

THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM GOLDING

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by

GARY E. MILLER, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Gary Earle Miller, B.A. (McMaster University)

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This thesis examines the four novels written to date by the English author, William Gerald Golding. It considers the author's use of allegory, and studies the ideas which he presents in his books -- often through this device -- and their implications. It seeks to evaluate Golding's skill as a novelist by looking at his style and the structure of his works, judging his originality, and trying to estimate his contribution to modern English literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Few modern readers and critics would dispute the assertion that William Golding deserves a place among the noteworthy writers of the last decade, but as to exactly what that position should be, no two people seem able to agree. Each new review praises reservedly or damns conditionally, adding merely another personal opinion to the controversy, so that Golding's status has now become like the result of the hypothetical Dempsey-Louis fight. One reason for the uncertainty is that so far criticism of Golding has been limited almost entirely to reviews of individual books, a fact which has caused a certain myopia about the body of his work. What seems to be needed -- although it may be too early for such an undertaking -- is a definitive study of all of Golding's writing.

This dissertation, however, is somewhat more limited in scope. It offers a fairly detailed look at the four novels which Golding has so far published: Lord of the Flies (1954), The Inheritors (1955), Pincher Martin (1956), and Free Fall (1959). But it mentions only incidentally the short story Envoy Extra-Ordinary (1956), which was transformed into a play, The Brass Butterfly (1958), and it ignores completely the considerable body

of poetry which Golding wrote before turning to prose and the many articles on history, geography, and travel, for magazines such as Holiday, which have made up all of his recent output.¹

The aim of this paper is threefold: first, to examine Golding's technique; second, to study and to analyze the ideas which he presents; third, to evaluate the success with which he communicates these ideas. This dissertation has, therefore, a tripartite form. Chapter One considers Golding's use of allegory.² Chapter Two looks at his view of the nature of man and his ideas on such subjects as morals, religion, society, politics, and the perennial controversy about free will and determinism. Chapter Three tries to judge the effectiveness with which these themes are presented, to analyze the structure of Golding's novels, and to examine critically his style; it also attempts (audaciously) to make some predictions about Golding's ultimate place in English literature.

The method of presentation used in this paper is a thematic rather than a chronological one. This approach is obviously more difficult since it necessitates first the construction of a logical though arbitrary framework in which the material may be presented, but it is a more rewarding way of

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For an example see William Golding, "Advice to a Nervous Visitor", Holiday, XXXIV, no. 1 (July, 1963), 42-43, 93-97, 125-126.

²

Certain details of Golding's life may be relevant. For a brief biography, see Appendix A.

looking at the four novels as it tends to link rather than to separate the four books.

Two terms are inevitably employed in this paper which may require definition, or at least discussion. They are, symbol and allegory. C. S. Lewis considers the two words to be almost diametrically opposed:

The difference between the two can hardly be exaggerated. The allegorist leaves the given -- his own passions -- to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real.³

But he is writing of another medium -- poetry -- and of an earlier time -- the Middle Ages. A more modern and less polemic definition of symbolism might be the practice of using a word or group of words, usually referring to an object or an action, which, besides its literal meaning, has a number of extra meanings or connotations, like echoes, so that the presence of a number of symbols enriches the texture of a literary work by their subtle interrelationships. A red rose, for example, suggests a rare, delicate beauty by its appearance; blood, passion, or guilt by its colour; and the House of Lancaster by historical association. The action of casting down a mail gauntlet symbolizes a challenge and carries with it the whole idea of the medieval social code of

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C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 45

chivalry. In Golding's novels the conch shell (in Lord of the Flies) and the "twig" or poisoned arrow (in The Inheritors) are symbols. This definition has the advantage of making a symbol merely a part or aspect of allegory, and this conception is more in keeping with modern thinking. Edwin Honig, who says that allegory "is symbolic in method", agrees with the above definition:

The symbol in allegory means something both literally and as a trope -- that is, as a thing and as a quality of that thing, analogically conceived -- before it is understood as being used and developed with other kinds of trope in an extended fiction.⁴

"But allegory is one of the most difficult of critical terms to define."⁵ In medieval times the word would have been just as difficult to define, but its characteristics were more clearly established. An allegory was a synthesis of two traditions, the homiletic and the erotic or courtly love tradition.⁶ From the former came the multitude of personifications, from the latter (replacing the Garden of Love setting) the journey or quest or life structure. Because meanings and correspondences were firmly fixed, the medieval allegory could

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Edwin Honig, Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 113.

⁵

Ellen Douglass Leyburn, Satiric Allegory: Mirror of Man (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 2.

⁶

C.S. Lewis, who presents this idea in his Allegory of Love (p. 259), also maintains that "the oldest kind of allegory is the moral or homiletic allegory; . . . erotic allegory had detached itself from it"

become extremely complex. Also, because of the presence of personified abstractions such as the Vices and Virtues, the form lent itself to the teaching of moral lessons. Ellen Leyburn discusses this point:

The proliferation of personified abstractions in medieval works is probably responsible for the gradual linking of personification with the definition of allegory The strong conviction of the Renaissance writers that allegory is a decoration of unpalatable truth, the sugar coating of the pill, seems a direct outgrowth of just one branch of its use during the Middle Ages. The medieval church had made a variety of uses of allegory. . . . It [allegory] has come to be considered as morally useful, its function being purely didactic. Aesthetic considerations are entirely subordinate. What charm the surface image has is judged by its effectiveness in charming the reader into truth.⁷

Here she raises an objection which seems to challenge Lewis's idea:

. . . the naming of an abstraction is contrary to the essential conception of concealment which is basic in allegory.⁸

One of the difficulties of defining allegory is now discernible: it is a form which evolved over a long period of time -- and

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Leyburn, op. cit., p. 3

8

Ibid., p. 4.

which is still evolving, or at least altering -- so that any definition gradually becomes incorrect through obsolescence.

This is not an unusual phenomenon. If one could ask a Greek sports enthusiast in the centuries before Christ the distance of the marathon, he would be told (the Greek equivalent of) twenty-two miles, the approximate distance run by Pheidippides from the Plain of Marathon to Athens in 490 or 491 B.C. If one were to put the same question to a modern sports fan,⁹ he would be told 26 miles 385 yards. Which is correct? Both are, for each would be giving the answer which is correct in his own time.

Therefore, useful as it would be to apply the more exact medieval idea of allegory in modern criticism, one cannot in fairness do so. Golding is a modern writer and cannot be bound by the fine denotations and connotations which the word had in another age.¹⁰ Honig defends the use of words like this one which are vague but still useful:

. . . custom -- here personified by the serious but non-specialized reader -- uses literary terms less self-consciously than the critic; and although, or perhaps because, it uses them indiscriminately,

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On June 19, 1963, the second part of this experiment was tried in the field house of McMaster University. Asked the distance of the marathon, Mr. Gordon Dickson, who has represented Canada as a long-distance runner in both British Empire and Olympic competition, with no thought of the "classical" race, immediately replied that it was "26 miles 385 yards."

10

Anyone who is still skeptical about this transformation of meaning of literary terms should see Appendix B.

it is slow to drop terms which have been battered or buried in ideological controversies. Critics themselves, lacking a comprehensive methodology which can embrace the techniques of all literature, often do no more than adopt the counters and makeshifts to which custom readily resorts.¹¹

The pat modern definition of this custom-sanctioned word -- "an extended or sustained metaphor" -- is hardly adequate here, nor is the basic meaning given by the Abridged Oxford English Dictionary, although it is better: "description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggested resemblance." Honig, looking back like Lewis to earlier allegory, writes:

Each allegory starts with a tabula rasa assumption, as though the world in its view were being made for the first time. The double purpose of making a reality and making it mean something is peculiar to allegory and its directive language In fixing and relating fictional identities, allegory gives new dimension to things of everyday acceptance, thereby converting the commonplace onto purposeful forms.¹²

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Honig, op. cit., p.9

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Ibid., p.113. Cf. Lewis, op.cit., p. 288: "... good allegory . . . is the best way of reviving to our imaginations the grim or delightful truths which platitude conceals".

Ellen Leyburn is contemporary in her definition:

We can, then, call allegory the particular method of saying one thing in terms of another in which the two levels of meaning are sustained and in which the two levels correspond in pattern of relationship among the details.¹³

To understand the concept allegory by the use of an image, imagine a piece of ground over which has been erected a tent with a number of holes in it, a tent which is fastened to the ground at intervals by pegs or stakes. The plot of ground represents the story, the tent stands for the allegorical meaning hovering over it, the pegs or stakes which link the two are the similes and metaphors, and the holes, giving occasional glimpses of stars twinkling far away, are the symbols. Sometimes above the tent spreads a tree, and above that floats a cloud, and over that is the vast sky, for an allegory may be written on several levels.

Perhaps it is time to offer diffidently a working definition of allegory for this paper. It is this: that literary device by which one or more abstract ideas are presented in a more familiar and more "tangible" form (though not necessarily a concrete form), enriched by the use of imagery, suggesting certain universals by its symbols, and with the over-all purpose of making the original ideas clearer and more interesting

13

Leyburn, op. cit., p.6

by their reduction to simpler terms. Except for its frequent use of personification, John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress is a good example; in it a man's life and accumulated Christian experience are described as a journey with its various incidents; his doubt becomes the Slough of Despond, his desperation becomes the Castle of Despair, and behind all there lies the whole of Christian theology.

The chief difference between medieval and modern allegory seems to be this one: the medieval writer wrote an allegory, a set form, whole and entire, while the modern writer produces work which is allegorical -- that is, having the qualities or characteristics of an allegory -- but which is not entirely an allegory.

While all of this explanation is not as precise as the medieval idea of allegory, it should help to make clearer what follows, especially in Chapter One and in parts of Chapter Three.

CHAPTER ONE

In The Allegory of Love C. S. Lewis wrote:

Allegory, in some sense, belongs not to medieval man but to man, or even to mind, in general. It is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms.¹

But to the serious modern author allegory does not seem so universal; his experience with it has been more like that described by Granville Hicks:

One consequence of the technological revolution is the emergence of what Donald Tovey called the Age of Inattention. . . . Fewer and fewer individuals are both able and willing to pay attention to any serious work of art, and this is happening at a time when the serious novel is demanding more and more effort on the part of its readers.²

¹

C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 44.

²

Granville Hicks, ed., The Living Novel (New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1962), p. 211.

One writer who may be suffering from this trend is William Gerald Golding. In each of his four novels at least one reviewer has discovered allegory, but as to whether its presence is a merit or a fault, critics cannot agree. Some regard it as a precious gem, others as a pernicious germ. Sylvia Stallings wrote enthusiastically of Pincher Martin:

Mr. Golding's book is written on at least three and possibly as many as half a dozen levels of significance;³

and Isabel Quigly was quietly delighted with this aspect of The Inheritors:

I do not wish to stress -- since Mr. Golding doesn't -- the novel's allegorical quality; but there it is, a further dimension of this many-dimensional and astonishing book.⁴

On the other hand, according to Roy Perrott, allegory fails to save Free Fall:

The nearest that Golding gets to a conclusion is in one strange scene in a German prisoner-of-war camp, the most plainly allegorical in the book . . .⁵

³

"Golding's Stunningly Powerful Novel of a Castaway Doomed to Face Himself", New York Herald Tribune Book Review (September 1, 1957), p. 3.

⁴

"New Novels", Spectator, no. 6640 (September 30, 1955), pp. 428-429.

⁵

Guardian (October 23, 1959), p. 8.

while Walter Allen is blunt about its effect on Lord of the Flies:

The difficulty begins when one smells allegory.⁶

For better or for worse allegory is certainly present in all of Golding's novels. The very titles, deliberately ambiguous, suggest allegory by the myriads of meanings which they awaken like echoes in the reader's mind. Lord of the Flies, besides referring literally to the head of the dead pig, at once recalls Beelzebub, the fallen angel of Milton's Paradise Lost and, more appropriately, Beelzebul, the "prince of dung" of the Bible; the former is present in the evil which ruins the island community, the latter in the struggle which takes place between Jack and Ralph for the allegiance of the smaller boys, the "flies", while the shallowness of the ultimate victory is suggested by the contrast between the two words lord and flies. The Inheritors has a triple meaning: it may refer to Lok and his band who are the inheritors of all of the evolutionary advances to their time, or to the "new people" who are the heirs of the Neanderthals' progress, or to the modern readers whose present state of development is a debt to both of the earlier types of man. There may also be an ironic echo of the phrase from the Sermon on the

6

"New Novels", New Statesman and Nation (September 25, 1954), p. 370.

Mount: "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth"
 (Matthew 5:5). The title Pincher Martin is rich in connotation, linking the suggestion of a lobster's claw -- an image which recurs in the book -- with the equally unpleasant idea of marten, a small weasel-like carnivore. In addition there are the various significant meanings of the noun pinch:

The pain or pang caused by the grip of death, or of remorse, chance, etc.

A case, occasion, or a time of special stress or need; a critical juncture; a strait, exigency or extremity.

The critical or crucial point of a matter.

The critical (highest or lowest) point of the tide; the turn of the tide.

A steep or difficult part of a road.⁷

Free Fall has the very modern meanings of a rapid descent by a jumper with parachute unopened and a state of weightlessness free from gravity, coupled with suggestions of the ancient theological problems of free will and the fall of man. With titles like these, then, it is only natural that the novels of William Golding should be "many-dimensional".

Certain of the names of the characters also have overtones of meaning. Simon in Lord of the Flies, for example, is probably meant to suggest Simon Peter, the disciple of Christ,⁸

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See "pinch" in A New Dictionary on Historical Principles Founded Mainly on the Material Collected by the Philological Society, ed. Sir James Murray, et. al. VII, pt. II, O-P (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909).

⁸

This point is discussed at greater length later.

and Marlan and Vivani in The Inheritors may be named for the Arthurian Merlin and Vivien, whose characters parallel those of the two early humans in Golding's book. Merlin, "on one side of demoniac, on the other of human parentage," ⁹ "was the son of no mortal father, but of an Incubus, one of the class of beings not absolutely wicked, but far from good, who inhabit the regions of the air." ¹⁰ Keith Baines' version calls him a "prophet or magician, son of the Devil", and tells how he "falls in love with a sorceress Nyneve, who imprisons him forever in an enchanted cave in Cornwall." ¹¹ This Nyneve is called "fair Viviane, the Lady of the Lake" ¹² by Bulfinch. The devilish evil inherent in man and the eternal deceitfulness of woman which are suggested by the names are present in Golding's Marlan and Vivani. The name Tanakil has an

⁹

"Merlin", Ency. Brit., XV, 1959.

¹⁰

Thomas Bulfinch, Bulfinch's Mythology (New York: Random House n.d.), p. 327.

¹¹

Keith Baines, Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur, intro. Robert Graves (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 508.

