I know that it is important for you personally to understand about heaven---about dying ---because in only a few years---"

For a while there was silence, a double shock--for the bells ceased to toll beyond the window . . . .
... the words pursued him, made his ears buzz, set up a tumult, pushed his heart to thump with sudden appalled understanding as though it were grasping the words that Nathaniel had not spoken.
"---because in only a few years you will be dead."
He cried out against the unspoken words in fury and panic.
"You bloody fool, Nat! You awful, bloody fool!"
The words echoed in the trench and he jerked his cheek up off the oilskin. There was much light outside, sunlight and the crying of gulls.
He shouted.
"I'm damned if I'll die!" (pp. 71-72)

Martin's attitude towards life and death, his blunt and unreasonable atheism, and his real hatred of the idea of death appear in this exchange;
the literal truth of his exclamation on "awakening" on the rock is grimly ironic.

V. S. Pritchett refers to Pincher's "...Job-like protest against a defeat which wrongs everything he has believed in," but Pincher was too blatantly selfish to accept suffering at any time, too selfish to be patient even with God. He believed really in nothing except self--his pleasure, his profit, his advancement, himself. Like Job, Martin is stripped of the last vestiges of all he clung to in life; finally even of the vaunted intelligence which he had misused to subvert others to his will. As his pain-racked body more and more fails to respond, his sanity, the centre, loses its control, and he becomes like the mad King Lear, whom he misquotes in his ravings. (p.197). He alternates between despair and mad defiance of the elements of nature, then of God; delirium and hallucination become more frequent than moments of consciousness. Martin had to be reduced to this extremity before he would face up to the guilty, sin-ridden self his self-worship had created. It is a situation of harsh and awesome irony which is heightened by our realization that this man who jeered at his friend's ideas of "the technique of dying into heaven" is now dead and being forced--or allowed--to judge himself. That is the situation we must acknowledge as we answer for ourselves the question of Mr. Campbell at the book's end, the question the stolid, boozy naval official misunderstood:

38 Op. cit., p. 146
"Would you say there is any—surviving? Or is that all? Like the lean-to?"
"If you're worried about Martin—whether he suffered or not—"
They paused for a while. Beyond the drifter the sun sank like a burning ship, went down, left nothing for a reminder but clouds like smoke.
Mr. Campbell sighed.
"Aye," he said, "I meant just that."
"Then don't worry about him. You saw the body. He didn't even have time to kick off his seaboots." (p 208)

With Mr. Campbell's sigh and acceptance of the officer's misconstruing of his question, Golding leaves the answer to the reader. The question was a hint towards the novel's meaning; the final sentences force a reconsideration to establish the significance of Martin's strange dialogue in the second last chapter (it is given here in part without the passages of description with which it is interspersed). Martin believes he sees a huge figure near him on the rock; he "looked up from the boots, past the knees, to the face and engaged himself to the mouth."

"You are a projection of my mind. But you are a point of attention for me. Stay there."
The lips hardly moved in answer.
"You are a projection of my mind."
He made a snorting sound.
"Infinite regression or better still, round and round the mulberry bush. We could go on like that forever."
"Have you had enough, Christopher?"
"Enough of what?"
"Surviving. Hanging on."
"I hadn't considered."
"Consider now."
"What's the good? I'm mad."
"Even that crevice will crumble."
He threw words in the face.
"On the sixth day he created God. Therefore I permit you to use nothing but my own vocabulary. In his own image he created Him."
"Consider now."
"I won't. I can't."
"What do you believe in?"
"The thread of my life."
"At all costs."
"At all costs."

He raged at the cardboard rock before the immovable black feet.
"I will not consider! I have created you and I can create my own heaven."
"You have created it."
"I prefer it. You gave me the power to choose and all my life you led me carefully to this suffering because my choice was my own. Oh yes! I understand the pattern. All my life, whatever I had done I should have found myself in the end on that same bridge, giving that same order. Yet, suppose I climbed... over the bodies of used and defeated people, broke them to make steps on the road away from you, why should you torture me? If I ate them, who gave me a mouth?"
"There is no answer in your vocabulary."
"I have considered. I prefer it, pain and all."
"To what?"
"To the black lightning! Go back! Go back!"

Martin's moments of madness and delirium continue, and increase at this point. The last words he screamed at the huge Sailor-God he had conjured up on the rock were, "I spit on your compassion," and "I shit on your heaven."

The "black lightning" Martin feared so much was annihilation, death; "A sort of black lightning destroying everything that we call life," Nathaniel had said (p. 70), "... the black lightning that splits and destroys all, the positive and unquestionable nothingness" (p. 91). The black lightning image becomes more frequent as the judgment of Martin progresses, as he is reduced to nothing more than the center and a pair of huge, grasping lobster claws. Throughout the story Golding supported the name "Pincher" with images of grasping, clinging, and

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holding on, appropriate to Martin's desperate situation and stubborn nature. As delirium increases, Martin sees his own hands as oversized claws, grasping the rock as they grasped everything in life.

Martin himself is finally reduced to this grotesque image:

There was nothing but the center and the claws. They were huge and strong and inflamed to red. They closed on each other. They contracted. They were outlined like a night sign against the absolute nothingness. . . .

The lightning crept in. The center was unaware of anything but the claws. . . . It focussed its awareness on the crumbled serrations and the blazing red. The lightning came forward. Some of the lines pointed to the center, waiting, waiting for the moment when they could pierce it. Others lay against the claws, playing over them, prying for a weakness, wearing them away in a compassion that was timeless and without mercy. (p. 201)

Michael Quinn has said of this ending of Pincher Martin's "second life":

The implication of these last lines seems to be that eventually the black lightning of God will succeed in breaking the grip of the claws and Martin's resolution will break and he will submit to God. But this . . . is a purely theological question and, whatever the explanation, these closing lines present a sufficiently mysterious, impressive and faintly optimistic ending -- some small consolation for the agony we have endured.39

It is difficult to find any real support for optimism in the final picture of Martin as a pair of grotesque claws absurdly grasping the only thing left--themselves. The symbolic meaning is clear: as he lived, so Martin died, and thereby judged himself; all his life he had chosen to reject God, to satisfy only his own desires, indulge only his own will.

