

## 4 THEMES

### 4.1 DISEASED AND FALLEN HUMAN NATURE

The theme of mankind's diseased and fallen nature is the central theme of the novel, and extends pervasively to such other themes as fear and power. In deciding to make his boys real, Golding was consciously challenging the idealised characters of *The Coral Island*, who are portrayed as unselfish, courageous and mindful of both their Creator and their beloved parents. In sharp contrast to Ballantyne's boys, who work in loving co-operation for the common good, without so much as an impure word, thought or deed, Golding's boys are shown to be selfish, greedy, superstitiously afraid, unmindful of their Creator, and forgetful of their parents and the standards imposed by adult authority. They are moreover, cruel, uncooperative, vindictive and finally self-destructive. (We may in part explain such radically opposed views about what boys are like by examining the historical contexts in which *The Coral Island* and *Lord of the Flies* were written. R. M. Ballantyne wrote in 1858, in a world that was becoming increasingly dominated by European technology, culture and religion. Britain in particular controlled a vast empire, and the British confidently believed they had a God-given right to extend to the rest of the world the material benefits of a progress for which they took much of the credit. The future appeared to hold out the hope of a still greater prosperity and unlimited progress. But a century later, when Golding wrote his fable, such optimistic Victorian hopes had been very thoroughly discredited. Industrial depression, the breaking up of the British Empire, the decline of religion, and two world wars, ending in the horrors of the concentration camps and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, destroyed all faith in 'progress' for Golding and many of his generation, and his fable can be thought of as expressing the disillusioned pessimism of the 1950s.

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Though this approach has value and is probably enough to explain Ballantyne, it fails to do justice to Golding, who has always had a pre-occupation with ancient civilisations and with pre-history (his second novel, *The Inheritors*, is about Neanderthal Man's encounter with Homo Sapiens). In *Lord of the Flies* Golding is clearly seeking to explore fundamental human nature, and this is apparent from the way in which he portrays the slackening hold of civilisation on the boys and their consequent atavistic regression. By reversing mankind's evolution and abbreviating time, he strips his boys to their essential nature, which is shown to be one of murderous savagery.

In doing this, there can be little doubt that Golding is inverting not simply Ballantyne's idealisation, but the whole Romantic tradition of 'the noble savage'. According to this tradition, which stems from the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, man's basic nature is good, but it has been corrupted by civilisation and perverted by Society's political, religious, educational and legal institutions from its pristine innocence and goodness. This belief is akin to the numerous utopian myths that tell of a golden world set in the past - Atlantis or Arcadia or Eden itself. At an opposite extreme to this utopianism affirming man's essential natural goodness, is the belief that man is by nature essentially sinful. One powerful assertion of this within Christian tradition is the doctrine of original sin, associated with St Augustine (345-430 AD). This holds that human nature is so fundamentally bad that it can be redeemed only through divine grace, never through man's own unaided efforts. It is a profoundly pessimistic belief, and one that Golding apparently accepts. 'Man,' he tells us, 'is a fallen being. He is gripped by original sin' (*The Hot Gates*, 1965).

Even so, we must distinguish between what Golding asserts here and what the novel itself actually conveys. What it does not specifically convey is 'original sin' in the Augustinian sense. There is no overt religious, let alone Christian, testimony in the novel. At best, we can say it portrays 'original sin' only if we use the term loosely, as an equivalent to an ingrained and ineradicable flaw in human nature. It is through Simon's 'ancient, inescapable recognition' that we, as readers, are made aware of mankind's evil - his 'essential sickness'; but here again, we should be on our guard when Golding calls Simon a 'saint', since the word has no specifically Christian reference, however convenient it may be as a metaphor.

*Lord of the Flies* works on the principle of exposing the inherent evil in its characters gradually and through ironic repetitions of behaviour (see Section 4.3). Jack turns into an arbitrarily cruel tribal chief who orders Ralph's death at the hands of his choirboys, who have themselves turned into merciless savages; Roger becomes a torturer, driven by

sadistic lust; the innocence of make-believe and 'fun and games' degenerates into savagery and the murderous assault on Simon. But the point is not that these things happen, but that they represent the realisation of the characters' instincts and the fulfilment of their most basic, and therefore most authentic, selves.

Nor can it be argued that at least some characters escape the 'essential illness' of human evil. If it is truly 'essential', it must exist in every human being, and it is in fact shown to afflict all Golding's boys. This is not to deny that Ralph, Piggy and Simon are capable of good intentions and actions. Clearly they are; but deep within them all is an evil they share with Jack and Roger. When Robert is acting the pig in game, Ralph as well as Roger fights to get close, trying 'to get a handful of that vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was overmastering' (Chapter 7). All the boys, in varying degrees, fear the Beast, just as all of them, Piggy included, become part of 'a single organism' and destroy Simon in a murderous frenzy. That is the outlet for their own bestiality (see *Specimen Passage*, pp. 77-82).

The only character never shown to be involved in evil is Simon, whose most reprehensible act is to join Ralph and Jack in destructively heaving a rock into the roof of the jungle in Chapter 1. But ironically, it is through the least blameable and most saintly of the characters that the revelation of mankind's diseased and fallen nature is made. Simon's actions are portrayed as consistently unselfish: he cares for the littluns, builds huts, tries to save Piggy from Jack's anger, crosses the island at dusk to help Piggy and the littluns, encourages Ralph in his leadership, and finally forces himself to climb the mountain to uncover the truth about the Beast, only to be murdered by those whom he seeks to liberate from fear by the truth he has painfully discovered. If any character in the fable might be thought to be exempt from the 'essential illness' of the human condition, it is Simon. He alone has the sheer moral courage necessary to face and comprehend what it is that causes the degeneration of the boys into squalor, savagery and bestiality. In his confrontation with the spiked pig's head, he refuses to flinch from the ultimate truth, which is that, like the Beast, and like everything outside ourselves that we call evil, it is in reality neutral, and is invested with evil only because he himself projects on to it an evil that originates in himself, but that is common to all mankind:

You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close!  
I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are as they are?

Even if some critics consider Simon to be too contrived a mouthpiece for Golding's central theme, they can hardly deny that in so far as the

fable can be claimed to have a 'message', this is the very heart of it. Ralph survives to know its truth and to weep 'for the end of innocence'.