¹²

Thomas Bulfinch, op. cit., p. 328.

historical origin, but an obscure one:

Tanaquil was the legendary wife of Tarquinius Priscus. She is said to have encouraged her husband's ambition, and, when he was murdered, to have played an important part in securing the succession of Servius Tullius, thus defeating the designs of the sons of Ancus Marcius.¹³

Like Merlin, the protagonist in Pincher Martin has a name of divine-unearthly dichotomy, Christopher meaning Christ-bearer and Martin coming from Mars, the Roman god of war. Free Fall is richest in significant names. Beatrice, "one who makes happy, blesses", reminds the reader of the saintly woman in the Divine Comedy whose love redeems the poet, so that Sammy Mountjoy's name suggests Dante, one who finally rises to bliss; to reinforce this idea, he lives on Paradise Hill. Nick Shales, the atheist, is a kind of devil (St. Nick) and a hard person to penetrate, as his name Shales implies. Evie is at once the sinful postlapsus female and the innocent woman of Eden.

But the majority of names in Golding's novels have no meaning beyond a simple appropriateness. The boys in Lord of the Flies are English schoolboys with typical English names -- Ralph, Jack, the nickname Piggy (similar to the names used in

¹³

The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, ed. Paul Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 414.

¹⁴

Charles Dickens often used the same device in creating names for his characters. See for example Miss Murdstone in David Copperfield.

Ballantyne's Coral Island) -- with a few Saxon -- Eric -- and Norman -- Maurice, Robert, Roger -- included for historical accuracy. The monosyllabic names of the Neanderthals and the di- and tri- syllabic names of the "other people" show the contrast between the simplicity of the formers' minds and the complexity of the latters'. The women in Pincher Martin might be purposefully names -- Sybil, a cruel witch-like creature; Mary, a beautiful Madonna; and Helen, a kind of fatal beauty -- but more than likely they are no more than English female names, as are the male George and Pete, Pincher's friends, and Campbell, Davidson, Officer Roberts, and Alfred. Nathaniel ("gift of God") may be more meaningful. Most of the large number of people in Free Fall are also named for "sound" rather than for meaning: Mrs. Donavan and Maggie, Minnie, Mavis, Jenny, Susan, Margaret; Johnny Spragg, Philip Arnold, Mr. Carew; and Dr. Halde, which sounds German.

Even the symbolic names, however, are vague in their exact significance. Simon's function as a Christ figure is not clear, and Pincher Martin combines Ajax, Lear, and Prometheus in uncertain quantities. As for Beatrice and Sammy Mountjoy, they are almost an inverted parody of the Divine Comedy characters: instead of lifting him to a state of grace through their relationship, Beatrice in Free Fall causes Sammy to lose his state of blissful amorality, but his sense of sin is not followed, apparently, by one of salvation; at the same time, while she seems

to stand for a kind of pure, unselfish love, she is degraded by the affair.

The conclusion about Golding's use of names would seem to be that only a few of the main characters are given names with allegorical significance, and that even the meanings of these are indirect or somehow reversed. If a name is not obviously significant, it is a waste of time to try to find any meaning behind it; the element of allegory is either not present in it, or is so obscure that any attempt to discover it is pointless.

With the broader allegory, even the reviewers who scent it are unfortunately not able to track it down successfully. Some are repelled by it and shrink from it as from a loathsome beast. The rest chase it futilely through a literary "forest primaeval", stumbling over symbols, impeded by mistaken meanings, led astray by false interpretations, and finally left hopelessly lost by a quarry which has eluded them. The explanations which they offer, therefore, are as incomplete and contradictory as the blind men's description of the elephant, but if (to change the image) they would look at the whole forest of his work instead of the individual trees, certain common features would emerge which would help to clarify the separate volumes. Golding's four novels are not a tetralogy, but they are related.

Martin Green, who wrote that "Golding is not importantly
original in thought or feeling"¹⁵, is right in that Golding deals
with the age-old themes of man, civilization, free will, and moral
responsibility -- matter which "oft' was thought" -- but Green
misses the important fact that the author writes on these subjects
in a strikingly different way, so that they have "ne'er [been] so
well express'd", at least in the modern idiom, for behind the
themes of Golding's novels and at the base of his allegory lies
the modern theory of evolution (this does not need to be limited
specifically to Darwinism, physical anthropology, or a scientific
interpretation of Genesis). In each book he accepts the premise
of man's animal ancestry and looks at human beings and various
aspects of their society on this basis. The ramifications are
tremendous. Here is no mere soap-box vegetarian contending that
the eating of meat is cannibalism sanctioned only by evolution,
but a philosophical writer thoughtfully examining ethics,
government, and civilization itself in the light of man's re-
lationship to the beasts. Looked at this way Lord of the Flies
is an allegory of the degeneration of society, showing evolution
in reverse. The Inheritors, depicting one step in man's physical
development, studies allegorically the meeting and clash of two
races with differing backgrounds and cultures. Pincher Martin,

¹⁵
"Distaste for the Contemporary", Nation (May 21, 1960),
p. 451.

while minutely analyzing one man, traces in symbols the whole evolutionary process from the appearance of life on earth to the rise of modern man, with glimpses of what may wait for him beyond death. Free Fall, by the use of an up-to-date Everyman, looks at the old theological question of free will and determinism. According to their concentration on different phases of evolution the books should come in this order: Pincher Martin, The Inheritors, Lord of the Flies, and Free Fall. This is the sequence used in the present chapter.

Pincher Martin, Golding's third novel, is generally considered to be his least successful, yet in it he makes the heaviest use of both his naval experience and his evolutionary allegory. The hero, Christopher Hadley Martin, is a drowning sailor and in the brief period covered by the story the author shows, allegorically and in a greatly accelerated way, the whole history of the evolution of life.

The novel begins with Martin struggling in the water where, biologists say, life originated, a fact which gives added significance to lines such as "He began to make swimming motions;" and "He made swimming movements again without thought and as if to follow in the wake of that brightness was an inevitable thing to do." At last, at the end of the first chapter, the exhausted sailor crawls onto the rock and his sensations must be very much like those of the first sea creature which found itself on dry land, surrounded by air, both of which were elements foreign to it: his own body feels strange and unreal and hard to control:

There was a white thing beyond [the pebbles]. He examined it without curiosity, noting the bleached wrinkles, the blue roots of nails, the corrugations at the finger-tips. He did not move his head but followed the line of the hand back to an oilskin sleeve, the beginnings of a shoulder. . . . He began to experiment. He found that he could haul the weight of one leg up and then the other. His hand crawled round above his head. He reasoned deeply that there was another hand on the other side somewhere and sent a message out to it. He found the hand and worked the wrist. . . . He moved his four limbs in close and began to make swimming movements. . . . he was trying to crawl up a little pebbled slope. ¹⁶

Soon it is the sea which is "alien to breathing life" and a new instinct replaces that of swimming: "Climb!" The fear of predators awakens as "A seabird cried over him with a long sound descending down wind." As he becomes more aware of his immediate environment, there occurs a key step in the evolutionary allegory as Martin, in a moment of self-consciousness, realizes and proclaims: "I am intelligent." The lost seaboots -- a symbol, perhaps, of gills or fins -- for which he wishes, may represent that desire to return to the sea which is supposedly still strong in all living creatures. The evolutionary force which drove life onto the land and away from the sea is here shown in the wind: "As long as he went forward the wind was satisfied, but if he stopped for a moment's caution it thrust his unbalanced body down"

16

William Golding, Pincher Martin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), pp. 21-22.

The changing physical form is suggested by the shedding of his clothes, and when it becomes a daily pattern it may represent seasonal moulting.

He begins to feel and to fulfil the more advanced desires. He finds shelter in a crevice somewhat like the cave of Lok and his group. He explores ("The first thing to do is to survey the estate"), names the parts of the rock (Safety Rock, Food Cliff, the Red Lion, Prospect Cliff, the Lookout), and digs an irrigation trench of sorts to get water when it rains. The arts appear: architecture in the building of the dwarf figure, reading in the identification disc, music in the snatches of Alouette, and poetry and drama in the oratorical declamations. He begins to link "education and intelligence". He is not free, of course, of instinct, which he describes this way:

There was at the centre of all the pictures and pains and voices a fact like a bar of steel, a thing -- that which was so nakedly the centre of everything that it could not even examine itself. In the darkness of the skull, it existed, a darker dark, self-existent and indestructible. 17

But now he experiences it in more complex forms, such as atavism, as when he looks at the sea-gulls --

17

Ibid., pp. 39-40

They retired then, circled and watched.
Their heads were narrow. They were
flying reptiles. An ancient antipathy
for things with claws set him shuddering
at them . . . 18

racial memories --

This became a rhythm that had obtained
from all ages and would endure so; 19

and even a Freudian "death wish" --

Give up . . . lie still. Give up the
thought of return, the thought of
living. Break up, leave go. 20

Once the sailor experiences the odd but common
phenomenon of feeling that it is the island and not the sea
which is moving:

The tide was running and glossy streaks
were tailing away from the Three Rocks.
. . . of course the rock was fixed. If
it seemed to move slowly forward in the
tide that was because the eye had nothing
else as a point of reference. . . . He
looked thoughtfully down at the streaks
that the rock was leaving behind in the sea. 21

18

Ibid., p.51.

19

Ibid., p.44.

20

Ibid., p.39.

21

Ibid., pp. 152, 155.

These sentences could be taken as a reference to the interesting (though not generally accepted) geological theory about the "floating continents"; if so, it is presented like the whole evolutionary allegory, greatly speeded up.

In the last chapter Campbell and Davidson examine Martin's remains as two palaeontologists might examine a fossil. Despite their sympathy they are very wrong in their conjectures about the sailor's last moments. They know nothing of the terrible purgatory or last judgment which Golding inflicts on his character, allegorically, near the end of the book. "Can't anyone understand how I feel?" Pincher had cried out, and the answer to both the man and the prehistoric creature is "no" --- unless one remembers the author of The Inheritors, who at least tried.

The Inheritors, Golding's second novel, develops allegorically two different though related themes, one evolutionary and one social. The former theme concentrates on a limited phase of evolution, the one step between the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnons, but the sharp contrast between the two groups suggests the changes wrought by evolution's every move; in addition The Inheritors studies (with pessimistic conclusions) the relationship between physical and technical advance and the level of morality.

Lok, Liku, Fa, Mal, and the rest, despite a slowness of mind often both amusing and annoying to a modern reader, are a

likeable band, simple and amoral. The "other people",
 Cro-magnons "who are modern [men] in every sense of the word,"²²
 are less admirable, and when Lok, with his hairy body and semi-
 simian face, finds himself confronting this new race, it is
 obvious from the author's description that he intends them to
 represent the contemporary Western reader:

There were white bone things behind the
 leaves and hair. The man had white bone
 things above his eyes and under the mouth
 so that his face was longer than a face
 should be.²³

The differences go beyond the obvious physical ones, however,
 into every aspect of life. The simplest objects of the Cro-
 Magnons fascinate the Neanderthals -- a comb ("a piece of bone
 that was divided like the fingers of a hand"), shoes ("toeless
 feet"), a canoe ("a log"), oars ("sticks that ended in great
 brown leaves"). But some of the things to which the "new
 people" introduce Lok and Fa are neither useful nor harmless,
 such as liquor --

His nose caught the scent of what they
 drank. It was sweeter and fiercer than
 the other water, it was like the fire

22

Ashley Montagu, Man: His First Million Years (New York:
 New American Library, 1958), p. 55.

23

William Golding, The Inheritors (London: Faber and Faber,
 1961), p. 106

and the fall. It was a bee-water, smelling of honey and wax and decay, it drew toward and repelled, it frightened and excited . . .²⁴

and weapons such as the spear ("a stick with a sharp stone on the end") and the bow and arrow:

A stick rose upright and there was a lump of bone in the middle. . . .
The stick began to grow shorter at both ends. Then it shot out to full length again.

The tree by Lok's ear acquired a voice.

"Clop!"
. . . By his face there had grown a twig.²⁵

The naivete suggested by this description becomes ironic when the author reveals Lok's feelings about the incident: "He had a confused idea that someone was trying to give him a present."

Montagu says that "we have very good reason to believe that Neanderthal man was every bit as intelligent
²⁶ as we are to-day," but for purposes of contrast with the advanced Cro-Magnon, Golding has chosen to present him as being slow and simple. Words such as thinking and like are unfamiliar and are uttered painfully by Fa and the rest; usually they speak of thinking as "having a picture". The

²⁴

Ibid., p. 172.

²⁵

Ibid., p. 106.

²⁶

Montagu, op. cit., p. 51.

first train of thought which Lok experiences is puzzling to him: "He wished he could ask Mal what it was that joined a picture to a picture so that the last of many came out of the first." At the same time the Neanderthals have a strange but keen kind of mental telepathy; around the camp-fire "one of the deep silences fell upon them, that seemed so much more natural than speech, a timeless silence in which there were first many minds in the overhand; and then perhaps no mind at all." This "community mind" is vital:

. . . the strings that bound him [Lok] to Fa and Mal and Liku and the rest of the people. The strings were not the ornament of life but its substance. If they broke, a man would die.²⁷

It also has practical uses, for when Lok and Fa are spying on the "new people", "without a word their pictures were one."²⁸

The Neanderthals are low on the evolutionary ladder also because they depend primarily on their olfactory rather than their visual sense. Lok "performed miracles of perception in the cavern of his nose"; and even more amazing is his

²⁷

Golding, The Inheritors, p. 78.

²⁸

Joy Adamson has observed something similar in her famous pet lion, Elsa: "I think perhaps it is the power of telepathy, which we human beings too may have possessed before we developed the capacity to speak." (See Joy Adamson, Forever Free (London: Collins and Harvill, 1962), p. 22.)

bodily control:

He was so close that at any moment he might wind them for all he was below them and Lok inhibited his own scent in sudden fear, though he did not know what he did. ²⁹

Shortly after, "when Lok expected the new men to put their noses to the ground they straightened up and stood"; and here is the key difference between the two races. Montagu says that

the most important single factor in the evolution of the primates was the increasing importance and dominance of the sense of vision and the correlated changes associated with it.³⁰

The Neanderthals' outlook on life is also, figuratively, short-sighted:

There was still food piled in the recess, though little enough was left. What people would hunt for food when they were not hungry and there was food left to eat?³¹

²⁹

Golding, The Inheritors, p. 139.

³⁰

Montagu, op. cit., p. 29.

³¹

Golding, The Inheritors, p. 95.

The Cro-Magnons' advances are strictly physical and technical ones, however, and they have paid dearly for them. They have achieved their measure of progress at the price of humanity. Their drunken orgies bewilder the simple Lok and Fa. Cruelty and slavery have appeared:

The old man stood by them and a dead snake hung from his right hand. . . .
The old man raised the snake in the air and struck with it at the shuddering backs.³²

They have replaced the promiscuity and innocent incest of the Neanderthals with a form of marriage (or prostitution) --

Vivani was covered with a magnificent skin, the cave-bear skin that had cost two lives to get and was the price her first man paid for her ³³ --

and with it come jealousy and plotting and murder:

Not long now, thought Tuami, when we are safe and out of the devil's country I shall dare to use the ivory-point.³⁴

32

Ibid., p. 209.

33

Ibid., p. 225.