Mr. Quinn's conclusion seems to gainsay somewhat what he said above:

The whole shape of Pincher Martin is dictated by a firm, even crude, conviction that the wages of sin is death and

that man's eternal destiny is ultimately his own responsibility. Nat represented the chance for Martin to become Christopher the Christ-bearer instead of Pincher, to become a face instead of a snarl, for his hands to link in prayer and not become lobster claws. . . . As with Macbeth, we are moved to wondering admiration at the determination of man to assert himself, even in a context that makes that assertion eternal folly. 40

From an eternal viewpoint, all the assertions of Pincher Martin's life were folly; all led up to the snarling refusal to die, to the projection of a survival on the stark and merciless rock, itself a projection of the memory of an aching tooth, as Golding has said. The image of the rock occurs many times in the story; this "tooth" tears and consumes Martin as he devoured the things and persons he encountered in life. The body he served while alive, the intelligence which bound him to logic even in agony and delirium, his memory and his conscience, all fought him in the end:

The bleakness of his solitude offers no security against introspection and, as his selfishness comes to comprehend the self it serves, his personality disintegrates. Inexorably, as he had eaten others, the rocky teeth in the sea eat him. He goes mad and dies during an apocalyptic storm, his vision tormented by the hallucinations engendered by fever and self-disgust. 41

Or at least he seems to die. Golding's main problem in Pincher Martin was to make Pincher's "life" on the rock realistic enough to be convincing, but at the same time to avoid making it so realistic that the reader could not accept the story's ending, the seaboots "gimmick."
The first he accomplished very successfully:

The raging index of the body's needs have rarely, I think,

41 John Peter, op. cit., p. 588.
been so intensely represented as in Pincher Martin. Every nerve of that racked, weathered, imperious flesh twangs its discord in the description of the castaway's condition. The mind withdraws and contemplates the body saved from the deep, its wounds, its pains, its hands like lobsters, its feet like far-off stones -- and cries, "I am intelligent!"
The basic irony of the book appears: for that corrupt soul we can predict only damnation; for that suffering body (in all its parts as we are) we can feel compassion.

The second he achieved by the "film-trailers" whereby Martin's past and character are revealed, and, more especially, by the "judgment scene"; it is these in particular that the re-examination of the story forced by its final sentence makes more significant. The mental films are more frequent as the story reaches the point where Martin seems heroic in his determination to live; they offset any tendency to admire his desperate resourcefulness, or to sympathize with his mental and physical torment. He is seen instead as a man of deliberately evil life, still clinging to his own self-will. The reader's distaste for him as a person parallels the disintegration of his body and mind.

This book seems to be constructed on a basis of parallel but related development of two antithetic themes, the heroic theme of survival against all odds and an anti-heroic theme that depends largely on the progressive consolidation of an adverse moral judgment in the reader's mind.

Our revulsion at Martin's egregious defiance is maintained by this mere man's likening himself to Atlas and Prometheus (p. 164), even to the Creator (p. 196); and by the vanity that his half-crazed posturings on the rock were worthy of background music by Tchaikovsky, Wagner, and Holst (p. 164). "I am intelligent," he had insisted (p. 32), but it is

43 Michael Quinn, op. cit., p. 252.
precisely by the use of his intelligence that Martin is basically evil. Lok and his fellow primitives died because they lacked intelligence. Pincher Martin, who inherited the intelligence of Tuami, suffered two deaths because of crimes committed by misuse of intelligence. His evil life, and therefore his fate, were his own deliberate choice: "I will not consider. I have created you and I can create my own heaven." "You have created it." The claws and the inexorable rock are Pincher's heaven.

Golding's echatology may be highly unorthodox, but his intention is clear. The novel says to us that"man's eternal destiny is ultimately his own responsibility," as Mr. Quinn put it; and the statement is one over-riding theme of Pincher Martin. But considered in the light of what we learned from Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors, the evil-doing Pincher is Man, and the crucial point of the story is not so much what Martin did as why he did it.

Pincher Martin, the modern Tuami fully aware of the evil of his life, was so burdened with guilt that the incidents from his past which rose to his consciousness during his ordeal were almost exclusively those which he knew to be morally wrong, those by which he acquired guilt. Even with his wavering sanity thus haunted, Pincher continued to refuse to accept responsibility for his past deeds. This prolongation of his lifelong attitude, his adamat refusal to accept death, or to "consider now," are all consistant with his rejection of Nathaniel's offer to teach him the technique "of dying into heaven."

Mr. Golding is saying, it seems, that Pincher's evil is essentially
but one thing: his vicious self-interest; his continuous, unwavering drive for self-gratification. Conversely, therefore, it is the exclusion of love of anything but himself. To the final second of the "judgment scene," Pincher remained what he had been in life, as earlier he had ironically recognized, "I am who I was" (p. 131). The darkness of Pincher's life was this lack of love of either man or God; and the most overpowering of the many ironies of the story is that in the end he could not love even the self he catered to in life. A colossal selfishness such as this is adequately recompensed in the grimly ironic nemesis of Golding's solution: the self-worshipping self which by its own choice remains alone for eternity can no longer serve self when all else is stripped away. Rarely in fiction has either irony or nemesis been so thoroughly exploited.

Pincher Martin's first name, Christopher, is symbolic, as is his Navy nickname: Martin bore Christ at least in the sense that he was a Christian, but in this novel he represents modern Christian man fallen anew from grace, "fallen more than most," as Golding deliberately depicted him, making "Christopher" an additional point of irony. Golding confuses Christian theology by having Martin undergo a period of probation after death, and by giving him a choice of judgment in his own case, but there is no mistaking the source of the novel's "judgment scene."

The Golding theme of evil in human nature here moves towards identification with man's fallen nature in the Christian sense. If it is this aspect of man's appalling ignorance of his own nature that M. Golding is

44 See "The Meaning of It All," p. 10.
trying to dispel by his novels, then no one who knows today's world will deny its reality nor the necessity of Golding's mission.

The character of Pincher Martin is, of course, the most strongly thematic element in the novel. The whole story is Pincher; until the final chapter (for 201 of 208 pages!), no other persons are present except by means of Pincher's agonized recollections, and then they serve only to reveal in more detail what he is. In other words, the novel comprises a rare union of characterization and theme; rare in fiction, that is, no longer rare in Golding. What Pincher is (and what Jack and Roger, Ralph and Simon, Tuami and the other New Men, all are), is what Golding wants to say; and Pincher, we recall vividly now, is an Everyman trying to cling to life, to self, to innate evil. Evil, guilty, Everyman-Pincher, says Golding in this fascinating and disturbing story, is part of all of us. Simon's stammered truth is powerfully exemplified in Pincher Martin. If Pincher seems at times, like Milton's Satan, to be too heroic to die, it is a bonus of Golding's fine craft. The story is not merely a memorable account of heroic endurance: it is primarily a picture of Man with his evil dominating all else in him. The novel is a thematic tornado.

III

From the boys on the coral island who exemplified the evil in man's nature, to Tuami and his tribe who sensed but did not understand their own evil, to Pincher Martin who refused to admit it, William Golding moved on to Samuel Mountjoy, who acknowledged the corruption of his nature and tried to identify it through its effects in his life. He is the
hero of the 1959 novel, *Free Fall*. This last novel carries on where Pincher Martin left off, in that a logical step after depicting a man who refused to face the reality of his evil life is to show the life of one who admits his wrongdoing.