#### 4.2 CIVILISATION

The novel presents civilisation both positively and negatively. While the boys, with the exception of Piggy, are at first exhilarated at knowing that they are on their own, and therefore exempt from the imposition of the adult world and its standards, the littluns and the more responsible older boys quickly come to the realisation that being cut off from the authority of schoolmasters and parents carries severe penalties. Their very irresponsibility in starting a fire that destroys a littlun, or in gorging fruit that gives them diarrhoea, or in fouling their immediate surroundings, forces Ralph to take an adult role and insist on rules designed to achieve civilised standards and to maximise the possibility of rescue. Even so, the action of the story strips the boys bit by bit of the veneer of civilisation, which the boys abandon in much the same way as they abandon their school uniforms.

Ralph's rules are increasingly ignored and violated, then challenged and contemptuously dismissed by Jack. The authority of the conch shell, a symbol of rational discussion and civilised values, is slowly eroded; the shelters and signal fire are neglected. As their memories of civilisation fade, the majority of the boys revert to savagery, which liberates them from civilised rules and standards, but at the cost of their forfeiting their individuality to become members of a tribe dominated by a Chief who imposes his will with arbitrary brutality, stopping at neither torture nor murder.

Ralph, Piggy and Simon struggle to uphold civilised standards, but fail because these have literally to be worked at (building shelters, keeping clean), whereas Jack offers the alternative life of excitement and hunting, free of boring responsibilities. Still more importantly, Jack has an answer to the boys' fear of a Beast that increasingly menaces their lives. It can be killed, or at least placated. Ralph despairs at the way everything breaks up, and together with Piggy and Simon, prays for a sign from civilisation. We know from his daydreaming that civilisation for Ralph means the security and the comfort of a home; but it also means an ordered life, a respect for adult authority, decency and honesty in one's dealings with others, caring for the weak, and, as Piggy would say, it means a world that makes sense - 'with houses an' streets, an' - TV' - and therefore a world free from fear and the menace of a Beast.

The heavily ironic answer to Ralph, Piggy and Simon, who strive unsuccessfully 'to convey the majesty of adult life' and desperately plead for a sign, is the dead airman, who symbolises the dark and negative aspect of civilisation, and is mistakenly, but significantly, believed to be the Beast. An alert reader will have noted that throughout the story, there are implicit references to 'civilised' violence. From the first chapter on, the play and speech of the boys is infected with this: Ralph 'machine-guns' Piggy; the size of a rock is equated with a tank, and it plunges into the forest 'like a bomb'. The boys of *Lord of the Flies* are never innocent, as Ballantyne's much older boys are. What violates their innocence is the whole world they live in: a world of atomic war. Through it they come to the island, and when they are finally saved, it is by being taken aboard a warship. Piggy's faith in civilisation is shown to be ludicrously misplaced, since the scientific progress he so confidently affirms has left the world in ruins, just as Jack's savages leave their island world in ruins; and both are destroyed because boys and adults alike are at the mercy of their own bestiality. Piggy accuses the boys of acting 'like a crowd of kids', without seeing that adults behave *exactly* like kids, but on a dishearteningly grander scale, using atom bombs for sticks.

Piggy believes in reason and claims that 'life is scientific'. But it is precisely because of the narrowness of this belief, and the unrelatedness of scientific knowledge to a profounder understanding of our true selves, that disasters occur. 'Man's essential illness' comes from his failure to face up to his own 'diseased and fallen nature'. His pride in his own rationality, which is inseparable from his pride in civilisation, blinds him to the reality of himself, which he desperately fears, but dare not confront. This truth is thrust home in Chapter 10, where Piggy consistently denies the truth of what happened when Simon was murdered, even though Ralph has the moral courage to recall it with ambiguous 'loathing' and 'excitement'. 'We never done nothing, we never saw nothing,' Piggy stubbornly insists, and tries to explain away what cannot be explained away - the part he as a 'rational' human being played in the frenzy of the previous evening. Piggy, the most 'adult' of the boys, displays here what Golding calls 'the infinite cynicism of adult life'. It is a cynicism that in the adult world stops at nothing, not even nuclear war, which can be regarded as the definitive climax of civilisation. In some respects, Piggy's counterpart in the adult world is the naval officer, who represents the intrusion of the 'real' world into the fictional nightmare. The officer is, in fact, a 'cutout' figure, straight out of the innocent world of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*. Overtly, he is civilised, just as overtly he is an adult; but his civilisation is no more than a well laundered uniform, and in under-

standing 'the darkness of man's heart' he is a mere child, compared with Ralph. Talk of the boys' being 'saved' is a nonsense, since the civilisation they hope to return to is 'in ruins', and as Golding himself has provocatively asked: 'Who will rescue the adult and the cruiser?' Civilisation, as presented in *Lord of the Flies*, is ambiguous and paradoxical.

### 4.3 FEAR AND THE BEAST

If *Lord of the Flies* presents man's diseased and fallen nature as his ultimate reality, it insistently shows that destructive, and self-destructive, violence is the inevitable outcome of this, and its release mechanism is fear. Setting aside the high-spirited horseplay of Chapter 1, virtually all the violence in the story has its origin in the tormenting fear extensively exposed in Chapter 2. Ralph calls an assembly to reassure the boys that they are on 'a good island', but almost immediately a littlun with a birth-mark shows distress, with talk about snake-things and a beastie that prowls the wood and wants to eat him. It is dusk. Shadows that are not just physical shadows close in on the assembly. The littluns need 'more than rational assurance' (a hint that there is something in their nature beyond the reach of reason), and all the boys shudder restlessly as the sun dies: a physical reaction indistinguishable from the fear that grips them. When the fire they then start goes out of control, the littlun with the birth-mark is destroyed by it, and the other littluns, their faces 'lit redly', scream like demons in hell as trees explode in flame round about them. The terror of this scene prefigures what lies ahead.

Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the boys' fears, which Ralph sees are the root cause of why 'things are breaking up'. He repeats his mistake of calling an assembly at dusk, when the encroaching shadows add an eeriness to the boys' already exaggerated terrors. Ralph confesses he himself feels fear, but insists there is no justification for it. Piggy denies its existence altogether, though he admits, with Jack in mind, that they all 'get frightened of people'. Jack, who when he hunts senses a menacing presence haunting him, denies that there is 'a dark thing, a beast, some sort of animal'; but his denials are less convincing than disturbing, and he ambiguously tells the littluns that they will have to put up with their fear, since as with 'the rest of us', that is their nature. Only Simon 'inarticulate in his effort to express mankind's essential sickness', perceives the truth about fear, but he is shouted down. Talk about nightmares, giant squids, beasts from the sea, ghosts, only inflames the boys' imaginations, and Ralph realises too late that his attempt to dispel fear by open and rational discussion of it has badly backfired. His effort to

discredit ghosts by means of a show of hands exposes the folly of supposing that terrors lodged in the deepest and darkest recesses of the boys' natures can be exorcised by opinion poll and democratic procedure.

Of the various attitudes portrayed towards fear, Piggy's is most intellectual, and *therefore* the shallowest and least comprehending. His pride in being 'scientific' not only prevents him from understanding the fear so distressingly obvious in the littluns, but also from understanding its origin in what Freud calls the 'unconscious mind' or 'Id', which is neither rational in itself, nor accessible to reason. He shows a glimpse of awareness when he acknowledges that being scared of someone can make you hate him, so that when you see him, 'it's like asthma and you can't breathe'; but it seems he does not really grasp that his asthma is his body's answer to other and deeper fears he 'scientifically' rejects.

While Ralph can at least admit to sharing some of the littluns' fears, it is Jack who is most fully aware of their sinister, instinctive nature. This enables him to play upon the fears of the others, sneering at them for giving way to a cowardice he has ruthlessly mastered in himself; and because he is alive to his own instinctive nature, he provides various solutions for coping with the Beast, which is an objectification of the boys' terrors. He and his hunters will track it down, hem it in, and kill it, ritually. The ritual is itself a means of bringing both the Beast and the boys' fears under control. Jack's primitive mentality also leads him to placate the Beast by offering it the pig's head. It is likely that the rituals in which the boys engage reflect the 'double-think' of unsophisticated minds. They know and do not know the truth about the Beast. They know and do not know that it is both inside themselves and external to them. They know and do not know that it cannot be killed.

Neither intellectual arrogance nor submission to blind instinct keeps Simon from confronting the truth, however unpleasant it might be. He is determined to understand things comprehensively and has the moral nerve to face the consequences. Even when he feels the onset of an epileptic fit, and stands before the impaled pig's head, he resists the hallucinatory voice that offers him the easy way out. The Lord of the Flies attempts to bully him into believing he is no more than 'an ignorant, silly little boy', who had better rejoin the others, before they think he is more 'batty' than ever. Though he shakes with fear, he stands his ground when the pig's head declares it is the Beast, 'the reason why it's no go', and threatens him prophetically with 'being done' by the boys. Nothing the Beast says is new to Simon, who speaks aloud in answer to it: 'I know that'. He also knows that its voice originates in him, as does the fear it appears to generate and the evil it counsels him to accept. It invites him to identify with Jack and his

hunters who create the Beast out of their own fear and then mistake it for reality. Simon 'licks his dry lips', feels the weight of his own hair, senses the savagery inside himself and finally falls in an epileptic fit. He arrives at 'that ancient, inescapable recognition' of his own bestiality, and has the moral strength to accept the darkest truths about his own nature. But this acceptance strips the pig's head of its terror and its claim to be the Beast. The terror and the Beast are 'close, close, close', because they are ineradicably a part of himself, just as the blackness that spreads about him when he falls in a fit originates, not in the objective world about him, but in what is happening inside himself. (Simon loses his life by attempting to reveal this truth to others, who suffer torments of terror for a Beast they locate in the sea or jungle or mountain top - anywhere but where it really exists: in themselves, and above all in their collectivity. Trying to free them from fear of the Beast, Simon is himself identified with it, and accordingly destroyed. When he dies, the truth of his discovery dies with him. Ralph dare not and cannot see the pig's head for what it is: he lashes out at it in 'sick fear' and loathing, only to be mocked by its leering grin 'now six feet across'. The obscenity lords itself over him, and as he is hunted down, he becomes indistinguishable from the savages who pursue him: he is 'screaming, snarling, bloody'; the personification of terror - 'fear on flying feet'.) (367)

#### 4.4 POWER

The narrative of *Lord of the Flies* recounts the unequal struggle for power that takes place between Ralph, who is the elected leader of the boys, and Jack, who usurps his leadership. Ralph is tolerant by nature, willing to take the advice of others, especially Piggy, and careful to follow the democratic procedures symbolised in the conch shell. However, his virtues serve only to undermine his authority and bring about his downfall.

Jack, on the other hand, is eaten up by ambition; he has the mentality of a Fascist, and a total disregard for those who are weaker than himself. From the start, he dominates his choirboys like a regimental sergeant major, and shows not the least concern when Simon faints. He succeeds in 'liberating' himself and his hunters into savagery and he is obsessed with killing, which is the ultimate assertion of power. After he and his hunters kill their first pig, Jack is elated with 'the knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long satisfying drink'. The 'thick excitement' Jack feels in killing a pig leads on to the murder of Simon, then Piggy, and

to the near-murder of Ralph, whom he *must* destroy, not simply because Ralph has been his rival, but paradoxically because he has a sneaking liking for him. But, for the sake of power, Jack is prepared to be as ruthless with himself as with others. He is under a compulsion to obliterate all opposition to himself and to destroy whatever he is unable to control. He even eliminates his individual identity to set himself up as a tribal Chief, with life and death at his command, and finally he sits 'like an idol' on his throne, exhibiting power 'in the brown swell of his forearms'. Authority is said to sit on his shoulders, where it 'chatters in his ear like an ape': an image that fittingly conveys the brutal and brutish nature of the power he wields.

The one occasion on which Jack actually seems childish is when his challenge to Ralph's leadership apparently fails in Chapter 8, and he weeps with humiliation. He accuses Ralph of not being a prefect, and in language that echoes a British playground, declares he is 'not going to play any longer'. Suddenly we cease to see Jack as a threatening savage, and are aware that he is still a child. At the same time, we are alerted to the childishness of the power game that so obsessively preoccupies him.