34

Ibid., p. 226

In some aspects, religion for example, the Cro-Magnons have advanced little beyond the Neanderthals. The former do not show the fear and reverence for Oa, the earth-mother or fertility principle, that the latter do, as when Lok says: "A cat has killed the deer and sucked its blood, so there is no blame;" but they do precede their hunting with an elaborate ritual similar to that of the Indians of the American southwest or perhaps that which produced the cave paintings at Lascaux. Near the end of the book the Cro-Magnons show their fear of "devils" and their ideas of death and immortality are probably very like those of the Neanderthals, although it is hard to imagine them burying their dead with the tenderness shown by Lok's band. Mal is buried with a simple ceremony in a foetal position in the floor of a cave to protect his body from animals:

. . . Fa and the old woman laid Mal gently on his side. They pushed the great gaunt bones of his knees against his chest, tucked in his feet, lifted his head off the earth and put his two hands under it. . . . The women poured water over Mal's face . . . Nil began to keen . . . The old woman . . . went to a shelf of rock and chose one of the haunches of meat. She knelt and put it in the hole by his face.

"Eat, Mal, when you are hungry."
. . . She came back and poured water over Mal's face.

"Drink when you are thirsty."
One by one the people trickled water over the grey, dead face.
Each repeated the words. . . . Lok began to sweep the pyramid of earth

35
into the hole.

Here also, Montagu supports Golding scientifically:

Neanderthal man also introduced
ceremonial interment of the dead,
thus suggesting that he possessed
a highly developed religious system.³⁶

When Lok, a pitiable, tragic figure, faces death alone at the end of the book, he meets it in the same position as Mal:

"It pulled its legs up, knees against the chest. It folded its hands under its cheeks and lay still." The impersonality of the pronoun it, along with the humble helplessness, wins the reader's sympathy for the Neanderthal, even though he is more closely related racially to the Cro-Magnon.

A literal evolutionist, if he were not sympathetic, might challenge Golding about the meeting of the Neanderthal and the Cro-Magnon, two forms of man who were really millenia apart. Montagu mentions this point, showing where Golding may have picked up his idea:

For a long time it was believed that Neanderthal man was exterminated by men of our own type. There was absolutely no evidence for this belief . . .³⁷

35

Ibid., pp. 87-91.

36

Montagu, op. cit., p. 52¢

37

Montagu, op. cit., p. 52.

But the effect of the novel more than atones for this deliberate anachronism, which also permits Golding to present, on another level of allegory, a timeless social problem: the difficulties which arise when two races with different cultural backgrounds meet. The gentler ones, as so often happens in Golding, appear in the better light -- and fare badly. They greet the new-comers with a childlike curiosity and shyness, and are met with distrust and violence. The more "civilized" sins of deceit and plotting are wrongfully attributed to them by the superior race, by a process of transference, and they become the victims of kidnapping and murder. The message can be applied to any encounter between peoples of different levels of development, but the emphasis on the appearance of the Cro-Magnon makes it seem embarrassingly pertinent to modern western man.

The greatest barrier between racial groups is of course language. The primitive speech of the Neanderthals is as meaningless to the "new men" as the Cro-Magnons' "bird-voice of conversation" is to Lok and his people. Golding adds to this difference, as mentioned earlier, by the use of polysyllabic names for the Cro-Magnons. But in keeping with modern psychological theory, Golding shows that the mistrust and hate are not inborn but are conditioned, for the children, Liku and Tanakil, readily try to make friends till their elders intervene. The childlike

Lok is willing to attribute the highest motives to his foes; he believes that the poisoned arrow is a twig which "the new people threw . . . to me" and he does not want to give it back. Later, although "he was frightened of the new people", he could feel "sorry for them." Repeatedly he greets them in his timid, friendly way to inquire about Liku and the "new one", but each time he is rebuffed. The interpretation of this level of allegory is obvious and does not need to be laboured.

In The Inheritors Golding uses a prehistoric setting to present a timely theme; in Lord of the Flies, his first novel, he uses a modern setting to present ancient themes. Two main ideas are developed allegorically in this novel, one evolutionary and one theological. Scientifically Golding's thesis seems to be that in every man the savage primitive instincts from his animal forebears are still present, unchanged and very strong, and that civilization is merely a thin veneer which is applied to each person by long, intensive, and incessant conditioning. He begins, like a good scientist, by choosing specimens which have been least influenced by environment -- young children, none older than twelve -- and isolating them: "We're on an uninhabited island with no people on it. . . . There aren't any grown-ups. We shall have to look after ourselves."

At first the boys try to carry on as they would have

in their own country. They use a simplified Parliamentary procedure --

"Let's have a vote."
 "Yes!"
 "Vote for chief!"
 "Let's vote --" 38

and establish rules --

"I'll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it while he's speaking. . . . And he won't be interrupted." 39

Soon, however, they ignore the custom:

"I've got the conch," said Piggy indignantly. "You let me speak!"
 "The conch doesn't count on top of the mountain," said Jack, "so you shut up." 40

Jack had said: "We'll have rules! Lots of rules! Then when anyone breaks 'em --" but he has been the first to break one. Piggy, the voice of reason, is repeatedly ordered to "shut up". The veneer, too thin, is wearing off and democracy is giving way to a dictatorship, which will be followed by

38

William Golding, Lord of the Flies (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960), p. 22.

39

Ibid., p. 32.

40

Ibid., p. 41.

anarchy and finally chaos:

"Conch! Conch!" shouted Jack, "we don't need the conch any more. We know who ought to say things. What good did Simon do speaking, or Bill, or Walter? It's time some people knew they've got to keep quiet and leave deciding things to the rest of us ..". 41

Ralph is capable as a leader not only because of his own qualities but also because he recognizes his own limitations and Piggy's ability; but although he is mild, he has trouble controlling his own instinctive cruelty, for he reveals the hated nickname: "'He's not Fatty,' cried Ralph, 'his real name's Piggy!'" Gradually Ralph matures and softens till finally he can weep for his "true, wise friend called Piggy;" but this emotion is the weakness which allows Jack, the figure of force, to win out. The beacon fire, the one hope for rescue, symbolizes civilization, and only one third of the way through the book "the fire was dead." Jack's final accession to the chieftainship represents the boys' last step in their reversion from a state of semi-civilization to one of primitive savagery.

This process of evolution in reverse is shown in a number of ways. The relationship between Ralph and Jack undergoes subtle but important changes. At first they are

41
Ibid., p. 97.

like Kipling's "two strong men" standing "face to face"; there is a strange link between them: "They were lifted up; were friends." They experience "that strange invisible light of friendship." But shortly after, when things begin to go wrong, "they were both red in the face and found looking at each other difficult." Their emotions are ambivalent and "baffled, in love and hate;" they are "two continents of experience and feeling, unable to communicate." "Not even Ralph knew how the link between him and Jack had snapped," but it has, and this split is symbolized by the new fire they build: "By the time the pile was built, they were on different sides of a high barrier." Now, not understanding why, they are antagonists -- as the principles they represent are antagonistic -- and they clash repeatedly, each incident a "fresh rub of two spirits in the dark." The climax occurs when "viciously, with full intention, Jack hurled his spear at Ralph." Even as the "painted savages" hunt him down, Ralph ponders "that indefinable connexion between himself and Jack; who therefore would never let him alone; never."

The devolution of the boys shows also in their hunting. When Jack, Ralph, and Simon, on their expedition to explore the island, find a piglet caught in the creepers,

Jack drew his knife again with a flourish.
He raised his arm in the air. Then came
a pause, a hiatus⁴²

The piglet escapes.

They knew very well why he hadn't:
because of the enormity of the knife
descending and cutting into living
flesh; because of the unbearable
blood.⁴³

Jack is less squeamish about blood as he exults over his
first kill:

"There was lashings of blood," said
Jack, laughing and shuddering, "you
should have seen it!"⁴⁴

Later, when the wounded sow escapes, "the hunters followed,
wedded to her in lust, excited by the long chase and the
dropped blood;" and when they corner her, "Jack was on top
of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife." There is
almost a sexual excitement to the chase and kill. Ralph
too almost succumbs to the lust for blood: facing the boar,
"Ralph found he was able to measure the distance coolly and

42

Ibid., p. 30.

43

Ibid., p. 31

44

Ibid., p. 67

take aim;" and later "he . . . felt that hunting was good after all." He conquers this atavistic tendency in himself, however, for during the first hunt the fire had been allowed to die and a chance for rescue had been lost. But for most of the boys hunting, the blood principle, dominates over fire-tending, the domestic principle.

Besides hunting, other actions show the castaways' reversion to savagery. As their clothes wear out, the boys go naked. Jack's "sandy hair [was] considerably longer than 45 it had been." He begins to paint himself with clay and charcoal for hunting, and the successful hunters return with a chant: "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood." This chant becomes part of a ritual which grows more terrifying as it develops:

45

Jack's red hair (mentioned on pages 19, 65, and 191) provides an interesting link between Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors; in the latter book, in keeping with modern scientific thinking, it is remarked several times that the Neanderthals have red hair too:

[Lok] leapt . . . like a red squirrel; (p.103)

[Lok] the red creature; (p. 216)

a small leg, red, covered with curls (p. 227).

Then the rest joined in, making pig-dying noises and shouting. . . .

Then Maurice pretended to be the pig and ran squealing into the centre, and the hunters, circling still, pretended to beat him. As they danced, they sang.

"Kill the pig. Cut her throat.
Bash her in." ⁴⁶

"We ought to have a drum," said Maurice, "then we could do it properly."

Ralph looked at him.

"How properly?"

"I dunno. You want a fire, I think, and a drum, and you keep time to the drum."

"You want a pig," said Roger, "like in a real hunt."

"Or someone to pretend," said Jack. "You could get someone to dress up as a pig and then he could act -- you know, pretend to knock me over and all that --"

"You want a real pig," said Robert, still caressing his rump, "because you've got to kill him."

"Use a littlum," said Jack, and everybody laughed. ⁴⁷

The dance soon becomes spontaneous and blood plays a part as in the "bleeding" part of modern fox-hunting:

. . . Jack stood up, holding out his hands.

"Look."

He giggled and flinched them while the boys laughed at his reeking palms. Then Jack grabbed Maurice and rubbed the stuff over his cheeks. ⁴⁸

⁴⁶

Golding, Lord of the Flies, p. 72.

⁴⁷

Ibid., p. 110.

⁴⁸

Ibid., p. 129.

As the hunters become dominant over the hut-builders, physical force replaces discussion:

. . . wails of agreement from some of the hunters drove Jack to violence. The bolting look came into his blue eyes. He took a step, and able at last to hit someone, stuck his fist into Piggy's stomach. 49

Finally there are the murders and even these show a progressive degeneration in the boys. The little fellow who is lost in the fire dies accidentally. Simon is killed deliberately, but in the heat of a dance, and even Ralph is drawn in. Piggy is murdered senselessly, cold-bloodedly, by the foolish prank of one boy. Appropriately, as Piggy, the feeble, blinded voice of reason dies, the conch, symbol of order, is destroyed. Savagery has triumphed, and when Ralph is hunted down it is a deliberate act by the whole band.

With savagery comes superstition. The "little 'un" with the "mulberry-coloured birthmark" first introduces the idea of the "snake-thing", the "beastie", and though he is never seen again after the fire, his fear has infected the others. Things happen "as if this wasn't a good island." The parachute and its cadaverous burden, though terrifying, are perfectly understandable, but to the superstitious islanders they become part of the beast myth. The descent to

49

Ibid., p. 68.

primitive fear reaches its nadir when Jack says:

"And about the beast. When we kill
we'll leave some of the kill for it.
Then it won't bother us, maybe;" 50

and shortly after, he leaves the pig's head on a stick with
the words, "This head is for the beast. It's a gift."

The only ones who resist the degeneration to savagery
(besides Simon) are Ralph and Piggy, and even they weaken at
times; they experience an uneasy fear and, like Ralph, Piggy
has a streak of cruelty deep down. Eager to abdicate his
role as buffoon he uses the absent Simon as a scapegoat:

"He might be climbing the mountain He's cracked."

Most amazing of all the changes, however, is the
speed with which the boys revert to their normal obedience to
adults as soon as the navy men land.

As Golding shows the wearing away of civilization, he
reveals allegorically his second theme, which is the fall of
man from innocence. He does not try, like Milton, to "justify
the ways of God to man", but structurally the book bears
striking resemblances to Paradise Lost. As its title hints,
in fact, there are many parallels with the great epic, although
Golding has shifted, altered, and compressed with great liberty.

50

Ibid., p. 127.

A few points should demonstrate this similarity. In the beginning the boys have been dropped from the sky and are scattered over the island as Lucifer and the rebellious angels were spread on the fiery lake after being cast out of Heaven. But this island is at the same time both Hell and Paradise. It is "a bath of heat"; Ralph, like Adam in Eden or Mammon in Hell, says: "This is our island. It's a good island." Ralph calls the boys together and after a meeting they explore their new home, discovering its various aspects and its geographical limits. In Chapter Five Ralph outlines their problems and requests suggestions and, in speeches reminiscent of those at the Great Consult, Jack and Piggy address the assembled boys. They organize for their different tasks, but -- the roles now shift. Jack replaces Ralph as the counterpart to Satan; like the Serpent in the Garden he leads the younger boys from innocence -- that is, from obedience to the code in which they were brought up -- as Satan led Adam and Eve into sin. Meanwhile Ralph and Piggy assume vague roles, perhaps those of modern man, who must suffer for the fall. Certainly like modern man they avoid by the use of euphemisms the mention of Jack's name:

". . . what makes things break up
like they do?"

". . . I dunno, Ralph. I expect it's
him."

"Jack?"

"Jack." A taboo was evolving round
that name too.⁵¹

In the end, like Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden,
the boys are expelled from their potential paradise, and from
hints scattered through the story, the reader sees how
severe a punishment this is:

"Didn't you hear what the pilot said?
About the atom bomb. They're all dead."⁵²

. . . a civilization that knew nothing
of him [Roger] and was now in ruins.⁵³

"We might get taken prisoner by the
reds."⁵⁴

What has happened on their island, then, is only a microcosm
of what has happened in the whole adult world outside where
nuclear weapons take the place of spears and stones.

51

Ibid., p. 133.

52

Ibid., p. 14.

53

Ibid., p. 59.

54

Ibid., p. 154.

Golding emphasizes the parallels with Paradise Lost by some of his imagery, such as the mention of the hunters: ". . . ages ago . . . their voices had been the songs of angels."

As "Ralph wept for the end of innocence [and] the darkness in man's heart", the reader wonders just when the moment of fatal error came. Golding never makes this matter clear, but a search for it reveals several other points worth noting. The boys yearn for "a message" from the outside world and receive the dead airman, a sign of death whose meaning they misunderstand. Simon understands both the corpse and the pig's head, but when he tries to tell the other boys, he is killed. Just before his death he becomes a kind of Christ figure through his strange messages of hope to Ralph:

"You'll get back to where you came from
. . . I just think you'll get back all right."⁵⁵

After his death, "the parachute took the figure forward, furrowing the lagoon, and bumped it over the reef and out to sea;" because the boys no longer need a figure of death from the outside: they have one of their own making.