Samuel Mountjoy is a successful London painter who, like Pincher Martin, reviews his life in a series of flashbacks, but in more detail than was realistically possible for Pincher. In fact, *Free Fall* is a book-length soliloquy or meditation built from flashbacks. Mountjoy is researching his whole past to determine the moment when a "wrong use of freedom" cost him his freedom. Each section of flashback recalls a major incident in his life; they follow in order of their importance to Mountjoy, rather than in chronological sequence. At the end of his examination of each incident he asks himself if it were what caused his loss: "And still I ask myself: 'Well, there?' and myself answers: 'No, not there!'" (p. 70); "Here, then?" "No, not here" (p. 132).

Samuel Mountjoy, like Jack and Roger, Tuami and Pincher, is intelligent and guilty. The difference in his case is that he is aware of his evil and feels the burden of his guilt. The strenuous, deliberate procedure of recalling his past in full detail is occasioned as much by his guilt as by his imagined loss of freedom:

Mountjoy's guilt centers around his treatment of a young woman, whom he has seduced and abandoned; in the last scenes of the novel there is a terrible confrontation, where he finds her hopelessly mad, as she has been for the seven years since his departure. The relation with Beatrice requires that he re-examine his descent from a stubborn innocence that survived a slum childhood and the protection of a neurotic priest into the hard
egocentricity that he found in himself as a young Communist and a young lover. 45

Mr. Price's statement goes to the heart of the matter of Sammy Mountjoy's self-recremation, though this incident is but one of the several he recalls for examination. However, before we examine its long-range effects on him, and evaluate its contribution to the theme of Free Fall, we must first consider some other aspects of the novel, if only to avoid recapitulation later.

In its barest outline, the story is simple. Sammy Mountjoy is born to a prostitute mother; he never knows his father. With his slatternly mother he lives at first in an almost incredible slum, where his upbringing is haphazard, his training negligible. His boyhood adventures include trespassing in the garden of a large private home, sneaking onto an airfield to watch planes, and desecrating the altar of a church. The last incident leads to his adoption, after his mother's death; by a neurotic vicar with the strange name of Mr. Watts-Watt; and a move from the horrible slum of his childhood to a better social and educational environment. Eventually his talent for art leads to his going to college. There he meets again a girl he had gone to school with some years before, Beatrice Ifor; he falls in love with her, and, after having an affair with her, and dallying briefly with Communism, he goes to war. He eventually marries another woman much more his intellectual and emotional match than was the hapless Beatrice. They are happy in all things except for Sammy's nagging examination of his past. As the novel ends,

and he resolves his mental conflict as much as circumstances make possible, Sammy is a well known painter.

With Free Fall, Mr. Golding modifies somewhat the severity of the isolation in which he hitherto placed his protagonists. In contrast to Pincher Martin's rock, the isolation in this novel is almost nominal: during World War II, Mountjoy spends and indefinite period in a Nazi war prison. The camp is to him what the monstrous rock was to Pincher; that is, a situation in which enforced idleness turns the mind in upon itself, and in which long-repressed guilt feelings surface to torment the evil-doer. In Free Fall, the isolation is offset for the reader by the continuous flashbacks to various strata of London society of the last thirty years:

Structurally, Free Fall is disciplined and sufficiently compact to exhibit a simple and orderly story method. The consistent soliloquy device recalls and sifts four major areas of Sammy's past to find answers to the questions, where, how, did he lose his freedom (pp. 4-5). One review article summarized the four areas as follows:

The narrator tells us his early history, before he lost his freedom and his innocence, for eighty pages; then jumps a few years, to describe his cruelty and compulsion in a love affair, after he had lost that freedom, for fifty pages; then fifty pages more about the experience of torture as a prisoner of war which reduced him to self contempt, returned him to God, and started this process of self-interrogation; then forty pages on the crucial intervening period of adolescence, the influences on him of science and religion, and the decision to rebel against his better self which, he realizes, lost him his freedom.

In the actual chronology of Sammy’s life, therefore, the fourth and last flashback would have occurred as the second; but the episodes with Beatrice overshadowed earlier memories and blinded him to the root cause of his guilt and sense of lost freedom.

It is quite possible that Free Fall grew more directly out of Pincher Martin than anyone has yet suspected. The flashback technique common to both novels makes it very easy to identify the one protagonist with the other; and certainly the compulsion to self-gratification in the affair with Beatrice is even more typical of Pincher than it is of Sammy. Mountjoy moreover, is as clearly a modern pagan of the post-Christian era as was Martin: modern fallen manbewildered by the human condition, and bedevilled by his state of freedom with responsibility, sinfulness followed by remorse. The Miltonic allusion in the book’s title hints powerfully that Sammy Mountjoy unknowingly mourns for a lost paradise as much as he bemoans guilt and lost freedom:

Whose fault?  
Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. 47

It is something of a paradox that as theme in Golding’s fictions becomes more evident, its each successive vehicle becomes more complex. A paradox of Free Fall itself is that while a relatively simple story outline may be extracted from it, and its carefully arranged, four-layer structure an obvious and most useful frame for a critical study, yet its

47 Paradise Lost, III, 96 - 99.
complexities are altogether enormous. The autobiographical monologue skillfully delays revealing just what it is that festers in Mountjoy's mind, although he calls it a loss of freedom; he is made humanly to follow false leads in his search. For instance, it is not until the fourth episode that he is allowed to realize that his guilt does not stem from the affair with Beatrice, a realization that began with his imprisonment in Germany, "... which reduced him to self-contempt, returned him to God, and started this self-interrogation," as Mr. Green expressed it.

His self-interrogation slowly and painfully brings home to Sammy that his childhood in Rotten Row with his boozy, unmarried Ma preceded his loss, and his affair with Beatrice came after it; it was an effect, not a cause. His preoccupation with sex as his "root of infection" long delayed the solution he sought. The enervating confrontation with the insane Beatrice is possible only because he has admitted and surmounted his guilt; in facing her he is holding a final confrontation with himself. He is now realizing that there really was no "decision freely made that cost me my freedom" (p. 7). Golding made it not a clear-cut decision but a gradual development of Sammy's character as a specific exemplar of fallen humanity, unable to escape an inheritance of proneness.

48 See Ian Gregor and Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "The Strange Case of Mr. Golding and His Critics," for a thorough analysis of this story, particularly of its opening and conclusion, and of Sammy's preoccupation with sex. This article is also helpful regarding the traumatic experience Mountjoy undergoes in the prison broom-closet.
to evil. Samy Mountjoy, too, is an inheritor; and he suffers in his
search until he recognizes what he has inherited. Sammy's loss,
according to R. W. B. Lewis, is the same one that

Mr. Golding's literary contemporaries have pointed to as
the defining quality of modern man—a loss that feels like
the appalling presence of death in the individual conscious-
ness. And as Mountjoy goes spiralling back in memory over
his life, from the first slum-child sensations to a climactic
nightmare in a Nazi prison camp, what he uncovers is not
merely a loss of moral energy. It is, rather, a loss of con-
tact altogether with the very reality of the moral world, the
world of free choice and the only world in which the word
"good" (or the word "evil", for that matter) has the slight-
est relevance. Somehow, somewhere, Mountjoy has simply
shut himself out of that world, and shut himself inside the
other more palpable world where cleverness operates, and
one manipulates persons and calculates chances. 49

It is Pincher Martin's world again, we quickly realize; and Sammy has
to come to know it before his redemption is possible. At the novel's
end he has begun again to know the moral world; to him its

substance was a kind of vital morality, not the relationship
of a man to remote posterity nor even to a social system,
but the relationship of individual man to individual man --
once an irrelevance but now seen to be the forge in which
all change, all value, all life is beaten out into a good or
bad shape. (p. 189).