In Chapter 3 we are given an insight into the fascination that a sense of power has for a littlun called Henry. He pokes about on the shore with a stick, making runnels to trap the tiny scavenging organisms brought in by the tide, and becomes 'absorbed beyond mere happiness' as he feels himself 'exercising control over living things'. Squatting at the water's edge, he is rapt in 'the illusion of mastery'. Meanwhile, Roger watches him, then teases him by throwing stones close to him, but aimed to miss, because 'round the squatting child' is 'the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law' - the authority of a civilisation that as yet still 'conditions' his arm. But just as Henry is absorbed in playfully exercising power over the 'transparencies', so Roger in his turn playfully dominates Henry, and even blushes at being caught out, because deep within himself he senses a satisfaction that is touched by something deeper than mere play.

In fact, Roger graduates from teasing to torture, and offers the clearest example of the perversion of power which we call sadism. This is shown in the killing of the sow (Chapter 8) where Roger cruelly lodges his spear in the sow's anus and forces it forward with all his weight till 'the terrified squealing' becomes 'a high pitched scream'. There is a clear hint of sadism, too, in Jack's arbitrary beating of Wilfred (Chapter 10), and it is this incident that comes to Roger like 'an illumination', opening up a whole new world to him: 'He... sat still, assimilating the possibilities of irresponsible authority.' From this point on, Roger seeks the fulfilment of his perverted nature in the infliction of pain and death. His arm is no longer conditioned by memories of civi-

lisation. When Roger, Piggy and the twins make their way into Castle Rock (Chapter 11), he aims a stone to miss the twins, and when Sam dangerously stumbles, 'some source of power' begins 'to pulse in Roger's body'. Minutes later, he leans his weight on the lever that topples the rock that kills Piggy, 'with a sense of delirious abandonment', and in his haste to torture the captured twins he 'only just' avoids pushing Jack with his shoulder. In Roger, who finds pleasure in the physical pain he inflicts, we witness the excesses of a power that has become so corrupt that it sets him apart, even among Jack's savages. 'A hangman's horror' clings round him, and he wields an authority that is 'nameless, unmentionable'.

#### 4.5 REALITY AND ILLUSION

Throughout the novel, there is a preoccupation with what is real and what is illusory. Even the island is ambiguously presented: 'the filmy enchantment of mirage' and 'strange glamour' on the lagoon side give it an unreal quality, while 'the brute obtuseness of the ocean' on its exposed side numbs the mind with a sense of a reality indifferent, and alien to, all human hopes and purposes. The effects of light and darkness affect the boys' perceptions. Places and objects that are ordinary by daylight become horrifying in the dark. In the 'tangle of golden reflections' Ralph speculates in a way that is foreign to him on the faces of the assembly, asking himself: 'If faces were different when lit from above or below - what was a face? What was anything?' (Chapter 5). Meanwhile, Jack has successfully set an example to his savages by abandoning civilised standards for a painted mask that makes him seem 'an awesome stranger', even to himself. But it is through the illusion of their masks that the boys are enabled to realise their true natures, while paradoxically forfeiting their personal identities.

There are many other similarly disconcerting ironies. The 'fun and games' the boys look forward to turn from play into frightening ritual and finally into murder. What Ralph and Piggy and Simon think of with awe as 'the majesty of adult life' is a pure delusion, since the savagery of the boys is being perpetrated by adults on the appropriately larger scale of atomic warfare. Their hopes focus on rescue and on being 'saved'; but the civilisation they believe they will be returned to no longer exists. The Beast itself is taken for reality by apparently healthy, normal boys, though it is in fact illusory. Meanwhile the illusion (and the central truth of the novel) is understood by a shy, inarticulate oddity of a little boy, who faints, has fits and distractedly walks into a tree. Simon, who alone knows no objective Beast exists, is murdered by

boys who deludedly believe that *he* is the Beast. At the story's close the real world apparently reasserts itself in the person of the naval officer, but he is only outwardly 'adult', and the little boys who stand before him shaking and sobbing know a reality he is too naïve even to suspect.

The shift in perspective brought about by the arrival of the naval officer is only the most notable of many such shifts designed by the author in his handling of the theme of reality and illusion. By his references to the remote and alien ocean heaving like some 'stupendous beast', or to the tides that 'soon, in a matter of centuries' will make an island of Castle Rock, or to the 'steadfast constellations' shining down on Simon's dead body, Golding startlingly alters the human scale of space and time, so distancing action and characters alike by setting them under the eye of eternity.

# 5 TECHNICAL FEATURES

## 5.1 PLOT AND STRUCTURE

As a narrative, *Lord of the Flies* is fast-moving and without either subplot or unnecessary digressions. Its themes are clearly stated in the first half, with more than a hint of foreboding and menace, then ironically reworked at a deeper, more anguished and frightening level in the second half.

The novel's development is *revelatory* - that is to say, it begins by revealing first a little, then more, then a great deal, about the characters and their behaviour. Repetition, with some variation, enriches the reader's insight into what, at the deepest level, the novel is about. Far from being monotonous, it is the means of heightening tension, and this is because each repetition adds something new and more powerfully charged to what has gone before: it is *incremental* repetition. The initial, innocent excitement of exploring the island (Chapter 1), is satirised in the second exploration (Chapter 7), in which the boys search out the Beast. Roger begins to realise his true nature by aiming stones that just miss a littlun, and finishes by toppling the rock that destroys Piggy. Between Jack's initial attempt to kill a piglet, when the 'enormity' of what he tries to do leads to failure, and the sharpening of the stick at both ends when Ralph is hunted down, there are several stages, each more sickening than the one before. Meanwhile, the ritual chanting switches from 'Kill the pig!' to 'Kill the beast!', and what begins as a game turns into deadly and murderous reality, with Simon a sacrificial victim. The fire in Chapter 2, which has the boys mischievously 'shrieking with laughter', also claims a victim and reveals a first glimpse of 'hell'. In the last chapter, the island is ablaze like the whole of hell, while the boys themselves act as destructively and maliciously as devils.