Somewhere in the series of deaths, perhaps, lies the fall, in the change from the error which killed the boy with the mulberry-coloured birthmark to the planned way in which

55

Ibid., p. 106

Ralph is hunted down like an animal. The gradual change, rather than any one moment, may be the fall. Or the moment of fatal decision may be the choice of Jack and all that he represents, for which the boys even have a symbol to replace the conch, a concrete sign of the new authority: it is the "Lord of the Flies", the pig's head, "the skull that gleamed as white as ever the conch had done."

Just as Raphael and Michael told Adam the history of the universe and the future of the human race, so Golding gives the reader here, allegorically, the same story in the less optimistic terms of the twentieth century. If a Christian tragedy is paradoxical and impossible, a tragedy on an evolutionary basis is not, and Golding seems to indicate pessimistically that it is even probable. Satan said the mind itself could "make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." Golding believes that the latter transformation is more likely.

The little boy feared the terrible beast and in a sense it was the beast that killed him, the beast of which the "Lord of the Flies" told Simon:

"Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill! . . . I'm part of you."⁵⁶

Piggy had told Ralph earlier that they had nothing to fear,

56

Ibid., p. 137.

"unless we get frightened of people;" and Simon had said at the meeting: ". . . maybe there is a beast . . . maybe it's only us." The bird that had frightened Jack while he was hunting in the forest, with "a harsh cry that seemed to come out of the abyss of ages", had probably awakened in the boy "his age-old tremors." The change which occurred first in Jack and later in the other boys caused Ralph to cry: "I'm frightened. Of us." According to Golding he had good reason to be, for still lurking within them, despite centuries of civilization, are the instincts of a murderous wild beast. To give in to this force is to abandon "the rules", which mean civilization, and to yield to a world where "nothing prospered but the flies". Yet, as Golding demonstrates, it is hard to "kick against the pricks" of nature and to resist the fatal concessions which seem so natural. To the "Paradise Lost" of Golding the evolutionist there is no "Paradise Regain'd" as a sequel.

So far the diameter of Golding's evolutionary themes has been steadily narrowing, while his treatment of man has been broadening from the individual to larger and larger groups. In his fourth novel, Free Fall, he narrows his range of vision sharply, abandoning physical evolution to study the shaping of one man as a social being, and allowing himself to probe deeply into the problem he had raised in

Lord of the Flies: the origin of evil and the nature of man's fall. Still present as in the other books, however, underlying Golding's thought, are the ideas of man's "animality".

Sammy Mountjoy, the narrator, begins by stating two problems: "Free will cannot be debated but only experienced," and "To communicate is our passion and our despair." But he adds: "There is this hope. I may communicate in part; and that surely is better than utter blind and dumb." His conception of the individual is very much like Pincher Martin's, full of the modern sense of isolation; every man

is unnameable, unfathomable and invisible darkness that sits at the centre of him, always awake, always different from what you believe it to be, always thinking and feeling what you can never know it thinks and feels, that hopes hopelessly to understand and to be understood. 57

Speaking personally he says: "I can still sense my feelings of defiance and isolation; a man against society." Once he asks Beatrice: "What's it like to be you?" feeling that "she herself was hidden", while at the same time he confesses: "I kept my drinking from Beatrice. . . . I kept an awful lot of things from Beatrice."

57

William Golding, Free Fall (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 8.

It is this kind of situation that permits people to be punished in life as Pincher Martin was in death. Sammy writes: "Life is perhaps more terrible than that innocent medieval misconception. We are forced here and now to torture each other;" and later he tells Kenneth: "I'm sorry. . . I mean it. People don't seem to be able to move without killing each other."⁵⁸ In a Martin-like speech he ponders: "Then was that long history of my agony . . . my hell -- real as anything in life could be real -- was that self-created?"⁵⁹

Yet Sammy was not always so vulnerable. His early years, despite his illegitimacy, his slum upbringing, his first-hand knowledge of the sordidness of life, his lying, bullying, cheating, and vandalism, did not see him conscience-smitten by guilt. He was like his mother whose "casual intercourse must have been to her what his works are to a real artist -- themselves and nothing more;" and he shared with

58

In his play Huis-Clos (No Exit), the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre develops a similar idea of hell. His three victims, Ines, Estelle, and Garcin, note ". . . il y a quelqu'un qui manque ici: c'est le bourreau;" and realize "Ce sont les clients qui font le service eux-mêmes, comme dans les restaurants coopératifs. . . . Le bourreau, c'est chacun de nous pour les deux autres." They conclude: "L'enfer, c'est les Autres." See Theatre (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), I, 146, 147, 182.

59

Ibid., p. 122.

her the folies à deux about his father, who metamorphosed from a soldier to a flier to the Prince of Wales to a clergyman. At this time, Sammy says, "I was innocent of guilt, unconscious of innocence; happy, therefore, and unconscious of happiness."

The change is explicable through Sammy's theory of time, which he describes this way:

. . . time is not to be laid out endlessly like a row of bricks.
 . . . Time is two modes. The one is an effortless perception native to us as water to a mackerel. The other is a memory.⁶⁰

He says that "what men believe is a function of what they are; and what they are is in part what has happened to them;" but because of the dual nature of time they are not completely tied to their experiences for "there is a threshold here, too, beyond which what they did was done by someone else" ("Yet," he adds, "I was there"). This corresponding duality of personality justifies his rambling style of narration:

I see now what I am looking for and why these pictures are not altogether random. I describe them because they seem to be important. They contribute very little to the straight line of my story. . . . They are important simply because they emerge.⁶¹

60

Ibid., p. 6.

61

Ibid., p. 46.

As long as he can separate "time present and time past" he can always look on himself as a different person from the one who has performed his acts, so that "his insufficiency and guilt were not mine;" and though he senses some relationship, he can ask: "Why should I think of forgiveness? There was nothing to forgive." These are his "days of terrible and irresponsible innocence."

For some people this state of amorality continues indefinitely. For example, "Philip is a living example of natural selection [note the evolutionary phrase]. He was as fitted to survive in this modern world as a tapeworm in an intestine." On the other hand there are those like Evie and Sammy's mother, whose lives supply him with the aphorism: "Love selflessly and you cannot come to harm." Either type, free of a sense of moral responsibility and thus of a sense of sin, can live contentedly. But between perfect egoism and perfect unselfishness is the huge abyss of guilt into which most people inevitably slip. Sammy is one of these:

I was not entirely free. Almost but not quite. . . . I may have been trying to avoid the life laid down for me. . . . And yet . . . I could find no moment when I was free to do as I would. . . . I could not remember one moment when being what I was I could do other than I did. 62

The result is that

I had lost my power to choose. I
had given away my freedom [by] the
mechanical and helpless reaction
of my nature. What I was, I had
become. 63

This strong feeling of predestination is broader than religion; religion is also subject to it. Sammy says that he accepts religion as "an inevitable part of an enigmatic situation which was quite beyond our control."

What has happened is that Sammy Mountjoy has lost his objectivity; he has lost that all-important ability to divorce his present self from his past selves, and he has lost the power to keep himself separate from other people. Johnny's philosophy of life, which he so envied -- "[Be] careless of what has been and what is to come; because what is to come might be nothing"; -- is his no longer. Recognizing his oneness with the rest of mankind he develops a conscience, and through it he assumes responsibility for all of his hitherto ignored sins, the sudden weight of which is unbearable.

He adopts a new outlook on life:

63

Ibid., p. 131.

Cause and effect. The law of succession.
Statistical probability. The moral order.
Sin and remorse. They are all true.
Both worlds exist side by side. They meet
in me. We have to satisfy the examiners
in both worlds at once.⁶⁴

The two worlds are those which exist within a man and outside him, in the society around, and once he has known the latter with its ethical code, he can never again escape moral responsibility unless, like Beatrice, he sacrifices sanity. For a man like Sammy, the eventual encounter with the world was inevitable for

Art is partly communication but only partly. The rest is discovery. I have always been the creature of discovery. ⁶⁵

He realizes that this external system of judging behaviour is arbitrarily established:

I saw that if man is the highest, is his own creator, then good and evil is decided by majority vote. . . . There is no spirit, no absolute. Therefore right and wrong are a parliamentary decision . . . There are no morals that can be deduced from natural science, there are only immorals.⁶⁶

64

Ibid., p. 244.

65

Ibid., p. 102.

66

Ibid., pp. 218, 226.

But this fact does not matter; once the accepted code is known, it must be recognized forever. Falling in love was the first breach in Sammy's defences; the experience in the German prisoner-of-war camp was the ultimate defeat.

The German officer promised:

I shall explain you to yourself. No one, not a lover, a father, a school-master, could do that for you. They are all inhibited by conventions and human kindness. 67

What he demonstrates to Sammy is the essential humanity within him, which Sammy has always sought to ignore or conceal. Golding finds the ultimate proof in evolution: ". . . each hair inherited a thousand years of loathing and fear for things that scuttle or slide or crawl." He draws back "a hand highly trained by the tragedies of a million years." Alone and frightened, suffering terrible mental tortures, Sammy is unable for the first time in his life to escape from himself and to avoid facing his inherent human cowardice. His treatment of Beatrice Ifor, whom he seduced and abandoned, had never bothered him before, but now, even though the psychiatrist assures him that the incurable mental breakdown she suffered was inevitable, Sammy is conscience-stricken.

67

Ibid., p. 144.

The weakness brings with it a compensating strength: he is now able to use his innate artistic talent and he fulfills himself as a painter. "In freedom I should never have acquired any capacity," he realizes, and conjectures: "Then was loss of freedom the price exacted, a necessary preliminary to a new mode of knowing?"

The fall of man from a state of grace, the theme of Milton's Paradise Lost, which Golding had considered in his first novel, is presented in his fourth book more fully and in the modern idiom. The state of innocence seems to be one in which the animal drives are freely and selfishly indulged with no remorse, and the fall is the recognition of one's fellow creatures and the accompanying sense of concern for their feelings. Ironically, this state is brought about by the appearance of love in Free Fall, though in The Inheritors it is the increase of knowledge which destroys the Cro-Magnons' innocence. Only one inextricably caught in the trap of guilt can appreciate the freedom of the former prison. Disobedience is merely the failure to abide by the conventions of one's society, which may or may not be related to some divine standard of conduct. Probably the happiest state is that of Nick, who realizes his freedom and enjoys it with no compunctions: ". . . to Nick the rationalist, the atheist, all things were possible." But for Sammy Mountjoy life after the experience

in the prisoner-of-war camp is very much like Pincher Martin's existence on the rock -- his own private hell from which there is no escape. "We do not torture you. We let you torture yourself," Halde told him, and Sammy does, without mercy.

Admittedly Free Fall is a difficult book, the author's most difficult to date, but one thing is fairly clear: it follows the other three in its assumption that man is a product of evolution and in its concern with the extent of his responsibility in view of the strong forces of nature which control him. It is the conflict of animal nature and civilized ways which lies at the heart of the dilemma of most of Golding's characters. And it is also this idea which lies at the base of much of his allegory.

CHAPTER TWO

Golding's view of the essential nature of man, as he reveals it in his four novels, has implications in many areas of human life such as society (in its broadest, most general sense), government, morals and ethics, and religion. His ideas about these subjects, whether they are realistic or pessimistic -- and it is often difficult to find the exact line of distinction -- are certainly worth considering, and it is the purpose of this chapter to examine them briefly. First, however, a look at the views which the pioneers of evolution held about man might prove rewarding.

The early evolutionists explained man fairly fully as merely a complex extension of the animal kingdom, and not just physically but mentally and socially as well:

But what about man's mental, moral, and spiritual faculties, those aspects of human nature which naturalists . . . had regarded as raising man immeasurably above the level of the brute creation? . . . A close observer of animals, Darwin had been impressed by the range of

their capacity for feeling and learning. In varying degrees he found them capable, like man, of pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, terror and shame, playfulness and boredom, courage and devotion, pride and jealousy. On the intellectual and esthetic side the higher animals exhibited a sense of wonder and curiosity, a capacity to learn by experience, an ability to communicate with each other by cries and sounds, and strong esthetic preferences.¹

The difference in degree is stressed however:

These qualities in animals should be compared, said Darwin, not with the highest manifestations of human art and intellect, but with the attitudes, emotions, and thought processes of the crudest savages.²

. . . social solidarity and common morality developed by a . . . process of natural selection. To Darwin it seemed likely that any animal possessing strong social instincts would acquire a moral sense if its intellectual powers became developed to the point where it was conscious of a conflict between its immediate impulses and its enduring social instincts.

. . . There was no question, Darwin continued, that man had strong social instincts, probably acquired

1

John C. Greene, The Death of Adam (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 317.

2.

Ibid., p. 317.

at a very early period through the advantage they conferred on the tribes possessing them. When to these instincts were added growing powers of reflection on past events and experiences, a moral sense would inevitably emerge.³

This slightly optimistic view is balanced by a pessimistic one about religion, which is reminiscent of Golding's ideas in Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors:

As an anthropologist, Darwin believed that religion had been born in the fears and misconceptions of primitive men. "The idea of a universal and beneficent Creator does not seem to arise in the mind of man, until he has been elevated by long-continued culture," he declared. Once this idea had arisen, he conceded, it became "a potent influence on the advance of morality." Yet the latest advances in science, to which Darwin himself had contributed mightily, seemed to undermine belief in such a Creator. In discovering the secret of man's lowly origin Darwin had lost confidence in the power of human reason and intuition to penetrate the riddle of the universe.⁴

Darwin's conclusion was frank and sincere, and could be taken as optimistic or pessimistic, depending upon the individual reader's feelings:

3

Ibid., pp. 324-325.

4

Ibid., p. 330.

I am sorry that I have no 'consolatory view' as to [the] dignity of man: I am content that man will probably advance, and care not much whether we are looked at as mere savages in a remotely distant future.⁵

Golding's ideas are not greatly different from those above, although he has developed them more personally through the medium of the novel. Golding believes, with Donn, that "no man is an Island, intire of it selfe"; man is by nature a social animal. In The Inheritors, the Neanderthals first appear travelling in a group, Liku riding playfully on Lok's back. Their hunting shows the necessity of co-operation:

Lok stole forward holding his thorn bush sideways. Fa circled out to his left. She carried a natural blade of stone in either hand. The two hyenas moved closer together and snarled. Fa suddenly jerked her right hand round and the stone thumped the bitch in the ribs. The bitch yelped then ran howling. Lok shot forward, swinging the thorn bush, and thrust the spines at the dog's snarling muzzle. Then the two beasts were out of reach, talking evilly and afraid. Lok stood between them and the kill. . . .

Fa was already down on her knees, struggling with the limp body. . . .

5

Charles Darwin in a letter to Charles Lyell, May 4, 1860, quoted in John C. Greene, op. cit., p. 305.