Sammy's recognition of man's responsibility to man, his re-intro-
duction to the moral world, saved him from the fate of Pincher Martin;
saved him likewise from the self-delusion, the moral-immorality of the
life of his former teacher, Miss Pringle. "For that woman had achieved
an unexpected kind of victory; she had deceived herself completely, and
now she was living in only one world" (p. 252). Rowena Pringle long ago

49 "Golding's Original, Searching Novel," The New York
had made her choice and did not know it.\footnote{Miss Pringle is a Golding exemplar of humanity’s evil informing the person of a woman. She taught religion, but without applying its principles to her own life; she was narrow-minded, vengeful, and without charity. She re-appears, with her name changed and in a new role, in a Golding short story, "Miss Pulkinhorn." See \textit{Encounter}, XV (August, 1960), p. 27-32.} Sammy made his by choosing to be like his schoolfellow, Phillip Arnold, who had an uncanny instinct for using other people; even at seven years he was a Pincher. Thus Sammy used Beatrice: Sammy is ‘\textit{mount joy}, mons veneris, as Gregor \footnote{"The Strange Case . . . . . .", p. 119.} and Kinkead-Weekes suggest; and his deliberate pursuit of evil was the choice that cost him his freedom. Parodying Milton again, Golding likens him to Satan: "Musk, shameful and heady, be thou my good" (p. \footnote{Cf. \textit{Paradise Lost}, IV, 106-108.} 232). It took the peculiar terror of the Nazi broom closet to make Sammy recognize his evil choice, to give him the self-knowledge he yearned for. He then could once again see himself sitting on his bicycle waiting for a traffic light, on his way to try to make a first contact with Beatrice; and choosing evil by not heeding his inner promptings or the symbolic red light.

James Gindin summarizes the choice, its origin and result, as follows:

\begin{quote}
Finally, Sammy localizes his loss of freedom in his early decision to pursue Beatrice at whatever cost. He had, while at school, drawn a picture of her and given it to one of his less talented friends to hand in as his own. The picture
\end{quote}
Sammy's sacrifice was made greedily, without counting the cost, it was not until years later that he remembered the second half of the parting words of his headmaster on the last day at his old school:

"I'll tell you something which may be of value. I believe it to be true and powerful—therefore dangerous. If you want something enough, you can always get it provided you are willing to make the appropriate sacrifice. Something, anything. But what you get is never quite what you thought and sooner or later the sacrifice is always regretted." (p. 235).

Sammy Mountjoy's free yielding to the way of Philip Arnold and Pincher Martin is the strongest thematic overtone in Free Fall; his choice of evil at any cost led eventually to his self-interrogation, and became thereby the chord unifying the various elements of this symphonic novel. Theme is the bond of unity between the flashback episodes and the sections of straight narrative. The emphasis throughout on Sammy's search makes Free Fall even more discernibly a fiction planned to carry a preconceived theme, perhaps more so than

any of its three predecessors. With it Mr. Golding may have reached a plateau in his almost missionary effort to convince modern man that man must know himself better.

In a novel as intricately conceived and as complex as Free Fall, perhaps only theme could dominate other elements of the fiction. In a sense it makes the mythical element of the book outweigh the fiction; the examination of Sammy as Man, in other words, is what determines what and how Golding wrote: it directs the sequence of the episodes, accounts for the emphasis on freedom lost through sin and guilt. As also is very evident in Pincher Martin, the mythical role of the protagonist explains why for so much of the story the reader is exercised with the inner struggles of the man, the mental agonies, the search for cause and motive, the self-reproach, the quality of Man in Pincher and Sammy.

It is not relevant in this study to give a detailed account of the complexities of Free Fall, but something must be said to convey an adequate idea of just how much, in a sense, theme had to contend with. There is, for example, the flamboyant, evocative, and poetic prose, suggestive rather than assertive. The opening paragraph best exemplifies it, though in almost every few pages there is similar passage. This first paragraph seems to echo the poetry of Dylan Thomas in one line and of Gerard M. Hopkins in another; it has overtones of The Apocalypse, camouflages a

54 See, for example, pp. 88, 123-124, 166-167, 186-187, for passages of similar poetic and evocative quality.
Graham Greene title, hints at the self-preoccupation theories of Freudian psychology; and, according to Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes, cryptically or symbolically contains the whole story in the one part. Martin Price's comment about stylistic virtuosity in Free Fall seems justified: "Golding seems like a card-sharp who plays the more skilfully for the card in his sleeve, and who must use it finally, not because his game requires it, but his temperament." Even when he is not being deliberately ambiguous, Golding's prose is rarely matched by today's novelists; a passage to remember occurs in the mop-closet episode, when Sammy wildly imagines there is a snake coiled up in the center of the floor (pp. 177-178); and one does not forget sentences like, "Perhaps reading my story through again I shall see the connection between the little boy, clear as spring water, and the man like a stagnant pool" (p. 9).

The Golding staple of myth-making is perhaps somewhat more self-consciously applied in Free Fall than in the other stories; at any rate, its commingling of fiction and myth is more easily discerned. The fiction, as was shown, may be extracted and briefly summarized; and the architecture of episode and mixed chronology, time-shifts within episodes, straight narration and interior monologue, though complex in variety, may be observed in the whole novel as a complicated skeleton would show in detail on an X-ray plate. The elements of myth, though, are more

56 Op. cit., p. 624
elusive, and more closely allied in function and meaning with the novel's piled-up imagery and symbolism.

Sammy's main role is allegorical, it may be said, in that he exemplifies a preconception which the novel evolves: the life-cycle he re-scans, like the guilt-prompting recollections that erupted from the subconscious of Pincher Martin, supports and rounds off a stage of Golding's perceptions about an ineffable savagery in man's nature. As in the other novels, allegory and fiction are interwoven in Free Fall; allegorical intent, of course, supports thematic implication. The fiction, as Ian Gregor says,

is ordinary enough and separated from a "life and times" novel only by the delicate observation of its detail and the superb assurance with which it is told. But for Mr. Golding, this fiction is only the means, like the children on the south sea island or neanderthal man, which enables him to explore his real theme--the nature of man, which remains evil until it recognizes its own depravity. 57

Through the whole of his "second life" Pincher Martin struggled against a recognition of this depravity; Sammy Mountjoy's story begins where Pincher left off: Sammy wanted desperately not only to recognize this depravity, but to identify it as well, to know what in himself made him do the things by which he acquired his sense of freedom lost. In other words, Sammy's search directs the reader to Golding's theme; and theme in turn is the motivating factor in Golding's detailing of the

58 Ibid.
search. "To Sammy, it is made appallingly plain where his lust has led. If, however, his freedom has been lost in the wanton assertion of self, a new freedom has been gained in the regenerate insight. The terrible vision of himself is now complete . . . 58 and Golding's vision of man has, by Sammy's insight, acquired a new dimension.