The pace increases and the tension builds up throughout, as with the best of adventure stories; but the structure of the novel, through repetition, accumulative progression, and climax, relates to much more than the narrative. Even unsophisticated readers can sense some deeper significance underlying and underpinning the story's surface. References such as those to 'mankind's essential sickness' and 'the loss of innocence' can hardly fail to alert the reader to this, and once we begin to penetrate the narrative events and characters, we quickly perceive that they afford rich insights into the human condition. The novel has unignorable elements of allegory and fable, and the point about allegory and fable is that they are to a great extent *consciously* controlled by the author. Before he set pen to paper, Golding had already conceived the novel's major theme and its outcome: he wished to challenge the facile optimism of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* by writing about 'real boys on an island, showing what a mess they'd make'. This is precisely what he does, but as he himself was aware, his island, his boys and the mess they make, are richly invested with symbolic meaning. As Golding has written:

The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. . . The whole book is symbolic in nature, except the rescue in the end where adult life appears, dignified and capable, but in reality enmeshed in the same evil as the symbolic life of the children on the island.

We should not, therefore, that the symbolic needs of the novel necessarily affect structure and significantly determine both the action and the characters. It is a tribute to Golding's supreme literary skill, that the story and the symbolic significance cohere so perfectly that we respond to them both simultaneously. Often when we read allegory and fable, we are painfully conscious that the characters and events stand for something *other than themselves*: they fail to operate convincingly at different levels. But in *Lord of the Flies*, the realism *embodies* the other levels of meaning; and it does so subtly, suggesting a range of symbolic meaning that cannot be crudely reduced to a one to one correspondence. Jack is, of course, a savage, a murderer and a Nazi, just as Ralph is a democrat and Piggy is an intellectual; but they are all more subtly conceived than this suggests, and are too complex to be labelled and written off in this naive way. So it is with the setting and action. The island is vividly realised, though it is a microcosm; the boys are convincingly individualised, however much their characters imply political attitudes; and the rise of Jack at Ralph's expense is painfully true to life, however much the stages of his success mark the cumulative triumph of bad over good.

There are, however, a very few events in the story that relate to structure and have been found too contrived by some critics, most notably the 'sign' sent from the adult world (Chapter 6), in the form of the dead airman. This may appear too cynical and too pat an answer to Ralph and his friends, who naively believe in 'the majesty of adult life'. Similarly, it has been objected that the wind's lifting the corpse to a sea-burial at just the time that the tide claims Simon's body (Chapter 9) is too artificial - that is to say, the symbolism fails to cohere with a credible naturalism. There is room for varying opinions about the acceptability of the dead airman and his role in the story, but objections raised about the naval officer's sudden intrusion into the climax of Chapter 12 are usually misconceived. Of course this intrusion is unforeseen and wholly incredible in its timing; but as Golding says, there is nothing symbolic about it. On the contrary, it comes as an antidote to the story's symbolism and is a deliberate device to shock the reader with a reality that throws everything that has happened into a new and startling perspective (a device, incidentally, Golding uses in *Pincher Martin* and elsewhere).

## 5.2 CHARACTERISATION

Whatever deeper meanings *Lord of the Flies* may have, we should never forget that it is overtly an adventure story. That it is a *successful* adventure story depends in large measure on its portraying recognisable characters with whom we can sympathise and identify. First and foremost, Golding has to win our acceptance of his boys *as boys*. Having achieved this, he is then able to invest individual characters with traits and qualities that transcend the individual and afford us insights into different human types, or at the deepest level of all, into the human condition itself. Indeed, it is Golding's distinction to have created characters who are wholly credible at a realistic level, while they remain powerfully persuasive both as types and at a symbolic level.

When we are first introduced to the characters, they are not only boys, in a naturalistic sense, but boys who are more themselves than ever because they are liberated from adult control. Ralph stands on his hands in pure joy, and in the same spirit joins Jack and Simon in heaving a great rock into the canopy of the forest to schoolboy exclamations of 'Wacco', 'Whee-aa-oo!' and 'Golly!' In fact, the datedness of the slang pinpoints them not simply as schoolboys, but as schoolboys of the immediate post-Second World War period. Like boys anywhere, they respond excitedly to what they see as an adventure (an adult would call their being wrecked, with loss of life, a disaster), and their understanding;

of their condition relates to school stories. They are too young to grasp the horrors that have overtaken the world from which they have been evacuated, and throughout they entertain an illogical belief in its being still as they remember it. Even Piggy continues to believe in a civilisation - 'houses an' streets, an' - TV' - that lies in ruins, and Simon reassures Ralph that he will get back to it, when clearly there is nothing to get back to.

The small boys are never really individualised, but there is much more differentiation among the older boys. Their physical differences are noted, and their differences of temperament become apparent the moment they talk with one another and begin to form relationships. The boyish boasting between Ralph and Piggy in their first encounter reveals much more than the difference in their social backgrounds. Ralph is obviously conscious of being in every way Piggy's superior and soon drops a cool politeness for casual abuse of this fat boy whose only claim to fame is that he gets 'ever so many sweets'. But we recognise, too, that Piggy is intellectually more mature than Ralph in their exchange about the possibility of rescue. Then again, we at once see how very different Jack is from either Ralph or Piggy, the moment he marches his choir along the beach, shouting orders with 'offhand authority', and announcing that he is Merridew - not just a 'kid', with a kid's name - and ought to be chief. And what could be more individual, even idiosyncratic, than the way in which Simon shyly strokes Ralph's arm, to show his affection? As the story develops, so our understanding of the individuality of the older boys, including that of Sam and Eric, who constitute a single identity, also develops, and our sense of the characters' individuality is heightened by the tensions that arise among them.

However, in so far as they revert to primitive behaviour, they lose individuality. This is obvious in respect of Jack, who forfeits his identity to wear a mask, and finally becomes an anonymous tribal chief; but it is true of *all* the boys when they frenziedly act as 'a single organism' in killing Simon.

It is not difficult to recognise that, though individually conceived, several of the bigger boys exemplify *types* of character. Conspicuously, Ralph and Jack typify, on the one hand, an easy-going, tolerant, democratic, and civilised way of life, and on the other hand, a way of life that is rigid, ruthless, Fascist and savage. Piggy has the strengths and weaknesses of the intellectual, Simon has the compassionate insight of a saint, Roger embodies our worst sadistic impulses and Sam and Eric typify ordinary humanity, who are basically decent, but too easily exploited and dominated by ruthless leadership. Their representative function does not, however, impair their claim to be individual characters. It is sometimes said that Simon is not a boy, but a vehicle to

express the spiritual awareness of the author. But he wrestles jubilantly with Ralph, as any boy would, and shares the exhilaration all the boys feel in finding they have an island to themselves. Similarly, Piggy has been argued to be no more than an intellectual Billy Bunter, though in fact he achieves a kind of nobility, both when he harangues the boys for starting the fire that destroys the 'littlun' with the birthmark, and when he carries the conch on his fatal visit to Castle Rock.