She was tearing fiercely at the
doe's belly with the flake of stone.
Lok brandished his thorn bush at the
hyenas.⁶

When Lok finds himself, at the end of the book, the last survivor of his race, he lies down and dies of loneliness. The Cro-Magnons too are gregarious, despite their secret scheming and hating, and they are usually seen in pairs or bands. The boys in Lord of the Flies degenerate to a primitive way of life, but they still cling together in groups. Ralph and Piggy grow closer together as time passes. Jack's question, "Who'll join my tribe?" gains many converts for him, even the twins, Sam and Eric, when they abandon their elected leader. When the boys are homesick or afraid, they find comfort in sitting around the camp-fire together or dancing. Even when he is being hunted by the rest, the outcast Ralph spends the night near the other boys:

He knelt among the shadows and felt his isolation bitterly. They were savages it was true; but they were human, and the ambushing fears of the deep night were coming on.⁷

Pincher Martin, alone on the rock, mutters "Rescue. See about rescue;" and struggles to survive so that he

6

Golding, The Inheritors, pp. 52-53.

7

Golding, Lord of the Flies, p. 176.

may return to the world of men. His mind is full of thoughts of people, memories of his friend Nathaniel, his drinking companions, Pete and George, and his casual loves, Sybil, Helen, and Mary. Even the deliberately isolated individualist in Free Fall, Sammy Mountjoy, moves constantly among people; in fact, more individuals are introduced by name in this book than in any of the other three. The hero's breaking point comes, significantly, when he is locked in a broom-closet alone.

But paradoxically man, who seeks human society, seems also to behave instinctively in an anti-social manner, both to other individuals and to the group to which he belongs. The more highly developed the civilization in which he lives, the stronger are his anti-social tendencies, for animal instincts are not weakened or eradicated, but merely manifest themselves in a more subtle way. Lok rests when he should be carrying firewood or finding food, simply because he is tired, but the Cro-Magnons, out of laziness, utilize weaker beings as slaves. The emotions of the Neanderthals are few, simple, and direct, and there is no attempt to conceal them. But civilization interrupts this basic stimulus-response pattern so that reaction often becomes an oblique, two- or three-stage movement. Thus the more complex Cro-Magnons know how to dissemble: Tuami finds that "to watch Marlan's face and intend to kill him was daunting" so that "he turned his eyes away."

The boys on the island repeatedly show cruelty to each other. Ralph and Jack taunt Piggy, and Jack beats the fat boy and breaks his glasses; Roger throws stones at Henry, beats the smaller boys, releases the huge rock which kills Piggy, and sharpens the stick to use on the fugitive Ralph; after the hunt the boys use Robert as the Pig in a re-enactment of the kill:

They got his arms and legs. Ralph, carried away by a sudden thick excitement, grabbed Eric's spear and jabbed at Robert with it.

"Kill him! Kill him!"

All at once, Robert was screaming and struggling with the strength of frenzy. Jack had him by the hair and was brandishing his knife. Behind him was Roger, fighting to get close. . . .

Ralph was too fighting to get near, to get a handful of that brown, vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-mastering.⁸

The hunters' attack on the rest of the boys to steal Piggy's glasses is injurious to both sides:

Then there was a vicious snarling in the mouth of the shelter and the plunge and thump of living things. Someone tripped over Ralph and Piggy's corner became a complication of snarls and crashes and flying limbs. Ralph hit out; then he and what seemed like a dozen others were rolling over and over, hitting, biting, scratching. He was torn and jolted, found fingers in his mouth and bit them. A fist withdrew and came back like a piston, so

8

Ibid., p. 109.

that the whole shelter exploded into light. Ralph twisted sideways on top of a writhing body and felt hot breath on his cheek. He began to pound the mouth below him, using his clenched fist as a hammer; he hit with more and more passionate hysteria as the face became slippery. A knee jerked up between his legs and he fell sideways, busying himself with his pain, and the fight rolled over him. Then the shelter collapsed with smothering finality; and the anonymous shapes fought their way out and through.⁹

Golding is not the first author to find brutality and
10 malevolence in children. William March in The Bad Seed and Lillian Hellman in The Children's Hour and Richard Hughes in A High Wind in Jamaica have all attributed these traits to pre-adolescents, but March and Hellman see vicious children as exceptions, whereas Golding and Hughes depict them as being typical.

Sammy Mountjoy and Pincher Martin, subjects of close study by Golding, both behave in selfish ways. The former is, for a long time, entirely sundered from his fellow-men and his actions towards them show a complete lack of conscience. The latter, as he is revealed in the flashbacks, is a thoroughly detestable character

9

Ibid., pp. 158-159.

10

This is the pseudonym of William Edward March Campbell.

by the standards of modern civilization. He is lecherous in his lust for Mary Lovell and in his fragments of thoughts, such as the one about Jane: "That wench was good for a tumble." He is unfeelingly cruel in the way that he treats Alfred in the affair involving Sybil. Worst of all, he uses people callously for his own ends: he tries to get Helen, the wife of Pete, the producer, to persuade her husband to keep him out of the navy. Yet he himself is very sensitive; he wants to be loved and admired, and as a result he becomes insanely jealous over petty incidents and has an uncontrollable, almost instinctive desire to gain revenge for imagined slights and wrongs. His friendship for Nathaniel is so strong that it surprises even Martin -- "And I liked him as much as that!" -- yet he plans to kill him. Nat's offenses are two: by voluntarily joining the navy, the quiet philosopher has innocently made Martin look cowardly, at least to himself, and by becoming engaged to Mary, whom Pincher brutally and unsuccessfully attempted to seduce, he has unwittingly aroused the actor's jealousy. The plan, which represents the supremacy of Martin's primitivity over his civilized training, has two steps: first, when Pincher is on watch and Nathaniel is standing on the

edge of the deck in deep thought, as he often does when he is off duty, the former will get rid of his two fellow-watchmen on pretexts; second, he will shout a sudden warning so that the quick turn of the ship will plunge Nathaniel, unnoticed, overboard. The terrible question which this diabolical plot poses about its originator is this: is his behaviour shocking because it is unique or because it is all too typical of mankind?

Sammy Mountjoy said in Free Fall:

When you are young, you cannot believe that a human relationship is as pointless as it seems.¹¹

This is the hopeless quandry of man as a social being. He is drawn strongly by his own kind, yet each contact produces, instead of satisfaction, mental and physical pain on both sides. Man is a modern Tantalus with a thirst for companionship and at the same time an allergy to that which satisfied that thirst.

"Piggy was an outsider", wrote Golding, and through his four books he develops this modern idea of the isolation of the individual even in the midst

¹¹

Golding, Free Fall, p. 119.

of his fellow-men. Ralph suffers from the difficulty of communicating with the others:

He had learnt as a practical business
that fundamental statements . . . had
to be said at least twice, before every-
one understood them. . . . He was
searching his mind for simple words so
that even the littluns would understand
what the assembly was about.¹²

So keen is the sense of being cut off that even Ralph and Piggy "found themselves eager to take a place in this demented but partly secure society." Even Lok, despite the telepathic union of the Neanderthals, experiences ironically "the indefinable attraction of the new people", but always there is something between men: just as a pile of firewood stood symbolically between Ralph and Jack, so a river separates one of the "new people" and Lok, and "neither he nor Lok could reach across the river."

On the rock Pincher Martin cries: "I am so alone. I am so alone!" but in a sense he has been alone all his life. One reason for his jealousy of Nathaniel is that he has won Mary, with whom Pincher failed, and that together these two "both have made a place where [Martin] can't get."

Sammy Mountjoy is the most concerned of all about the inability of people to communicate with each

12

Golding, Lord of the Flies, p. 75.

other. Early in Free Fall he writes:

My darkness reaches out and fumbles
at a typewriter with its tings.
Your darkness reaches out with your
tongs and grasps a book. There are
twenty modes of change, filter and
translation between us.¹³

Communication is important to Sammy because he has concluded, the "order of things" is based on pillars of an unknown material:

This 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 a bad shape.¹⁴

One can even lose contact with one's self:

I am not a man who was a boy looking at a tree. I am a man who remembers being a boy looking at a tree.¹⁵

13

Golding, Free Fall, p. 8.

14

Ibid., p. 189

15

Ibid., p. 46.

Love is important in establishing communication with others;
it is like the telepathy of the Neanderthals:

. . . my tiny thread was attached to
her [Beatrice] . . . I began to appre-
ciate dimly that a thread must be tied
at both ends before it can restrain
anything. . . The thread stretched
and broke.¹⁶

Despairingly Sammy wonders:

Would a lifetime with her bring up
a transparency first and then reveal
in it the complex outlines of the
soul in itself?¹⁷

Even the ability to comprehend Nick Shales and Rowena
Pringle is important because, Sammy writes, "I cannot
understand myself without understanding them." They
are not important to Sammy's thinking as typical
individual human beings, but as representatives of
two ways of life between which he must choose. The
science teacher represents a world which is concrete
and physical, an amoral world in which "what is nearest
the eye is hardest to see;" the other world is bounded

16

Ibid., pp. 85, 86.

17

Ibid., p. 113.

by absolutes, but stretches beyond the known world and is very moralistic. The former world represents freedom, the latter determinism. Meeting Miss Pringle, Sammy decides that "Nick's universe is real", but he also realizes that

that woman had achieved an unexpected kind of victory; she had deceived herself completely and now she was living in only one world.¹⁸

The people who live in Nick's world escape moral responsibility often at the terrible price of sanity: Beatrice, Minnie, even Sammy's mother, who "today . . . would be classed as subnormal". Then Sammy realizes:

Her world was real, both worlds are real. There is no bridge.¹⁹

But even if man cannot communicate their deepest feelings to each other, they must still live together, and as soon as a society reaches any size or complexity, it requires some form of government. Golding looks at this aspect of mankind -- man as a political animal -- in Lord

18

Ibid., p. 252.

19

Ibid., p. 253.

of the Flies and to some extent in The Inheritors. A civilization is based on a system of universally accepted regulations; in fact, Ralph at one point equates the two: ". . . the rules are the only thing we've got!" But as Sammy Mountjoy was aware, these rules are arbitrarily established and not absolute. They are in existence only because they have evolved along with human society, slowly and parallel to biological evolution. Each generation is carefully indoctrinated in the prevailing code and painstakingly taught to subordinate its natural instincts to this abstract authority.

Unfortunately the same characteristics which prevent man from being a truly social animal also make him reluctant or unable to obey the regulations necessary for a true, organized civilization. This conflict between savagery and rationality is dramatized when Ralph and Piggy go to the other boys to plead for order:

"Which is better -- to be a pack of painted niggers like you are, or to be sensible like Ralph is?" . . .

"Which is better -- to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill?" . . .

"Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?" 20

20

Golding, Lord of the Flies, p. 171

The real choices had been made symbolically long before:

Ralph discovered dirt and decay; understood how much he disliked perpetually flicking the tangled hair out of his eyes, and at last, when the sun was gone, rolling noisily to rest among dry leaves.²¹

Ralph is rejecting the savagery which Jack accepts as he "smeared on the clay" and declares: "Bollocks to the rules! We're strong --". It is significant that in the struggle between Jack, representing the "law of the jungle", and Ralph and Piggy, whose combined personality and brain make the perfect civilized leader, it is the former who emerges victorious. In a recent interview Golding said:

My sympathies are with Ralph, yes. But I don't think that he will necessarily win out because he's likeable. . . . I would have liked Ralph to "make it," but he couldn't. The "nice guy" frequently loses.²²

Major changes in the government of a society are brought about in one of two ways. When training

21

Ibid., p. 73.

22

Douglas M. Davis, "A Conversation with Golding", New Republic (May 4, 1963), p. 29.

fails and a majority of the members in a society no longer feel bound by "the rules", then a change takes place and government has evolved another step; or sometimes one man or a small group refuses to be bound by the convention of a society, rebels, and establishes a new set of rules under the theory that "might makes right".

In Lord of the Flies both methods combine to produce the chaos into which the island degenerates. The boys are too young to have been trained sufficiently in any system of government; therefore the inherent savagery quickly breaks through. Then Jack, who obviously subscribes to the theory of "the survival of the fittest", takes control through sheer physical power and establishes his own set of rules. Also, like an unscrupulous politician, he is not above using appeal to human weakness to gain support: "Who'll join my tribe and have fun?" he asks.

The simple Neanderthals seem to have no problems of government: the band is small, closely-knit, and its actions are often surprisingly selfless. Mal is well cared for during his final illness; perhaps the animal's instinct to look after its young is still strong in these creatures. Leadership seems to rest with the older members because they have wisdom and experience,

unlike the boys on the island, where the elder rule by physical strength. The Cro-Magnons combine the worst of both worlds: the elders, like Marlan, are nominally in control, but the strong youths, like Tuami, plan secretly to overthrow them by physical force.

Pincher Martin and Sammy Mountjoy both obey the laws and customs of their societies basically out of fear and cowardice. They are selfish like the Cro-Magnons, but they are careful to follow any rules which they cannot break with impunity, even foregoing their desires rather than risking punishment.

Beyond the strictly legalistic code of behaviour, an advanced society has a system of morals and ethics, but if the former is difficult to enforce, being against man's biological make-up, how does the latter fare, being even more arbitrary and more unnatural? Since the Neanderthals have no idea of right and wrong, they also have no sense of sin, but whether this is a state of pre-lapsus innocence is uncertain. C. S. Lewis writes (of another group):

They were innocent because they knew
no evil, but innocence is not
goodness.²³

23

C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 60.

Only one who is conscious of the effects of his acts on others can rightfully be praised for virtue or blamed for sin, and the Neanderthals lack this foresight.

With mental development this state of primal innocence (or ignorance) disappears, and the natural functions which the Neanderthals took for granted acquire for the Cro-Magnons the delight of "forbidden fruit". Eating leads to gluttony, drinking leads to alcoholic orgies, and sex leads to promiscuity. It is the old struggle of man in civilization trying to subordinate his natural desires to a moral code of which the animal in him knows nothing. The contrast is brought out strongly when Lok and Fa watch the feasting and love-making of the "new people" in amazement, and Fa concludes: "Oa did not bring them out of her belly."

The boys in Lord of the Flies raise another problem in morality. Both the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnons had to evolve their own systems of morality, relying on their own intellects; consequently the former have an extremely simple system, and the latter an imperfect one; but the boys had as a guide the example of the land in which they had been brought up, yet from that they degenerated to a state approaching

that of the Cro-Magnon. Are they more culpable for falling from the level of their society, or are they merely the victims of insufficient conditioning and, like the other two groups, of their own inescapable instincts? Regarding the former question it is interesting to note the surprising rapidity with which the boys revert to the old system and obedience to their elders at the end of the book. Jack, who at one time had "sat . . . like an idol", is immediately "a little boy" again, and Ralph is "boss" once more, trying to answer the officer's questions.