Allegory and myth are likewise interwoven in this novel; or, at least, there is more than a suggestion of myth in some of the story's details. Sammy says he lives "... on Paradise Hill, ten minutes from the station"; he belongs in paradise, he realizes that he is still not far from Rotton Row.

In the world of myth, Sammy's childhood is lit by intimations of immortality. There is his mother imagining that his father might have been the Prince of Wales, and his playmate Evie declaring that her uncle was a duke. The light of this world gradually fades, to be replaced by that of the devil-may-care innocence of Johnny Spragge and the calculating evil of Philip Arnold . . .

The Dante-Beatrice legend makes myth of the early relationships of Sammy and Beatrice if, when for a moment he captured her solemn, ethereal beauty in the drawing he lost to Philip and never afterwards could repeat. Even after he abandoned her, Sammy could not fully explain nor fully escape the first fine careless rapture of their early love. In her sad-dog devotion to him, Golding perhaps parodies the devotion of Dante, as the legend has it, to the memory of his once-seen Beatrice. The Beatrice Sammy painted disappeared forever with his failure to love and

58 Ibid.
59 Op cit., p. 965.
to communicate with her as at first he fondly hoped to; the woman he
came to know was not the myth his youthful ardour created.

A myth of horror is built around the prison camp incident which
later gave Sammy his moment of truth about himself. When Sammy
burst forth from his closet-cell, like Lazarus from the grave, the
Gestapo officer removed with a few words of broken English the over-
lapping layers of neurotic terror Sammy's horror-laden imagination
had developed. His disenchantment later completed by reflection alone and
palely loitering in tears in the prison yard, Sammy thereafter sought within
himself for the explanation of his loss.

Sammy's guilt is revealed against the Miltonic myth of paradise
lost; but Sammy as Satan never defies God as did Pincher. Ironic
reversal mixes with the myth, for the Sammy of Rotten Row was innocent
as he wandered through its squalid by-ways with Evie (whose name,
like Mountjoy and Beatrice, is not likely accidental); while long after he
has "... seen the flake of fire fall" in the prison yard, the adult,
post-pentecostal Sammy lives "on Paradise Hill." "Standing between the
understood huts, among jewels and music, I was visited by a flake of
fire, miraculous and pentecostal; and fire transmuted me, once and
for ever" (p. 188).

The myth remains associated with Biblical reference in the scene
in which the prison psychiatrist questions Sammy; Dr. Halde's propositions
are likened to the temptation of Christ by Satan (p. 147):

Interrogated by a Gestapo psychologist, Sammy is made to see himself as a man who neither believe in the Spirit, nor in disbelief. Therefore the temptation to betray himself and his fellow men is a parody of the temptation of Christ. Christ could be tempted because he could say 'yes' or 'no'; could refer temptations to standards good or bad. Sammy can be neither a villain nor a hero because he does not know what he believes, does not know what he knows. He simply cannot answer, so he is thrown into pitch darkness into a cell in which there is only himself. In his terror he uses his imagination to torture himself, and what the torturing imagination reveals is the true nature of the mind that imagines.60

Imagery and symbolism in Free Fall mainly support the paradisal themes; there are many veiled and overt references to gardens, falls from innocence, punishing angels, and loss of freedom. Names are significant, and fit into the pattern of myth and theme (the best examples we have already seen). There are, too, numerous independent images, to coin a term for those which serve one purpose and are abandoned: the cat run over by a car prefiguring the despoiled Beatrice; hats standing for attitudes, professions, or beliefs; musk symbolizing sex; and the pitifully retarded Minnie prefiguring the equally pitiful, insane Beatrice of the later novel. Golding's symbolism in general is traditionally Christian, revolving around the general theme of the fall of man; in this sense, at least, he is primarily a religious novelist.

The symbolism of his novels is, in essence, theoretical. Both Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors are

60 Ian Gregor and Mark Kinkead-Weekes, op. cit., p. 120.
concerned with the primal loss of innocence. Pincher Martin, as the last chapter proves, explicitly concerns the sufferings of a dead man who has created his own Purgatory. It is a moral axiom of Golding’s that man, and man alone, introduced evil into the world: a view which is hardly separable from the doctrine of Original Sin. 61

_Free Fall_ carries on the process; it extends the theme of a loss of primal innocence and man’s consequent evil-prone nature to include the idea of redemption; or, at least, the idea of a possible salvation once the evil nature recognizes and admits its own evil. Appropriately, therefore, Sammy’s confrontation is not with God, as was Pincher Martin’s; it is with himself. Golding invests it in the prison yard episode with a pentecostal symbolism of new knowledge—a new faith also to face the future with the confidence which should accompany the new insight of Sammy-Man into his own nature.

_Free Fall_ is most lucid and most appealing where either the fiction predominates (as in the scenes of Sammy’s youth—the schoolroom scenes especially—and young manhood), or where the myth is strongest (as in the broom-closet trauma or the prison-yard moment of truth). In both modes, though, Sammy’s self-searching, the bloodstream of the story, is never for a moment abandoned. Sammy never leaves the stage, never escapes Golding’s spotlight; for Sammy is Man, the main character in all of Golding’s work. When it dawns on Sammy that he lost his freedom when he chose evil as a

61. Peter Green, _op. cit._, p. 63
way of life, he becomes another of Mr. Golding's "public voices" speaking for his creator. Free Fall, no less than its predecessors, is a thematic novel. It is not for us to ask why Golding, since he writes with a mission of removing man's ignorance about his own nature, makes it at times very difficult to extricate his message from the commingling of myth and allegory and fable that is now recognized as a staple of Golding's fiction.

Free Fall, therefore, stabilizes the thematic burden Mr. Golding assumed in Lord of the Flies by carrying it on to a recognizable resting place. Thematically, the connection between it and the previous stories is a compact and evident one; and the fact that this novel moves away from the device of isolation makes its findings all the more valid and acceptable in our time. Its major incidents have the quality of archetypes of modern experiences: a sensitive man confused about human responsibility; a personal interrogation to establish that responsibility; a wartime internment; an episode with a woman (Beatrice, in the novel) put into a proper perspective only by distance, time and trauma; the role and problem of sex in a man's life. The fiction of Free Fall informs the myth; and the myth illustrates Golding's main thematic emphasis: man's fallen nature, the Miltonic theme of paradise lost through human fault.