Closely allied to what the characters typify, but at a still more elemental level, is what they symbolise in terms of the story. For example, when we see Piggy, nearly blind, groping his way to Castle Rock in a desperate, last attempt to reason with Jack, we are aware that rationality and savagery, the enlightened and the dark forces of our humanity are closing in a final conflict. The fragile conch Piggy carries, which is invested with civilised values, smashes to smithereens at the same time as Piggy's skull spills out the brains by which mankind evolved civilisation. Simon's death, too, is not simply the death of a rather strange boy, but symbolises the end of intuitive understanding and goodness. The message Simon sacrifices his life to deliver - the truth that he alone had the moral courage to uncover - goes unheard, drowned by the frenzy of the ritual death-chant.

It is customary to think of characters as 'developing' or 'revealed'. A developed character is one who in the course of the novel is significantly changed by the action, while a revealed character remains static, though we learn more about him as the action unfolds. Ralph is the only real instance of the first (he finishes a much sadder and wiser boy than he began); the others, like Jack, are 'liberated' into savagery, but reveal nothing new in their nature. The 'illumination' that Roger has does not alter him; on the contrary, it leaves him free to fulfil his essential nature by murder and torture. And this descent into savagery itself destroys character. In so far as the boys revert to primitive behaviour, they lose whatever individuality they originally possessed. Jack has to forfeit his identity to wear a mask, and finally becomes a wholly anonymous tribal chief. When frenzy takes hold of *all* the boys in their killing of Simon, individuality ceases to exist: they act in the grip of a primitive compulsion that nullifies character and reduces the whole lot of them to the mindlessness of a mob - 'a single organism'.

**Ralph**

Twelve years old, well-built, fair-haired and middle-class, Ralph has some of the obvious characteristics of a schoolboy hero and leader. He is, as the other boys are quick to recognise, well balanced, decent and very *normal*, unlike Piggy, the intellectual, Jack, the fanatic, and Simon, solitary and strange. His dependability and normality stem from his



secure home background, which means a great deal to him, and of which he dreams and daydreams more and more as 'things break up' in the island adventure that goes wrong. It is part of Ralph's normality that he has only average intelligence. His leadership is buttressed from the start by the more intelligent Piggy. For example, the conch shell is no more than 'a worthy plaything' to Ralph. Its use as a horn to summon the stranded boys, and the authority it is increasingly invested with, are first perceived by Piggy, who often unobtrusively manipulates Ralph, the overt leader. When despairing or perplexed, Ralph is not above openly asking Piggy for advice.

But whatever his intelligence, Ralph is almost always fair-minded. He takes his leadership seriously, with some occasional prompting from Piggy, and sets about making proper provision for everyone, and especially the littluns, who most need it. When the other boys shirk their duties, to play or swim or hunt, Ralph tries with steady determination to build shelters. When he is voted chief, he is sensitive to Jack's disappointment, and tries to avoid conflict by consigning the choir to Jack as hunters, so showing a restraint and fair-mindedness Jack himself would have been utterly incapable of. Right to the story's end, he is tempted to believe that the other boys must share his own basic decency and sense of justice.

... might it not be possible to walk boldly into the fort, say -  
"I've got pax", laugh lightly and sleep among the others?

However, horrors of darkness and death prevail, and Ralph has to face the tragic reality that Golding calls 'the darkness of man's heart'. Though he is tempted to think of Simon's and Piggy's deaths as 'an accident', he cannot in the end do so, because he remains honest with himself. After Simon's death, Piggy evades facing facts, pretending everything that happened was accidental; but Ralph is morally Piggy's superior, not only because he can openly acknowledge his own part in Simon's death, but because in doing so he glimpses something of Simon's vision ('I'm frightened. Of us.'), and can even recall the murder with 'loathing, and at the same time a kind of feverish excitement'.

Golding speaks of Ralph's mild eyes, which proclaim him 'no devil'. But he is by no means a saint, either. He can share the hunters' excitement and bloodlust, and he boasts immoderately about spearing the boar's snout. Equally, he can share the other boys' irresponsible delight in play and having fun; he can even share their rather cruel laughter at Piggy's expense. His courage is certainly equal to Jack's, as he proves by deciding to climb the mountain to discover the Beast, and by forcing himself to take the lead and make the 'two leaden steps' that finally reveal it. A strong sense of duty can make him courageous, but his fear

can on occasion overwhelm his physical courage, and even his moral courage. When Jack brings his hunters to the shelter in the night to steal Piggy's glasses, Ralph mistakes the noises they make for the approach of the Beast. The blood roars in his head, and very unheroically he prays that the Beast will 'prefer littluns'.

Ralph is all the more credible for such inconsistencies of character, and we should remember that he is tested in extreme and violent ways. His tendency to be easy-going and liberal, allied to his good nature, is exploited by Jack, who is ruthlessly single-minded, and quite without the self-doubt that at times undermines Ralph's leadership. Piggy has to alert Ralph to the threat and hatred posed by Jack, and Ralph is so far from having a dark side to his nature that even on the eve of his planned execution he can talk about his having liked Jack. Meanwhile, he is slow to grasp the significance of the stick sharpened at both ends, and 'Samneric' have actually to warn him about Roger's sadism.

As Ralph himself comes to realise, he is inadequate as a thinker, and his judgements often suffer in consequence. Only very gradually does he come to respect Piggy's capacity to think. His limited understanding keeps him from taking Jack's measure, so that Jack can taunt him into acting against his own better judgement, as when they climb the mountain together to the Beast. Some of Ralph's decisions are extremely ill-judged. His calling an assembly as dusk settles on the island is a mistake that gets disastrously out of hand when, in Chapter 2, the talk focuses on snake-things and beasties; and Ralph's attempt to deal with the littluns' fears by holding a democratic vote on whether beasties exist is both pathetic and ludicrous.