In modern times some people attempt vainly to return to the innocence of earlier days by deliberately rejecting the morals of their own age. They are careful, however, not to get into trouble by infringing on the legal code. Pincher Martin tries to live an amoral life, but he does have his own queer set of rules. To him life is a struggle in which only the fittest survive, and to him the fittest are those with the fewest scruples. Pincher treats everyone alike, be he man or woman, friend or enemy. In a series of flashbacks, he reveals himself to be guilty of crimes both major

and minor: attempted rape and seduction, deliberate maiming, theft, and petty upstaging. Sammy Mountjoy is more successful at being amoral, perhaps because he does not delight in cruelty and because he recognizes that social codes, while arbitrary, do exist and cannot be completely ignored. At first he knows only the values of Rotten Row -- "We were a world inside a world." Later he learns that there is a great variety of moral systems, none of them absolute; consequently they must be flexible. The stiff, drunken morality of old Benjie condemns Miss Manning and Mr. Carew for their affair, but they "love selflessly" and are admired by the children to whom they are "sex itself", and their primitive innocence is suggested by the epithet "our Adam and Eve". When Sammy Mountjoy returns from the war to Taffy, his legal wife, he goes almost at once to visit Beatrice, to whom he owes a moral debt which his conscience tells him is greater than any legal contract. A true sense of morality, after all, is not a series of do's and don'ts, but a way of treating each person with the utmost concern for his feelings and welfare, and this way of behaving will require variations as one deals with different personalities. It is the

practical system of Nick rather than the puritanical and proscriptive system of Miss Pringle, and judged pragmatically it works. It accounts for the spinster's attitude towards the other teacher: "She hated him because he found it easy to be good." Or is it merely that like the Neanderthals Nick has no system by which he can be bad?

In the area of religion Golding's work has its widest application, perhaps because religion itself extends far beyond law and morals and encompasses both the individual and society, and stretches beyond life itself. In Lord of the Flies he shows how early religion was merely primitive superstition arising out of ignorance and fear. Anything which is unfamiliar or incomprehensible to the boys takes on aspects of the supernatural. They "suffer untold terrors in the dark", they are frightened by dreams, and they fear "the beast which comes out of the sea."²⁵ They begin to leave parts of the kill after hunting as a sacrifice to placate the spirit. One boy comes close to the truth when he says: "Maybe . . . it's some sort of

25

It is interesting to note that, in evolutionary terms, man (and all life) is in a sense "the beast which comes out of the sea," and it was suggested several times that what the boys had to fear was themselves.

ghost." In a sense it is: the whole concept is an atavistic one, bequeathed to the boys by their prehistoric ancestors. In The Inheritors both the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnons are afraid of spirits and devils, but the former have also Oa, the earth-mother. As their chief deity she is frightening but at the same time benevolent. The little band makes ritual sacrifices to her, and Liku wears her image around her neck.

In his religious ideas Golding is not completely unorthodox; neither is he neo-orthodox. He seems to try to look at old theological ideas from the modern point of view and to interpret them accordingly. Ever since Darwin published his two great books, Origin of Species and The Descent of Man, man's thinking about himself has undergone a drastic evolution. As a product not of a divine fiat but of a biological process, man has sunk in his own eyes -- at least, in the eyes of those men who accept the theory of evolution -- to a level only a little above that of the other animal creatures to which he is related; he has become merely another sport, a mutant, a whim of nature. No longer is he "a little lower than the angels", and his ideas of things such as Paradise, Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory, therefore, have also undergone a descent.

For part of mankind now, Paradise is not a place created by God for man, but a state which man has the power to create for himself. This potentiality shows itself in the island of the schoolboys. "It's a good island," Ralph says the first day, but later he finds that things go wrong "as if this wasn't a good island." It is at once both a good and a bad island; which it becomes depends entirely upon the boys themselves.

On a higher level Golding suggests that Heaven -- or a pre-Heaven or Purgatory, such as Pincher Martin experiences on his rock -- may also be a product of man himself. Nat talks of

The sort of heaven we invented for ourselves after death, if we aren't ready for the real one. . . .
Take us as we are now and heaven would be a sheer negation. Without form and void. You see? A sort of black lightning, destroying everything that we call life.²⁶

Pinch even claims to have created God, for when he faces the mouth on the rock, he says: "You are a projection of my mind;" but when he cannot control the creature, he cries in terror: "I could never have invented that."

26

Golding, Pincher Martin, p. 167.

Voltaire once remarked that in the beginning God created man in His own image and that ever since man has been returning the compliment. There is a certain poetic justice, therefore, to the idea that man also creates for himself a Heaven and a Hell, constructed in his own life. As Satan said in Paradise Lost:

The mind is its own place, and in
itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell
of heaven. (I, 252-253)

But there is one difference: the heavens or hells which Golding's characters build for themselves are the products of lifetimes, and once completed they cannot be altered by the will or ignored.

Golding does not make it clear whether Martin's ordeal on the rock, which he has created in his mind, is an earthly experience, perhaps based on the belief that a drowning man's whole life passes before his eyes in a few seconds, or an other-worldly one, taking place in some state beyond death. This vagueness is regrettable from a reader's point of view, but is necessary for the author who cannot know any more about the fascinating subject than anyone else. The rock might

represent a kind of Purgatory, for the sailor suffers here as social man on earth might, seeking the companionship of his fellow-men: "I'm so alone! Christ! I'm so alone!" he cries; or it may be Hell itself, since he fears that the state may be permanent: "I shall never get away from this rock." It is noteworthy that the man who has always treated people with such a selfish contempt longs for them so desperately when he is isolated from them. Sammy Mountjoy underwent a similar experience in the broom closet, as perhaps Simon did facing the pig's skull, but the former emerged a better man and the latter a wiser. Pincher Martin is stubborn and defiant, clinging to his stone statue as one clings to false gods, and he sees himself as Ajax, Prometheus, and Lear, an Everyman in his suffering, but even this thought is probably only the actor's self-deceptive dramatization of the situation. This personality of Pincher is the kind of which Nathaniel had spoken, and will have to be destroyed and re-made in order to prevent Heaven from being, for the actor, "a negation".

Whether or not it is just for the being to do this to Martin depends upon two questions: free will and the nature of God. Sammy Mountjoy seems to feel that man has free will, for he says:

Somewhere, some time, I made a choice
in freedom and lost my freedom.²⁷

At the same time he seems to believe in predestination:

And yet . . . I could find no moment
when I was free to do as I would.
. . . I could not remember one
moment when being what I was I
could do other than I did.²⁸

Pincher Martin also finds this paradox:

You gave me the power to choose
and all my life you led me care-
fully 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, at that
same time, giving that same order
____ 29

The being on the rock tells Martin that there is an explanation of this paradox, but that he could not at present understand it: "There is no answer in your vocabulary." Martin prefers not to have the apparent contradiction cleared up, but to remain in his "own heaven" as he has created it, for the reconciliation

²⁷
Golding, Free Fall, p. 192.

²⁸
Ibid., p. 191.

²⁹
Golding, Pincher Martin, p. 180.

of opposites would make him morally responsible for the actions of his life. The boys on the island present the same dilemma: apparently they can make of their place of exile a heaven or a hell as they choose. But can they? Being creatures of nature, early freed from the formative pressures of civilization, could they control their animal instincts any more than the Neanderthals or the Cro-Magnons could theirs, or was the legacy of evolution too strong and the chaos inevitable? Golding seems to suggest that man's free choice is an illusion, that nature has secretly loaded the dice against him, yet also that he must play the game and that he is not free of responsibility for the outcome. Sammy did improve morally, though too late to help Beatrice, and Ralph and Piggy matured as the other boys degenerated, though they were overwhelmed by those others.

The kind of God who would play such tricks on man must be, if not cruel, at least characterized by an ironical sense of humour. Simon, representing truth, and Piggy, representing reason, try to help the boys and are killed; Lok tries to be friendly to the invaders and is repulsed by the Cro-Magnons, who flee from "the devil's country"; Sammy senses a deep truth which he cannot express, and the result is worse than

ignorance:

I had a hazy feeling that if only I could find the right words, Miss Pringle would understand and the whole business be disposed of. . . . Did she not understand that we were two of a kind, the earnest meta-physical boy and the tormented spinster . . .?³⁰

Pincher Martin is the victim of the cleverest of all the tricks of fate in Golding; his plan to murder Nat succeeds, but with one ironic addition: as Martin cries out, a torpedo does hit the Wildebeeste, and he realizes:

And I gave the right orders too.
If I'd done it ten seconds earlier
I'd be a bloody hero --³¹

As it is he is a dying man, the butt of a cosmic joke that would not be out of place in one of Thomas Hardy's greatest novels.

Cynical and pessimistic or simply realistic and frank, Golding is certainly modern in his outlook on man, society, and religion. The author himself explained his views in the interview mentioned earlier:

³⁰
Golding, Free Fall, pp. 203, 204.

³¹
Golding, Pincher Martin, p. 12

asked to comment on the idea that Salinger saw man as basically good while he saw man as basically evil, Golding told the questioner:

I'm not saying everyone is evil. I set out to discover whether there is that in man which makes him do whatever he does, that's all. When I was young, before the war, I did have some airy-fairy view about man, though I wasn't a Marxist (you'll find, I think, that the Marxists are the only people left who think humanity is perfectible). But I went through the war and that changed me. The war taught me different and a lot of others like me.³²

32

Douglas M. Davis, "A Conversation with Golding", New Republic (May 4, 1963), p. 28.

CHAPTER THREE

Several aspects of Golding's work remain to be discussed: its merits and faults, his style, the structure of his books, and an evaluation of them

Two of his greatest strengths as a novelist are that he is a natural story-teller and that he is original, and these assets supplement each other.

There is little question of William Golding's originality as a novelist. He has not been afraid to experiment with form or to attempt daring themes.¹

Golding's ability as a narrator is such that a reader can enjoy his books (except, perhaps, Free Fall) without thinking about, or even being aware of, the underlying ideas.

1

Frederick R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel (New York: Noonday Press, 1962), p. 254.

The implications of Lord of the Flies, the characters and setting of The Inheritors, the situation of the protagonist in Pincher Martin, and the ideas in Free Fall are all extremely unusual. In fact, original is a word found frequently in reviews of Golding's books. "Mr. Golding, in a first novel of great promise,² is also original," wrote a reviewer, and the later novels have been progressively more difficult to relate to other books. At the same time Martin Green, thinking perhaps of the themes, expressed the opinion that "Golding is not importantly original in thought or feeling."³ Green is also right for, despite the originality, some of Golding's tales and ideas can be traced to sources.

Lord of the Flies, a good, consistent piece of writing, is probably Golding's most derivative book and the one in which the influences show most clearly. The author himself acknowledges them: "Like the Coral Island," says the naval officer who rescues the boys, and the boys themselves have earlier drawn this parallel. In fact,

²
John Metcalf, "New Novels", Spectator, no. 6588 (October 1, 1954), p. 422.

³
"Distaste for the Contemporary", Nation (May 21, 1960), p. 454.

when "a picture of three boys walking along the bright beach flitted through [Ralph's] mind," it is not clear whether the reference is to Ralph's own earlier experience or to the book by Ballantyne, which he had read. Golding uses the same names as the Victorian author, although he changes Peterkin to Piggy, and similar personalities except for Jack, whom he totally alters. In both books Jack and Ralph are strong, athletic youths, while Peterkin and Piggy are less competent physically, but while Ballantyne's third boy is merely inferior to the others, Golding's is completely awkward; also, Peterkin is a deliberate clown and is beloved for it, while Piggy is the unwilling butt of every jest and prank, and is despised. One important difference between the two books is the number of people involved: in The Coral Island the three shipwrecked boys are completely compatible, but trouble appears with the arrival of a large band of pirates; so in Lord of the Flies small groups of boys -- Ralph and Piggy; Sam and Eric; Ralph, Jack and Simon -- get on well together, but the boys in the full society do not. Golding may here be attempting to stress the difference in personality between individual man and social man.

Stevenson's Treasure Island is also mentioned
in Lord of the Flies,⁴ and according to at least one reviewer, Richard Hughes's A High Wind in Jamaica is⁵ a possible source. But Lord of the Flies is related to these books as Voltaire is related to Leibniz or as Nathanael West is related to Horatio Alger: it is a cynical (or realistic) reversal of an idyllic tale, and if Golding's pessimism is exaggerated, it is no more so than the optimism of Ballantyne or Stevenson.

In some ways Lord of the Flies was for Golding an unfortunate first novel. It is very good -- many reviewers think it is his best -- so that with it he set for himself a very high standard, one which he has found hard to maintain. But what he has lost in his later novels in the quality of the finished product, he has gained in an even greater originality.

The Inheritors might almost be called a unique book. Certainly its only sources seem to be H. G. Wells'

4
p. 34.

5

James Stern, "English Schoolboys in the Jungle", New York Times (October 23, 1955), p. 38.

The only resemblance seems to be a vague one, that of the general theme of the inherent cruelty of children.

Outline of History, a paragraph of which Golding quotes in the front of the book, and a couple of interesting analogues, perhaps unconscious, between Golding and Hughes's A High Wind in Jamaica:

. . . Lok put his palms into the hollows of his eyes and rubbed them sleepily. Green spots from the pressure floated across the river.⁶

She pressed her eyeballs devoutly with her fingers to make sparks appear; ⁷

and Lok's "miracles of perception in the cavern of his nose" have their counterpart in Hughes's book:

"I could smell it was an earthquake coming when I got up. . . ." "She's awfully good at smells," said . . . Harry, proudly, to John. "She can sort out people's dirty clothes for the wash by smell: who they belong to."⁸

6

Golding, The Inheritors, p. 41.

7

Richard Hughes, A High Wind in Jamaica (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 24.

8

Ibid., p. 29.

Pincher Martin and Free Fall are even more divorced from ordinary literature. Martin may be a spiritual Robinson Cruscooe, but the relationship is remote, and Sammy Mountjoy is even farther from his possible progenitors, Adam, Christian, and the modern follower of Christ. In the question of free will versus determinism, Golding's character is used much as Milton uses Adam in Paradise Lost, for the conclusions each author reaches are applicable to all men. Like Christian in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Sammy is an Everyman, but his life is told as an autobiography, not as a symbolic journey. Instead of losing his burden, however, Sammy assumes it; he "takes up his cross" in the words of the New Testament; and although he does not emerge as an orthodox Christian, his experience in the broom closet might be considered his obedience to the command "Ye must be born again", for he undergoes a great transformation. Interestingly, while it is a moral change in Sammy, Golding describes it in psychological and biological terms, as if it were an actual birth. It occurs in a small, dark room, obviously symbolizing a womb, and in it Sammy -- like Lok -- assumes a foetal position:

I got my knees up against my chin
and put my crossed arms before my
face.⁹

He thinks of himself in terms of "the whole race", and reluctantly, "against [his] will", he begins to move about. As the human embryo in its development goes through all the stages of evolution, so Sammy, in his fear, follows a similar pattern: void or death, represented by "the body"; the origin of life ("Smooth.Wet. Liquid;") the reptilian or amphibious stage, "the snake"; and finally the human phase as he senses himself, though to his deceived fingers he seems to be touching "an enormous dead slug". At the end, like a lost soul, he cries out: "Help me! Help me!" It is an old religious theme presented in a new way, and shows Golding at his most original.