63 This question is insistent in the major reviews currently appearing for Golding's fifth novel, The Spire.
CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS PARADISE REGAINED?

It is not easy to accept Mr. Golding as an apologist for Christian
dogma, for he is never as explicit as dogma. Nor is he overtly didactic,
for, as we have already insisted, the consummate artistry of his fiction
makes palatable and challenging what in a lesser artist would be obvious
sermonizing. Christian apologist he is, though, in effect if not fully so in
intention. The less specific theme of evil inherent in human nature, evident
in all the four novels we have studied, grows in the latter two into the
more precise one of fallen man and paradise lost; one which, if not
identifiable in detail with the Christian doctrine of original sin, at least
parallels it. In the light of what we can deduce from Free Fall and Pincher
Martin, Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors assume an introductory role
establishing the thematic concept now all but exclusively recognized as
a Golding property. As a French review expressed it, "L'homme, nous
rappelle M. Golding de façon aussi cruelle que frappante, est un être
tombé." 1

Man's ignorance of his own nature, it now seems, consists of
his being unaware of the universal human condition of being prone to evil, of
not seeing himself as Fallen Man: a creature capable of sin, and free of
will to commit it, but not free of culpability and guilt. Free Fall emphasizes

1 David Lodge, "Le Roman Contemporain en Angleterre," La Table
the freedom; **Pincher Martin** stressed the culpability and its effects if denied through self-worship and pride. The earlier novels concentrated on the fact of an almost ineffable evil in man, the "darkness of man's heart" in Lord of the Flies, and the resulting endless dark future for man in The Inheritors.

All four novels concentrate man's attention on himself; they invite him to understand his own nature, to seek within himself for both the causes of his guilt and the source of his redemption. This preoccupation with the consequences to man himself of human behaviour, man's weaknesses and sin, make Mr. Golding's work resemble that of Graham Greene. Sammy Mountjoy, the self-seeker like his older sibling, Pincher Martin, has the process of his defection from early innocence (Samuel, "the chosen one of God") arrested by his internment and the opportunity it provides for him to evaluate himself. Sometimes his reflections during the process of soul-searching might have been conceived by Mr. Greene for the whisky priest, for Major Scobie, or for an adult Pinkie: "...

... since I record all this not so much to excuse myself as to understand myself I must add the complications which make nonsense again. At the moment I was deciding that right and wrong were nominal and relative, I felt, I saw the beauty of holiness and tasted evil in my mouth like the taste of vomit" (p. 226).

This study of William Golding's fiction has relied throughout on the novelist's own statements about his purpose and methods. These and the analyses by competent critics make it incontestable that with each book Golding set out to illustrate a specific theme which determined in advance
the direction of his plots and the qualities of his characters.

... Lord of the Flies, The Inheritors, Pincher Martin ... were deliberate and self-contained attempts to pinpoint a single target, a number of radar stations giving Golding the shape of what he wanted to fire at and the range. Free Fall is a frontal attack on a target long since determined. 2

John Wain's statement to Professor Kermode assumes without question that Golding is exemplifying a thesis in each of his novels; 3 and John Peter, treating the first three novels as fables, made the same assumption. 4

We might, with Margaret Walters and Mr. Peter, demur at this violation of the principle of l'art pour l'art—the temper of modern criticism is always to do so—but this would introduce at a late and inconvenient time a mostly irrelevant topic. Such objections in principle are all too often a matter of principle only; they must ignore many excellent factors of the work in order to sustain the principle. This, I feel, is the weakness of such broadsides as Miss Walters' statement on Lord of the Flies and Free Fall: "In each, the preconceived and controlling idea is too obviously preconceived and too obviously controlling. 5 The fact that such objections have been made, however, is grist to our mill: they object to what we are trying to show; namely, that in Mr. Golding's four

3 See Chapter I, p. 16.
novels, theme is the directing force, the element which gives to each story a meaning for our times, applicable to the dilemmas of modern man. However, Mr. Golding’s determination to dispel man’s "appalling ignorance of his own nature" does not, I contend, become in his fiction so obvious a force that the result is scarcely veiled didacticism. So to claim is to ignore the power and the glory of his work: his all but unique ability to combine many fictional elements, to integrate fiction and myth, symbolism and omniscient author and change of viewpoint, time-shifts, first-person narration and stream-of-consciousness interior monologue. So thoroughly is the integration accomplished that one academic critic credits Golding with re-inventing these techniques for himself; speaking of Golding’s "desperate technical resource," Frank Kermode wrote: "Sometimes this last power re-invents what others have done before, old devices labelled in textbooks: stream of consciousness, changing point of view, time-shifts." 6

The relevance of Mr. Golding’s fictional themes to our day cannot reasonably be questioned. Except in The Inheritors, the characters of his novels are people we can recognize in a world we can recognize (or at least from such a world before he isolates them for observation); they are particular persons in a general situation of our times, people whose emotions we can feel, whose thoughts we can understand, and with whose lives most moderns can identify. That is not to say that to expose the fact of man’s

inherent evil should be the sole occupation of today's novelists, nor is it so in practise; but to show the effects, in individual lives and on society, of the darkness of the human heart definitely is. The human duality of man at war with himself, and with society because of his personal conflict, is now almost a commonplace of fiction; from Nathaniel West's Miss Lonelyhearts, to Jack Kerouac's rebellious outsiders in America, and from Conrad's self-destructive Kurtz to Sillitoe's long-distance runner in Great Britain. Modern novels emphasize that man today is isolated and violent, and Mr. Golding takes up the evolving tradition to show why.

The violence of the fight to the death on the coral island, of the pre-historic inheritors, of the self-centered two lives of Pincher Martin, and of the anxiously self-questing Sammy Mountjoy, is the outward evidence of the inner conflict of man, who knows not why he resorts to violence. He does, says Mr. Golding in his stories, because he is fallen man who, until he knows the propensities of his own nature towards evil, cannot do otherwise.

The Bible has a word for it. In the Second Epistle of Saint Peter, it says that "the heavens will vanish with a crackling roar, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works thereof shall be burnt up." This, as we know, is no longer vision; it has become physics. The Divinity of the Bomb, not the Dove, broods over us. Against such an apocalyptic background the images of violence in modern fiction take on a new meaning.  

Two of Mr. Golding's novels have as their background the violence of World War II; the New Men violently exterminate the people in The Inheritors. Lord of the Flies presents a fictional expedient of some future nuclear


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war. The violence of man's world today, it seems, reappears in the violence of man to man, and of man to himself. Is this violence "one of man's responses to a universe which mystifies and frightens him?" Mr. Golding exposes the violence, and insists that man continues to be violent and evil because he does not know himself.

"How," asks Pincher Martin, "should a man not be mad?"