But we must allow for the unremitting and unfair strain Ralph is subjected to. He is, after all, only twelve years old, but he has to try to think and act like a responsible adult, and it is no wonder that he fails. The tension and strain he is under are more than enough to set him biting his nails (or, finally, biting the bark off his spear), and it is small wonder that his mind keeps blacking out when, despite his courageous efforts to get the boys to concentrate on rescue and to work together co-operatively, they choose 'liberation' into savagery, while the world of sane values and moral obligation he represents falls chaotically apart. Just how much civilisation means to him is clear from the almost hysterical disappointment he feels when in Chapter 4 the chance of rescue is lost, and the 'understandable and lawful world' seems to slip away with the ship.

#### Jack

From the start, Jack asserts his claims to leadership, and is unrelenting in struggling to achieve it. If he could yield to anyone, it would be to

Ralph, for whom he feels, initially at least, a certain respect and shy liking, if only because at first Ralph shares his adventurous delight in being free from the restraints of the adult world. His limited tolerance of Ralph is encouraged by Ralph's helping him to heave a great rock into the canopy of the forest, in the course of exploring the island, and by Ralph's unsympathetic treatment of Piggy. Gradually, as Ralph becomes more responsible in his behaviour, and treats Piggy with increasing respect, Jack becomes more and more alienated from Ralph, and more and more violent in his bullying of Piggy, whom he intensely resents for being physically handicapped and an intellectual. He uses Piggy to taunt Ralph with, and is obviously jealous. 'We mustn't let anything happen to Piggy, must we?' he sneers, speaking 'in a queer, tight voice' (Chapter 7).

A tall, thin, ugly, red-headed boy, Jack first makes his appearance at the head of the choir, over whom he exercises a strict military control. The choir vote for him to be leader, but do so out of fear, not liking. He wears to the end a black cap that carries appropriate overtones of his being an executioner, and throughout the story shadows, 'the damp darkness of the forest' and the threat of death cling about him. There is no hint of kindness or sympathy in him. His opaque eyes - eyes bolting and blinded by fanaticism - disregard Simon when he faints, and are indifferent to the needs of the littluns, whose fears he is willing to exploit for his own ends. He is obsessed by his passion for power, at whatever cost, and gradually realises his own nature by exercising this power in its most extreme form, determining the life and death not only of animals, but of his rivals. The justification of power does not concern him. In the end, he forfeits his own individuality to become a savage Chief, with total and arbitrary authority. Even his name is abandoned, along with all other tokens and memories of the civilised world. He beats Wilfred to satisfy a whim, demands absolute obedience and ritualised obeisance from his tribe, and caring nothing whatever for justice, compulsively seeks to destroy its last representative, Ralph.

Even so, Jack has to overcome in himself certain civilised restraints which he regards as weaknesses. He cannot at first commit the enormity of killing a pig, but slamming his knife into a tree trunk, vows he will not let a second chance slip. Nor does he; but his triumph in making a kill and providing meat is ruined by Ralph's accusation that it has been achieved at the cost of their missing the chance of being saved. This infuriates Jack, since his need to hunt and kill is more immediate and urgent than his need to be rescued. Even so, he has to hide behind a mask of paint and he twitches still, as he boasts of cutting the pig's throat. Only later will he kill, and lug out the guts, and break all pre-

vious taboos, as with grim determination he gradually suppresses all civilised emotions in himself as shameful. Meanwhile, imposing his will, outwitting a living creature and taking its life are, for Jack, 'like a long satisfying drink'. His anger at not winning Ralph's applause for his first kill (an anger he takes out on Piggy because he dare not at this stage risk direct conflict with Ralph) shows him to be to an extent vulnerable. 'I painted my face - I stole up. Now you eat - all of you. . . ' he says in rage and frustration, precisely because he has had to nerve himself to kill. He still, at this stage, wants sympathetic 'understanding' of what he has had to put himself through to achieve success, but all he gets from the boys is 'respect'. This serves only to harden his nature still more.

But Jack is no less severe with himself in coping with fears and superstition. He accepts fear as a reality that cannot be avoided, and expects everyone else, including the littluns, to do so; he understands the littluns' fears better than the other biguns just because of his superstitious sense of being the *quarry*, not the hunter, when he stalks the forest. The atavistic impulse is strong in Jack: at the beginning of Chapter 3 he is described in images that are primitive, elemental, and even animal - he seems less a hunter, 'than a furtive thing, ape-like among the tangle of trees'. But this same impulse helps him to find a primitive solution to the problem of his own and the boys' tormented fears. He discovers how painted nakedness can liberate the personality 'from shame and self-consciousness'; he initiates dancing after killing the pig, sensing that ritual serves to release and at the same time control powerful emotions; he similarly placates the Beast by leaving it the offering of a pig's head.

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that Jack cannot think, when it suits his purpose. He is first to realise that Piggy's spectacles (which he later claims as a trophy) can be put to use as burning glasses, and when he takes the conch he speaks with cleverness and cunning, playing on the boys' fears, but also making debating points against Ralph. In Chapter 8, he actually calls an assembly to challenge Ralph's leadership, and is hard-hitting in arguing that Ralph is a talker, like Piggy, who fails to value the hunters and is (though this is a lie) a coward. He fails in this challenge to be leader, and goes off on his own, weeping 'humiliating tears'; but his failure is apparent, rather than real, since most of the boys desert Ralph to join Jack's tribe, so making him 'brilliantly happy'. After this, however, Jack submerges his identity in his role of chief. He becomes remote, 'like an idol', surrounded by more ritual of his own devising, and rules tyrannically over his tribe. The authority he so passionately pursued now sits 'on his shoulders and chatters in his ear like an ape'.

In Chapter 2 Jack gives apparent backing to Ralph in calling for rules, with penalties for those who break them:

... 'We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English; and the English are best at everything. ...'

This patriotic sentiment is identical with Ballantyne's. But it is subjected to the author's darkest and most persistent irony. Jack is the first to ignore democratic rules and to plunge into savagery. This does not mean he is against rules. On the contrary, he is entirely *for* rules, once it is understood that his word is law. Rules, and harsh punishment for those who break them, are an absolute necessity for an intensely Fascist mentality like Jack's.