One reason for his ability to maintain narrative interest is his habit of writing about things with which he is familiar from first-hand experience. From his naval career came the background for Pincher Martin, the officers in the final scene of Lord of the Flies, and perhaps the

9

Golding, Free Fall, p. 168.

military prison camp scenes in Free Fall. His teaching experience and possibly the observation of his own children supply the knowledge of schoolboys shown in Lord of the Flies, and of childhood in certain scenes of Free Fall. In the former book Sam and Eric are typical pupils:

"Huh. Remember old Waxy at school?"
"'Boy -- you-are-driving-me-slowly-insane!'"¹⁰

In the latter book Nick Shales and Rowena Pringle seem to represent for Golding examples of good and bad teaching technique.

Often in the school scenes Golding's sense of humour, which is never long absent, reveals itself and though it is frequently subtle, it is a strong asset to his writing. Sometimes it takes the form of satire, as in Jack's staunchly nationalistic speech, "We're English; and the English are best at everything;" or in the religious lesson of Johnny Spragg:

10

Golding, Lord of the Flies, p. 93.

Miss Massey hit him on both sides
of the head, precisely with either
hand, a word and a blow.

"God --"

Smack!

"-- is --"

Smack!

"-- love!"

Smack! Smack! Smack! ¹¹

At other times Golding's sense of humour shows itself less wholesomely in sarcasm, smutty references, or obscene puns, which can be justified only on the grounds of appropriateness to the characters being depicted.

Golding's style is of uneven merit, although his manner of writing does not vary markedly. The apparent inconsistency springs from the fact that his style is more or less appropriate as he switches from theme to theme. Lord of the Flies is told in a straightforward, narrative way and is very commendable stylistically. The Inheritors presented the problems of depicting to readers the unfamiliar world of prehistoric man, making a group of unusual characters realistic and understandable, and creating an atmosphere never before attempted in serious literature. Golding overcame his problems very skilfully: his short, simple sentences convey the

11

Golding, Free Fall, p. 56.

impression of a world in which thought is childish and speech rudimentary; the passages in which Lok's impressions of objects new to him are given have an appealing simplicity; and his images are usually apt, and natural rather than literary, such as "He sounded busy at his meat as a beetle in dead wood;" or "He began to draw his body forward slowly into the narrow space like a snake sliding into a hole."

The only flaw in the style of this book, and it is a minor one, is an occasional lapse into unsuitable comparisons, as when Golding writes: "A hint of danger would have sent him flying along the terrace like a sprinter from his mark." Sprinter, with its connotation of a modern athlete training in his leisure time to run in organized competition for glory and trophies, is a highly inappropriate word to associate with a Neanderthal, whose life was devoted entirely to bare survival. Golding's naval background, which usually stands him in good stead, also betrays him in this book when he repeatedly uses the British naval slang word forrard: this term, applied to a canoe, is ludicrous, and when he uses the phrase arse-upward he transports the reader roughly from the forest to the fo' o'sle. In a primitive society with a very basic language,

12

See pages 24-25 of this thesis.

the concept of slang would be unknown, and the use of any word suggesting this idea to a reader is out of place and harmful to the delicately constructed atmosphere of the book.

Pincher Martin, although it is Golding's shortest novel, seems to drag, and its monotony is also caused by a stylistic fault: the author spends the entire book, except for the last chapter, telling the reader of the sense impressions of the sailor, and there is a certain boring repetitiveness about this technique. The first chapter is the worst in this respect, the later ones having the relief of brief flashbacks.

Karl puts it this way:

The weakness of the piece, despite its exciting and vivid prose, stems from the author's stress on survival only -- Martin is reduced to unthinking, instinctual flesh. He has nothing left over beyond the sheer will to live and his belief that he will be rescued. This lack of intellectualization, the very return to the primitive, leaves the novel flat; thrown back entirely upon Martin, the reader finds him insufficient.¹³

The style of Free Fall is a combination of "many a sniggering jest" and deliberate literary allusions, and artistically the latter are more objectionable. The slang and the earthy phrases are quite in keeping with the character of the narrator, but the more than half a dozen

13

Karl, op. cit., pp. 258-259.

quotations from a variety of great English authors are not. Sammy Mountjoy is basically an intelligent man so that the reader can accept his philosophical thought as normal introspection, but as Golding emphasizes, he has not received a good education, so that phrases from Bunyan, Milton, Bentham, Carlyle, Wordsworth, and Shelley sound unrealistic on his lips. One reviewer analyzes the style of Free Fall this way:

. . . it is not the prose of a successful artist. There is no life in his language; it is all ingenuity, intention, and synthesis. The colloquialisms are never the perfect expression of complex meaning; the elaborate imagery is never assimilated into a natural speaking voice. Ideas are worked out too mechanically. . . . Details are often flatly commonplace, though at the same time exaggerated, in a way that is not really redeemed by the author's indication that he knows they are. . . . And when he escapes the commonplace ¹⁴ it is by invoking the eccentric.

To this criticism might be added the complaint that Golding is sometimes careless in his diction and his use of punctuation. Awkward turns of phrase and weak words, which should have been eliminated in a re-writing, are still present; punctuation, which should be used to clarify

14

Martin Green, "Distaste for the Contemporary", Nation (May 21, 1960), p. 452.

meaning, in Golding often does not, since it is used either excessively or too sparsely. Too often the reader gets the impression that the writing was done in a great hurry and never revised properly. Golding himself has suggested the source of this fault; asked if he wrote quickly, he replied:

I think I'm rather slow, in one sense, fast in another. I've got to think a long time before writing. I do two or three drafts. The Inheritors was written in twenty-eight days. I wrote the draft of my next novel in America in sixteen days, which is pretty fast, I suppose, but you see I had been thinking about it for two or three years. When you think about finished work, I'm slow by comparison. In eight years I've written four novels. That isn't much.¹⁵

Structurally Golding's books suffer from the same inconsistency as his style. The careful workmanship in Lord of the Flies is obvious in its fine texture. If the earlier examples of the wearing away of civilization and the rise of the hunting instinct in the boys need supplementing, there is the "stone sequence". In the first chapter the boys, in a burst

15

Douglas M. Davis, "A Conversation with Golding", New Republic (May 4, 1963), p. 29.

of exuberance, roll a rock "as large as a small motor car"
down the mountain:

"Heave!"

The great rock loitered, poised
on one toe, decided not to return,
moved through the air, fell, struck,
turned over, leapt droning through
the air and smashed a deep hole
in the canopy of the forest.¹⁶

In the fourth chapter the size of the missile has diminished, but a dark intent is replacing exuberance in the thrower's mind:

Roger stooped, picked up a stone,
aimed, and threw it at Henry --
threw it to miss. The stone,
that token of preposterous time,
bounced five yards to Henry's
right and fell in the water.
Roger gathered a handful of
stones and began to throw them.
Yet there was a space round
Henry, perhaps six yards in
diameter, into which he dare
not throw. Here, invisible
yet strong, was the taboo of
the old life. Round the squat-
ting child was the protection
of parents and school and
policemen and the law. ¹⁷

¹⁶

Golding, Lord of the Flies, p. 27.

¹⁷

Ibid., p. 59.

In the sixth chapter Ralph and Jack repeat the action of the first chapter, but this time with thoughts of a deadlier purpose:

"Shove a palm trunk under that and if an enemy came --- look!"

A hundred feet below them was the narrow causeway, then the stony ground, then the grass dotted with heads, and behind that the forest.¹⁸

As the climax of the book approaches, "Roger took up a small stone and flung it between the twins, aiming to miss." Then "someone was throwing stones: Roger was dropping them, his one hand still on the lever."

Finally;

high overhead, Roger, with a sense of delirious abandonment, leaned all his weight on the lever.

Ralph heard the great rock long before he saw it. He was aware of a jolt in the earth that came to him through the soles of his feet, and the breaking sound of stones at the top of the cliff. Then the monstrous red thing bounded across the neck and he flung himself flat while the tribe shrieked.

The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow . . . bounded twice and was lost in the forest.¹⁹

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁹

Ibid., p. 172.

The build-up to this shocking scene is carefully constructed: the alternation of large and small stones, the change from purposelessness to deadly purpose, show a careful planning. Later Golding utilizes this last rock further when Ralph, as a fugitive, hides by it. With such careful planning it is not surprising that, when Lord of the Flies was made into a film -- the British entry in the 1963 Cannes Festival -- one reviewer wrote: "It is probably the most faithful film adaptation of a novel ever produced."²⁰ It would be difficult to improve structurally.

But in Pincher Martin, Golding's least popular book, the fault lies in the structure. He has tried to do too much too quickly. With his "three and possibly . . . half a dozen levels of significance",²¹ he becomes like a juggler trying to keep too many balls in the air at one time -- he fumbles. He does manage to give the conclusion a startling twist, but he has to strain for it, and knowing that some readers will feel

²⁰
The London Illustrated News, no. 6460 (May 25, 1963), p. 819.

²¹
See Page 11, footnote 3, of this thesis.

that they have been tricked, he has to prepare carefully for the re-readers who will search for the point at which the hero actually dies, or at least lapses into his final

²²
fantasy. The author has to fill the book, therefore, with hints that the sailor is really drowning all the time and not on a rock at all, hints such as

There was a new kind of coldness over his body;²³

Like a dead man!²⁴

His body was in some other place that had nothing to do with this landscape;²⁵

. . . like a waterlogged body
. . . to float, still and
painless;²⁶

22

This point is found on page 6 "The hard lumps of water no longer hurt. There was a kind of truce, observation of the body."

23

Golding, Pincher Martin, p. 22

24

Ibid., p. 29.

25

Ibid., p. 35.

26

Ibid., p. 44.

I am aware of a weight. A ponderous squeezing. Agoraphobia or anyway the opposite of claustrophobia. A pressure.²⁷

There are more than thirty of these phrases and sentences which assume special meaning upon a second reading of the novel, but which make the book seem "ponderous" and "word-logged" on a first or any subsequent reading. In the American edition Golding tried to clarify the meaning of the book by changing the title to The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin. This change helps little, and loses the sobriquet "Pincher", which occurred only in the title. Golding tells the place of its origin, incidentally, but not its significance. The officer asks Martin: "Got your nickname on the lower deck yet?" and he replies: "Afraid so, sir. Inevitably, I believe."

One may also question the credibility of Martin's creation of God as a naval officer with "coal black . . . seaboots, good and shiny and wet and solid." Since he did not join the navy willingly, he would certainly not think of himself primarily as a sailor. In his own eyes he is essentially an actor and a Casanova, so that a God

27
Ibid., p. 116.

he would create "in his own image" would more probably be a domineering director or a Venus or Cupid figure. On the other hand, God represents authority, and since the only real discipline Pincher knew in his life was that which he met in the navy, this scene may be justified.

While Golding is original and cannot be accused of writing to a pattern, his books do show certain similarities in structure. At some point in each book, for instance, a main character, in solitude and usually under great stress, experiences a moment of mystical vision or revelation which leaves him with a greater insight into himself, mankind, or "this sorry Scheme of things". In Lord of the Flies Simon's confrontation of the pig's skull and the dead flier reveals to him the real danger which threatens the boys on the island: the fact that the real "beast" is within them and cannot be escaped by fleeing. Pincher Martin's moment of truth is really the whole book, since it is an imaginary experience taking only a few minutes, but it does rise to a climax near the end in the encounter with the being. Sammy Mountjoy's moment in Free Fall occurs when he is locked alone in the broom closet and forced to face himself.

The Inheritors is slightly different; Lok has a premonition when he meets the old woman:

She was so close that Lok could see
the drops that fell from her fingers
and the twin fires reflected in her
eyes. She passed under the rock and
he knew that she had not seen him.
All at once Lok was frightened
because she had not seen him. 28

Soon after, she is murdered, but this is only a prelude to Lok's own death, which he accepts passively, but it has great significance since his lonely demise marks the end of his race and also the end of another stage of evolution.

The sections referred to above, or ones near them and related to them, usually carry the "messages" of the books. They are not exactly purple passages, but they stand out clearly and obviously, and in some inexplicable way they seem to draw attention to themselves as different from the rest of the book. They are usually philosophical in tone and help to clarify the meaning underlying the book.

Near the end of each book, except Free Fall, there is a switch in time or point of view. In Lord

28

Golding, The Inheritors, p. 78

of the Flies the arrival of the naval men immediately re-asserts European customs and values on the primitive society of boys. The Inheritors gives the reader a glimpse of the world and the Neanderthals through the eyes of the "other people", the Cro-Magnons, in the last section. Pincher Martin concludes by leaving the sailor and introducing two navy men and an old fisherman.

This device allows Golding to end each book with a heavy (and sometimes laboured) twist of irony.

"I should have thought that a pack of British boys -- you're all British aren't you? -- would have been able to put up a better show than that ..."²⁹

says the naval officer in Lord of the Flies. The simple Neanderthals regard the Cro-Magnons with awe, so that it is surprising to learn how the latter look upon the former:

. . . shut off from men by the devil-haunted mountains . . .
Who would sharpen a point against the darkness of the world?³⁰

29

Golding, Lord of the Flies, p. 192.

30

Golding, The Inheritors, p. 231.

In Pincher Martin Davidson's last speech crowns the whole story:

". . . don't worry about him.
You saw the body. He didn't
even have time to kick off
his seaboots." 31

Earlier in this book there was the surprise about the torpedo. Free Fall ends with a double surprise too: it is Beatrice, not Sammy, who has broken down and is in the mental hospital, and the room in which the artist underwent the ordeal of solitary confinement turns out to be a broom closet.

Even the short story Envoy Extraordinary has a "message" shortly before the end, in the conversation about time and the individual between the Emperor and Phanocles, and a mildly surprising ending when the inventor is appointed as ambassador to the Orient.

These last two devices -- the shift and the ironic twist -- have caused critics to attack Golding for inconsistency and artificiality; one writes of Free Fall:

31
Golding, Pincher Martin, p. 189

What seriously weakens Golding's novel . . . is the appearance of a predetermined deus ex machina that suddenly resolves the conflict.

. . . though Sammy is amoral, even immoral, by any Christian or humanistic standard, Golding is anxious to indicate that he can be reached and transformed. . . . there are beliefs and values operating in Golding's fiction that must dominate despite the main thrust of each novel toward disbelief. 32

Yet it is these changes which give Golding's novels their third dimension. Deprived of such a conclusion, unrealistic as it may be, each novel would be flat, showing only a hopeless picture of humanity and life. The Ralphs and Piggys show how much the boys have sunk and how high civilized man has risen, and the Sammys show how an amoral slum boy may find a sense of values, even though in real life the Ralphs and Piggys and Sammys are rare exceptions. In Pincher Martin Golding depicted a character who was not redeemed in life and whose end was a kind of purgatory. Of this unrelieved piece of pessimism, the above critic wrote:

32

Karl, op. cit., pp. 256-257.

The weakness of the piece, despite its exciting and vivid prose, stems from the author's stress on survival only -- Martin . . . has nothing left over beyond the sheer will to live and his belief that he will be rescued. . . . Had Golding been more interested in Martin's psychology than in his instincts, he could perhaps have created a real hell of those few seconds, one that convinced us of Martin's cruel drama. 33

Golding is caught in a hopeless dilemma: he may face the charge of being dull and flat, or of developing his characters in an unrealistic way.