I will tell you what man is. He goes on four legs until Necessity bends the front end upright and makes a hybrid of him. The fingerprints of those hands are about the spine and just above the rump for proof if you want it. He is a freak, an ejected foetus robbed of his natural development, thrown out in the world with a naked covering of parchment, with too little room for his teeth and a soft bulging skull . . .(p. 190)

That is the voice of unredeemed, violent man, deprecating his own kind, cursing the evil nature he does not understand, seeking blindly for the cause of the war within him. Pincher, though, is not Golding's last word on man's nature. The regenerate Sammy Mountjoy, having had his dark night of the soul in the Nazi closet, having made adjustments and achieved recognitions that Pincher rejected, escaped the latter's madness and recourse to violence.

William Golding's world is peopled by troubled humans who are confused by the same dichotomy of man's nature that exercised the mind and soul of Saint Paul centuries ago: "The good which I will, I do not; the evil which I will not, that I do." Pincher might have found an answer to his cynical view of human life, and some solace for conscience in this pas-

8 Derek Stanford, op. cit., p. 36.

9 This passage echoes the words of the worldly-wise old emperor in Golding's play, The Brass Butterfly, and short story, "Envoy Extraordinary," on which the play is based. The short story passage reads: "...it has always seemed to me that some god found man on all fours, put a knee in the small of his back and jerked him upright."
sage of Romans; and Sammy Mountjoy, in tears in the yard of the prison camp, would have found in St. Paul's words an echo of his own feelings:

I am a thing of flesh and blood sold into the slavery of sin. My own actions bewilder me: what I do is not what I wish to do, but something which I hate. But if I do what I do not wish, I admit that the law is good. Meanwhile, my action does not come from me, but from the sinful principle that dwells in me. Of this I am certain, that no principle of good dwells in me, that is, in my natural self; praiseworthy intentions are always ready to hand, but I cannot find my way to the performance of them; it is not the good my will prefers, but the evil my will disapproves, that I find myself doing. . . . For I am delighted with the Law of God according to the inner man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and making me prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death? 10

This is not to say that Mr. Golding sees himself as a providential fugleman showing the rest of humanity how to march through life towards salvation. Golding's exhortation is simply "Know thyself": to this end he offers his own view of man, "in the hope that it may be something like the truth." His first four novels combine thematically to culminate in a view of man as expelled from paradise, fallen from primal innocence; but having survived in our day to a stage of his history at which he has forgotten what paradise meant. He is "a burning amateur, torn by the irrational and incoherent, violently seeking and self-condemned" (Free Fall, p. 5), in his struggle symbolized as the burning bush which is not consumed (the implication of Miss Pringle's lesson on Moses). Mr. Golding's themes are directing forces in his novels because he wants man to cease his violent search, to discover the radical cause of his

10 Romans, VII, 14-25.
self-condemnation by knowing his own nature, and facing himself in full admission and acceptance of this awesome knowledge of his condition.

Only in this knowledge and acceptance will there be for man any hope of self-redemption, any chance of regaining paradise.
This appendix comprises the full text of Mr. Golding's contribution to the symposium on "The Writer in His Age" in The London Magazine, IV (May, 1957), pp. 45-46. See footnote 17, p. 8 of this thesis.

A writer is a citizen with a vote, access to his MP, access to the correspondence columns of magazines, newspapers, and the BBC -- a citizen with the right to speak in Hyde Park if he wants to or feels he ought. Surely that gives him enough opportunities for non-professional engagement in current affairs? I should think that the Marxist idea of total engagement has been blown up, even in Russia. I am a citizen, a novelist, a schoolmaster. If my teaching of English grammar need not be aimed specifically at the prevention of capital punishment, why should my novels be?

So much for current affairs. The distinction between them and the general human background is vague; felt by the novelist rather than defined. But what is apparent to him--dare one say, "to him rather than to most"?--is that current affairs are only expressions of the basic human condition where his true business lies. If he has a serious, an Aeschylean, preoccupation with the human tragedy, that is only to say that he is committed to looking for the root of the disease instead of describing the symptoms. I can't help feeling that critics of this Aeschylean outlook are those who think they have an easy answer to all problems simply because they have never looked further than the rash appearing on the skin. They want Gulliver to declare himself for one end or other of the egg.

As for an awareness of recent discoveries in biology, astronomy, and psychology, it is a necessary part of any mind's equipment. But think of our extraordinary mixture of humility and hubris. The same mind which contains the whole universe -- I've no time to debate that one -- the same mind, decides that humanity is an irrelevant by-product and stands it firmly in one corner; thus declaring that the highest reach of the intellect is to prove the whole smaller than the part! No. To be aware of discoveries need not mean that we over-rate their importance--need not mean that we must picture our flesh under the electron microscope when our real job is to show it sub specie aeternitatis.

Are there novels, plays, or poems that could have been written any time during the last fifty years? I haven't come across any; the
verbal surface changes year by year. I suppose the question means more than that, though. Does it mean that the basic nature of man has changed in half a century? Surely the hydorgen bomb is only an efficient way of wiping out the other tribe—a pastime we've always been prone to? Surely discriminatory taxation wipes out one class, while technology and the expense account invent two others?

How serious is a writer? I am very serious. I believe that man suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own nature. I produce my own view in the hope that it may be something like the truth. I am fully engaged in the human dilemma, but see it as far more fundamental than a complex of taxes and astronomy.
William Golding has become one of the most controversial British novelists. His own view of the real meaning of his work is given in this unscripted discussion with Frank Kermode which was broadcast last month on the BBC's Third Programme. Golding's new novel will be published at the end of October.

KERMODE: I should like to begin, Golding, by talking about an article on your work which I know you liked which appeared in the Kenyon Review about a year ago. I think it says many amusing things about all your books but introduces a distinction between fable and fiction and puts you very much on the fable side. For example, for that in Lord Of The Flies you incline occasionally not to give a full-body presentation of people living and, so much as an illustration of a particular theme, would you accept this as a fair comment on your work?

GOLDING: Oh, yes. I think that a fable, is a much more profound and more significant thing than a fable. I do feel fable as being an invented thing on the surface whereas a myth is the same thing as the roots of things in the ancient sense of being the key to existence, the whole meaning of life, and explained in a whole.

Fables, I would regard as a tremendous compliment to myself would be if someone would substitute the word "myth" for "fable". Yes, but I think a myth, is a much profounder.

KERMODE: You're not primarily interested in giving the sort of body and pressure of lived life in a wide society; obviously not, because all the books have been written with either persons or societies, unnaturally isolated in some sense. It is legitimate to assume from that that you are concerned in this kind of extremity of solitariness.

GOLDING: Well, no, I don't think it is legitimate. My own feeling about it is that their isolation is a convenient one, rather than an unnatural one. Do you see what I mean?

KERMODE: Yes, I do see, but I'm not sure about the word "convenient" here. Convenient to you because you want to treat these children in the absence of grown-ups, is this what you mean?