This problem is like the one faced by the characters themselves, who must make choices apparently free, but which are destined to be wrong. Like Camus' doctrine of the absurd, the situation is an unsolvable riddle, and it may explain why Golding is sometimes compared to Camus and the Existentialists. Karl suggests this relationship when he writes:

What Golding senses is that institutions and order imposed from without are temporary, but that man's irrationality and urge for destruction are enduring. 34

33

Ibid., pp 258-259

34

Ibid., p. 257.

But within Golding's work there are flashes of the faith and optimism of an earlier time, which prevent him from being a full-fledged Existentialist.

The theme of man's nature and the question of free will have been central to all four of Golding's novels, but he has shown, if not development, at least some variation in his approach to his topics. As his interest had shifted from the social to the moral and religious aspects, his subjects for study have narrowed from larger groups (in Lord of the Flies) to smaller groups (in The Inheritors), and finally to individuals (in Pincher Martin and Free Fall). This change has necessitated other changes. The omniscient author of the first book tried, in the second, to present much of the material through the eyes of his characters, but he remained omniscient. In the third book, through flashbacks and long passages of thought, he penetrated more deeply into his central character, and in his latest book he uses the autobiographical form, which removes the author completely and allows the reader free access to the subject's mind. The simple chronological structure of the first two novels was replaced in the third by a patchwork of flashbacks (not chrono-

logical) which allowed Golding to present Martin in greater depth, while in the fourth book, composed entirely of reminiscence, he deliberately shuffled the order of the scenes, so that the time sequence is like a jigsaw puzzle. It is not an unsolvable puzzle, however, and it does allow Golding to reveal his main character in the most effective way, making use of suspense and surprise. Any resultant obscurity is in thought, not in characterization.

His style has altered to fit his growing interest in character, until he has developed a "stream-of-consciousness" technique of writing, in which key phrases from earlier scenes recur in later ones so that several past incidents are all linked in an apparently haphazard (but often ironic) way:

Again there came the sound of the spade against the tin box.

"Hard a-starboard! I'll kill us both, I'll hit the tree with that side and you'll be burst and bitched! There was nothing in writing!"³⁵

What is your name? Muriel Millie-cent Mollie? Mary Mabel Margaret?

35

Golding, Pincher Martin, p. 182.

Minnie Marcia Moron?
Oil, acid, lye. None of them.³⁶

But Golding's technique, while it is individual, is not an important contribution to literature; much of his real value is in his adaptation of allegory to the modern novel, for he has taken this device and modernized it without losing either "the complex appeal of good allegory"³⁷ or "the universalizing power of allegory".³⁸ Obviously he has made changes; he had to. Earlier allegorists, such as Edmund Spenser and John Bunyan, used the device to present difficult religious and moral ideas in a simplified form to their readers, who were wholly in agreement with the philosophy behind the stories. Golding has a moral purpose behind his writing, but it has not caused him to simplify his presentation; instead, his use of allegory makes the subject in some ways more difficult since it expands the topic and probes all its

36
Golding, Free Fall, p. 180

37
C.S.Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 289

38
C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 387.

complexities. As Bertrand Bronson wrote:

. . . it is possible to hold that allegory is a more advanced form of intellectual and artistic expression than naturalism. Just as on the physical level it requires a concentration of will and effort to drive a road through the jungle, so in the world of the mind, it requires a greater intellectual and imaginative effort to divine or perceive order within the chaotic multiplicity of consciousness, and to represent that ideality with power and beauty, than to reproduce, even with high fidelity, our chaotic impressions and responses to the phenomenal world. Every such act is a reclamation, a little fiat in the divine image, and is entitled, if any aspect of our mental life has such a right, to be called mature. ³⁹

Furthermore, Golding cannot rely on the complete agreement of his readers as could earlier allegorists, for not only are his ideas not religious in the orthodox sense, but also one of his basic ideas -- evolution --

39

Bertrand H. Bronson, "Personification Reconsidered", in New Light on Dr. Johnson: Essays on the Occasion of his 250th Birthday, ed. Frederick W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 215.

may arouse antagonism in many of his readers. The modern allegorist is, like the novel form itself,

a victim to the loss of an agreed picture of the Universe, which has faded with the stifling of Christianity by non-dogmatic idealism and crude materialism.⁴⁰

Medieval allegories were peopled with personified abstractions, the vices and virtues, while Golding uses characters who, although they may represent types, are at the same time believable individual personalities. As Roger tosses stones at the boy on the beach or as Pincher Martin, tormented yet defiant, stubbornly resists the creature on the rock, there is an echo of the medieval psychomachia, to use a Lewis phrase, "a psychomachia with trimmings". Finally, the earlier allegorists established in each work a set of fixed equivalents to which they rigidly adhered, while Golding, especially in Lord of the Flies, allows his allegorical correspondences to shift. Ellen Leyburn feels that a mathematically precise system is not necessary:

40

J. M. Cohen, quoted in The Living Novel: A Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks, p. 28.

. . . double consciousness is essential if the allegory is to be maintained. This is not to suggest that every detail, especially in a long allegory like Gulliver's Travels, should bear a double meaning, but that the imagination of the reader should be kept steadily operating in two planes.⁴¹

Critics such as Karl feel that much of the weakness in Golding's novels is traceable to his use of allegory:

The idea of a Golding novel invariably is superior to the performance itself. Ironically, the idea, often so engaging in the abstract, is self-defeating, for it forces an artificial method. Golding is an allegorist whose allegory pre-empts the realistic level; often, only the allegory is of interest and when that begins to wear thin, there is insufficient substance to grapple with.⁴²

While there may be some truth in these remarks, they yet ignore much which should be added. Any literary "form" is restricting, but it is also necessary for the discipline it imparts. Also, as Karl himself

41

Ellen Douglass Leyburn, op. cit., p. 12.

42

Karl, op. cit., p. 259

admits, Golding is primarily a moralist, and allegory is the form most suited to "teaching lessons", being as it is stripped of subplots and unnecessary minor characters, so that the full force of its didacticism may strike unhampered. That it is an artificial form is unfortunate, but realism merely weakens the force of the message.

But Golding's importance goes beyond the revival of the use of allegory. The purpose for which he himself has used this device is significant: he has made it a vehicle for presenting in a literary way modern scientific ideas and their implications for mankind. In a sense he is a modern Milton, but the gospel he expounds is that of Charles Darwin, and he attempts no justification, merely a description of the ways of nature to man. In a world where "everything is relative, nothing absolute", Golding tries to define sin, to assess the moral responsibility of a creature who is still a mass of uncontrollable primitive instincts, and to show the importance, even the necessity, of organized society in preserving civilization. It is not a pleasant, optimistic outlook, but it is a frank, timely one, as a reviewer wrote of

Free Fall:

A strange, difficult, demanding book, but ultimately rewarding and memorable because of its brutal honesty.⁴³

Golding's importance, like that of Orwell and Huxley, is as a modern gadfly to society. As such, Martin Green does not find him admirable:

. . . Golding is a belated recruit to the ranks of those writers who have rediscovered for this century man's essential savagery; who have triumphantly rejected science and hygiene, liberalism and progress; who have, in any account of contemporary conditions alternated between effects of commonplace and effects of nightmare. He is so belated as to inherit these themes in their decrepitude.⁴⁴

To an ordinary writer this would be crushing criticism, but to Golding it may be disguised praise, for his purpose is not to lull readers but to produce mental discomfort, so that his effectiveness can be best judged not by his popularity but by the reaction he

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Aileen Pippett, "Something Went Wrong", New York Times Book Review (February 14, 1960), p. 4.

⁴⁴

"Distaste for the Contemporary", Nation (May 21, 1960) p. 453.

provokes. The vigour and vehemence with which critics decry his ideas about mankind suggest that he may be uncomfortably close to the truth; like Gertrude, they protest too much:

. . . it is permissible perhaps to carp at the very premise on which the whole strange story is founded;⁴⁵

At times the boys are less boys than archetypal savages producing the correct taboos a little too promptly;⁴⁶

Rather too many nagging questions remain unanswered.⁴⁷

But a few critics, men of a hardier breed, are willing to face the implications and to admit the truth of his picture of man:

45

James Stern, "English Schoolboys in the Jungle", New York Times (October 23, 1955), p. 38.

46

Douglas Hewitt, Manchester Guardian (September 28, 1954), p. 4.

47

Dan Wickenden, "First Idyll, Then Nightmare", New York Herald Tribune Book Reviews (October 23, 1955), p. 6.

"Lord of the Flies" strips people down to their essentials. Apocalyptic, harrowing, shatteringly dramatic, it is a novel of the beginning and end of things. It is, in fact, a kind of utopian novel in reverse -- Robinson Crusoe with the id running amuck. . . . It is the howling primitivism the children discover in themselves that undoes their flimsy society. . . . the society the children created on the island is a parallel to our civilization. Their failure, therefore,⁴⁸ is a reflection of ours.

Just as there is disagreement over the merits of Golding's individual novels, and over the truth of his picture of man's nature, so there is a lack of unanimity about Golding's probable place in English literature.

Certainly his fame is growing steadily:

William Golding already has a considerable, but unofficial, reputation in this country [the United States]. There has been one article about him -- in the Kenyon Review -- but the charge carried by his name in literary conversation is out of all proportion to that. To some degree, the lack of published criticism may actually increase that charge: to say

48

David Boroff, "They Speak the Teen-agers' Language", New York Times Book Review (April 7, 1963), p. 3.

the right thing about Golding is
the most searching of current
tests of one's sophistication.⁴⁹

Another observer, writes of Golding's popularity among
young people:

. . . those who like the book like
it with a passionate intensity
which tends to fly at the throat
of adverse criticism of any sort.⁵⁰

But fads are temporary and no indication of permanent
worth, and interpretations of the current interest in
Golding vary greatly. Frank Warnke writes:

Without too much hesitation, I
would venture the prediction that
the Golding craze, though certainly
as silly, will prove neither as
significant nor as long-lived as
the cult of Salinger.⁵¹

Others, even those strongly critical of his writing, see
for Golding a more permanent place in literature.

49

Martin Green, "Distaste for the Contemporary", Nation
(May 21, 1960), p. 451.

50

Frank J. Warnke, "'Lord of the Flies' Goes to College",
New Republic (May 4, 1963), p. 27.

51

Ibid., p. 28.

52

"'Lord of the Flies' . . . has a good chance of enduring," wrote one, and another called Free Fall "a failure, but on the heroic scale, not to be lightly dismissed." Karl summed up Golding's work to the present in these words:

53

. . . he . . . indicates in nearly every line that he is an artist seriously interested in his craft. And even if he seems prone to surprise the reader with gimmicks, he nevertheless has demonstrated a sharp enough awareness of his material to overcome this defect before it permanently damages his fiction. When literary values overcome the moralist, Golding's potential may well be realized, and he will become an outstanding novelist.⁵⁴

Golding's novels have a much wider application than Salinger's, with their themes of mankind as a whole compared to the latter's obsession with adolescence, and Golding's books are certainly more interesting as stories than the American's. On the strength of his first novel, Lord of the Flies, Golding should survive as a minor classic. He has demonstrated in all four of his novels an original if

53
Aileen Pippett, "Something Went Wrong", New York Times Book Review (February 14, 1960), p. 4.

54
Karl, op. cit., p. 260.

not completely disciplined talent, so that he is capable of a body of work of even higher calibre, and under optimum circumstances he might produce a masterpiece of greater magnitude than Lord of the Flies.

He came surprisingly close to his first book in Free Fall, in which he dealt with the theme of the individual and free will and determinism, a theme about which he has probably thought and written more than any other contemporary English novelist, and on which he has not yet made his final pronouncement. If Golding should surpass Lord of the Flies in some future novel, it is to be hoped that this book will deal with this same theme, which he has explored so painstakingly, so that his readers may catch in it some glimpse, through the allegory, of the cosmic truth above the animal man; for if his talent "catches fire in the sun", Golding may reveal whether "the line of darkness [has] an ending."

APPENDIX A

William Gerald Golding was born on September 11, 1911, and educated at Marlborough Grammar School and Brasenose College, Oxford, from which he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1935. (It is significant for this thesis to note that at Oxford he studied science before switching to literature.)

He married Ann Brookfield in 1939, the year the Second World War broke out, and in 1940 he enlisted in the navy. He served throughout the war, seeing much action in a variety of places, such as the sinking of the Bismarck, the "D-Day" landings, and the attack at Walcheren. From his naval experiences came the backgrounds for two of his novels and, perhaps, the Edwardian beard he now wears.

Since the war he has been teaching at Bishop Wordsworth's School, Salisbury, and carrying on his hobbies: sailing and reading classical Greek, which he taught himself. In 1955 he received his F. R. S. L. and during the past year Golding spent several months on a lecture tour of American campuses. His family now includes a son and a daughter.

APPENDIX B

. . . and indeed the whole Frame of it
[the Faerie Queene] wou'd appear monstrous,
if it were to be examin'd by the Rules
of Epick Poetry, as they have been drawn
from the Practice of Homer and Virgil.
But as it is plain the Author never
design'd it by those Rules . . . to
compare it therefore with the Models
of Antiquity, wou'd be like drawing a
Parallel between the Roman and the
Gothick Architecture. (Hughes, 1715)¹

Has Spenser formed his allegories on the
plan of the ancient poets and artists,
as much as he did from Ariosto and the
Italian allegorists, he might have
followed nature more closely; and would
not have wandered so often into such
strange and inconsistent imaginations.
(Spence, 1747) ²

. . . Though the Faerie Queene does not
exhibit that economy of plan, and exact
arrangement of parts which Epic severity

1

The Poets and Their Critics, ed. Hugh Sykes Davies
(London: Hutchinson Educational Ltd., 1960), I, 44-45.

2

Ibid., p. 46.

requires, yet we scarcely regret the loss of these . . . (T. Warton, 1754) ³

When an architect examines a Gothic structure by Grecian rules, he finds nothing but deformity. But the Gothic architecture has its own rules, by which when it comes to be examined, it is seen to have its merit, as well as the Grecian. The question is not, which of the two is conducted in the simplest and truest taste: but, whether there be not sense and design in both, when scrutinized by the laws on which each is projected.

The same observation holds of the two sorts of poetry. Judge of the Faerie Queene by the classic models, and you are shocked by its disorder: consider it with an eye to its Gothic original, and you find it regular.
(Hurd, 1762) ⁴

Considered most broadly, allegory is made by many different kinds of writers using all the literary forms. These writers, often widely separated from each other in time, bring literary method and particular cultural ideas together in a flexible organization of techniques. In this way unsuspected possibilities for literary treatment are discovered, leading to the gradual construction of a new form or the

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Ibid., p. 46.

4

Ibid., pp. 49-50

5
revitalization of older forms.

The passages in which Spenser reminds us of medieval allegory are not very numerous, and even where we are reminded we are not always sure of a real connexion.⁶

5

Edwin Honig, Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory, p. 93.

6

C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 297.

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