GOLDING: Yes, I suppose so. You see it depends how far you regard intentions as being history, as the past. There's a point not really knowing what they are doing, not really knowing about teaching people; we both do it as our daily bread. Well, you see, perhaps, people are taught in the most intimate ways, you see, but my own immature boys I watch carefully and there does come a point which is very legible in their society at which you can only say, "That's absolute nonsense."

KERMODE: Yes, but may I introduce the famous Lawrence caveat here, "Never trust the teller, trust the tale ...

GOLDING: Oh. That's absolute nonsense. But of course the man who tells the tale if he has a tale worth telling will know exactly what he is about and this business of the narrator as a sort of starry-eyed inspired creature, dancing along, with his feet two or three feet above the surface of the earth, the whole business of the narrator's being all behind him, is nothing like the truth.

KERMODE: Well, I don't think it's necessary. What have you

GOLDING: I think the arbitrary checks that you talk about are nothing but the fruit of bitter experience of people ordered to do things that are just wrong and the human invention of evil will proceed, provided that certain quite arbitrary checks are given. Which simply because evil is a self-defined action, the human invention of evil will proceed, provided that certain quite arbitrary checks are given. Which simply because evil is a self-defined action, the human invention of evil will proceed, provided that certain quite arbitrary checks are given.

KERMODE: I think it's interesting to think of that explanation in connection with the Ballantyne treatment of...
the same theme. I don't know whether you would like to say just how far and how
ironically we ought to treat this connection.
GOLDING: I don't think, fairly deeply, but again, not ironically in the back
but in almost a compassionate sense. You see, really, I'm getting at myself in this.
While writing The Inheritors I discovered a kind of fool, you remember when you were a boy, a
small boy, how you lived on that island with yourself and how this book grew out of it.
(Simon, by the way, Simon called Peter, you see. It was worked out very carefully in
every possible way this novel.) I said to myself, you see, I'm being grown up, you are
adult, it's taken you a long time to become adult, but now you've got there you can
see that people are not like that; they would not behave like that if they were
God-fearing English gentlemen, and they went to an island like that. Their savagery
would not be found in natives on an island. As like as not they would find savages who
were kindly and uncomplicated and that the complications of the three white men on the
island itself. It is a really big connection for me now.
KERMOUE: In fact it's a kind of black mass version of Ballantyne, isn't it?
GOLDING: Well, I don't really think I ought to say that, I think I mean you mean. No, no, I disagree with it entirely.
I think it is, in fact, a realistic view of the Ballantyne situation.
The Inheritors
KERMOUE: May I, to change the subject, ask you whether there is anything in the
genesis of The Inheritors comparable to the
position that Ballantyne has in the development
of Lord Of The Flies?
GOLDING: Yes, there's the brash optimism that H. G. Wells exhibits in The Outline Of
History, my third book, an outline of history covered
the sea-bashed body of Pincher Martin.
GOLDING: Yes, there's the brash optimism that H. G. Wells exhibits in The Outline Of
History, my third book, an outline of history
which Wells' Outline Of History played a great part in my life because my father
was a rationalist, and the Outline Of History was
something he took neat. Well now, Wells' Outline Of History is the usual conscious
gospel, in excelsis I should think. I got this
from my father, and by and by it seemed to me to be too neat and too slick. And when
I re-read it as an adult I came across his picture of Neanderthal man, our immediate
precursors. It's a great brute, a great brutish
creatures who possibly were the basis of the
mythological bad man, whatever he may be, the
demon man of all time, the kind of place
just absurd. What we're doing is externalising
our own inside. We're saying, "Well, he must have been a brute, he must have been a
thing that you identify yourself with and then
at the end I'm going to put you where you are,
looking at it from outside.

Technical Innovation
KERMOUE: Would it be true to say that the technical innovation in one of your book
could have been done if there had been no experimental novels written in the last half
century? I have about them: that they are directly out of the
nature of the theme and the nature of the
mind that's treating it. You can say of some
novels that they haven't been written before
Ulysses, but you couldn't say that of yours, could you?
GOLDING: Well, I may have had a very little genesis outside myself. That to a
large extent I've cut myself off from conventional
literary life, I've gained a sense by it that I may have lost in
another.
KERMOUE: Now, you once wrote in the Radio Times a most remarkable article
about Pincher Martin, your third book; remarkable because I can't think of another
decade of a novelist trying to explain so clearly what that programme of the book was.
This is not a modern habit.
GOLDING: I spoke of Pincher Martin himself as suffering a fate through his own freedom
of choice, which was not overtly theological (this was the expression you used) because
we find that he will either have devils and so he had kind of purgatory and a kind of
hell which were not theological since the
book, but rather a particular pattern but he had it all the same.
KERMOUE: My point is really this, you see: that you meet a Christian, he thinks that
you can die and he will either have devils with three-pronged forks and forks of
to hell which we're no longer seeing the situation as we've been seeing it
throughout the book. In The Inheritors, for
example, we suddenly begin to see through
of the eyes of the new men and not the old ones,
or through the eyes of the Naval Officers in
Lord Of The Flies, or your or your book
covered the sea-bashed body of Pincher
Martin. Now this seems to me to be an entirely
original device but it is one which is not
unnatural, has been published.
GOLDING: I think it is reasonable to infer that it has something
to do with your way of going
backwards and development of the germ
from which you start.
KERMOUE: I see, or I bring myself to see, out of this, I think, of a particular
way. If it is the way everybody else sees them, then there is no point in writing a
book. If it seems to differ from the accepted
point of view, there is a point in writing the
book because it might at least be a talking
point or it could be a contribution to other
people's view of reality.
KERMOUE: Surely, the only way in which you can bring out that contrast is to put a
perhaps exaggerated and sometimes even
heroic view of the three white men on the
island. It is a really big connection for me now.

Pincher Martin
GOLDING: Yes, but a lot of people go into church and say, we have left undone
those things which we ought to have done, and we've done those things which we ought
not to have done, and so on. They find this perfectly credible, perfectly understandable,
and that is more or less what Pincher Martin is to me. I knew that there was a paradox
in it, but I don't understand the paradox.
KERMOUE: Now here is Christopher Hadley Martin
drowning in the sea. On page 2 he will drown
then this is what I think happened to him
You see, he is so involved in this idea of
something as unprecise, or apparently
unspecific, as what happened.
KERM: There is a similar point that arises out of Pincher Martin: I think it's
inestimable that one should treat him as a
particular person, but, of course, there is the
aspect of it, which you yourself would stress.
GOLDING: He's fallen man, yes. He can't escape that. Yes, he can't escape
that.
GOLDING: Very much fallen — he's fallen
more than me. In fact, I went out of my
way to say to Pincher Martin as much as I could by
making him the most unpleasant, the nastiest
thing I could think of, and I was very interested to see how critics all over the
place would say, "Well yes, we are like that."
I was really rather pleased.
WILLIAM GOLDING IN PRINT: Free Fall will be published by Faber and Faber.
Pincher Martin (15s.); The Inheritors (1s. 6d.). both published by Faber and Faber.
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