#### Piggy

We know Piggy only by his nickname, and Golding, like most of the boys, enjoys a joke at his expense, since he often uses a vocabulary associated with pigs ('grunt', 'squeak', etc.) in referring to him. Several things conspire to make him an outsider: his asthma, his fatness and laziness, his tendency to fuss, his comparative intellectual maturity, his poor eyesight, his being fatherless and brought up by an aunt, and his being working-class in speech and background. It is clear from the first that Piggy himself recognises that he is an outsider. He does all he can to ingratiate himself with Ralph, whose athletic body he watches enviously, though Ralph's initial reactions are to patronise him, to abuse him in a casual way because of his 'ass-mar' and aunt, and to betray his nickname, which was given by Piggy in confidence. Piggy's shortcomings are immediately obvious and invite ridicule; his merits require time and experience to be appreciated.

Despite his being the most bookish and intellectual of the boys, he can be childish on occasion. Ralph establishes his status by boasting that his father is a commander in the Navy. Piggy, who is perhaps illegitimate, makes his claim to fame in terms of his auntie's sweet shop, and his getting 'ever so many sweets'. His greed is, of course, a childish feature. In Chapter 1, though fearful of being separated from Ralph, he steals away to gorge fruit; in Chapter 4 he dribbles and pleads humilatingly for meat; and in Chapter 9 he rationalises his greed by suggesting that he and Ralph should attend Jack's feast, 'to make sure nothing happens'. In fact, Simon is murdered.

Because he is physically weak, unfit and short-sighted, Piggy is timid and easily frightened. The moment he sees Jack, he knows that he will be bullied by him, and he clings loyally to Ralph because his instinct tells him that if Ralph were to 'stand out of the way' Jack would 'hurt the next thing', which is himself. For all his pretensions to be grown-up

and scientific, he shares many of the fears felt by the others, including horror of the Beast reported by 'Samneric'. Jack sneers at Ralph for keeping Piggy 'out of danger', and certainly there is nothing heroic in his character; but this does not mean that he is a coward, or that he cannot be moved to act bravely on occasion, especially when his righteous indignation is aroused. Piggy achieves an incongruous dignity when in Chapter 2 he launches into a tirade, reproaching the others for behaving 'like a pack of kids', for not giving Ralph time to think, and for stupidly starting a fire that destroys the littlun with the mark on his face. When outraged, he can defy Jack, and he meets his death as a result of his insisting on doing so, despite Ralph's warning that he will get hurt. His last words are typical of him, and bravely spoken: 'Which is better - to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill?'

Illness has kept Piggy isolated, given him time to reflect, and to acquire a more adult way of thinking than the others, whom he castigates for acting 'like kids'. Though he does not always live up to 'the majesty of adult life', as he conceives it, he believes fervently in it. Life is, for him, 'scientific': the world is rationally planned, with 'houses and streets, and - TV', all of which are strictly incompatible with ghosts and superstition. His profoundly serious respect for adult values makes him unimaginative and often the butt of the other boys' humour. Though Ralph is his intellectual inferior, he can pull Piggy's leg very easily; for example, about making a sundial or a steam engine. Meanwhile, and ironically, the world of scientific progress that Piggy confidently affirms is a world 'in ruins'.

Piggy is right to stick loyally by Ralph, whose basic decency can be relied on, and he realises that his own more 'grown-up' values stand no chance of being implemented, except through Ralph's agency. From the start, he tries persistently to influence and manipulate Ralph. He sees the possibility that the conch shell may be more than 'a plaything', and it is largely through his perception that it evolves into a symbol for democratic procedure, rules and law and order. For this reason, he passionately reveres the conch, bravely tries to protect it when Jack and his savages make a night attack, and proudly carries it to Castle Rock, to show Jack 'the one thing he hasn't got'. What he fails to see is that Jack does not want it, anyhow, and that it is - like the values it represents - exceedingly fragile. It is absolutely fitting that the shell should meet its end along with Piggy, exploding on the same rock that breaks open his skull.

Ralph is right when he acknowledges Piggy's superior intellect and laments 'the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy'. Even so, we are made aware of Piggy's limitations - for lack of a better word, his *spiritual* limitations - in his dealings with and attitude towards Simon. When Ralph has intuition enough to guess that Simon has

off to climb the mountain, Piggy breaks into 'noisy laughter' and declares Simon 'cracked'. His intellect is unable to grasp the essential goodness and bravery of Simon, who turns to him for 'help and sympathy' in the assembly in Chapter 8, only to find on Piggy's face 'an expression of derisive incomprehension'. Worse still is Piggy's attempt to explain away Simon's death. He suggests every possible way out of facing the truth, but as even Ralph knows, all Piggy's arguments are specious and spurious. This attempt by Piggy to evade all moral guilt exposes how totally inadequate and even dishonest the intellect is when confronted with values that transcend its own limitations.

We should note that the progressive harms inflicted on Piggy - his becoming half blind, then almost entirely blind - correspond to the stages of the boys' retreat from civilised standards into an irrational savagery.

#### Simon

Golding himself has said of Simon that he is 'a saint', 'a Christ-figure', 'a lover of mankind, a visionary'. He is rather younger than the biguns, bright-eyed, 'a skinny, vivid little boy', with coarse black hair. His physical weakness is apparent from his fainting, and he probably is an epileptic. Unlike Piggy, who exploits his lack of fitness and uses it as an excuse for laziness, Simon is passionately determined to triumph over his body's frailty, whether he struggles to make shelters with Ralph, or stoically forces himself to climb the mountain. In sheer will-power, he outstrips all the other boys, even Jack; and unlike Jack, he directs it always towards ends that are constructive and good.

Simon's 'saintly' disposition is indicated in many ways. He genuinely cares for the littluns, reaches down fruit for them, builds huts for their security, and volunteers to cross the island at dusk on his own, to bring reassurance to them and Piggy. When Jack attacks Piggy for not helping with the fire, Simon quietly points out that because they used Piggy's spectacles, 'he helped that way'. Later, Simon self-sacrificingly shoves meat over the rocks to Piggy, from whom Jack is cruelly withholding it. Finally, Simon meets a kind of martyr's death, trying to bring to his murderers the reassurance of the truth he has discovered about the Beast.

No one understands Simon. Jack despises him as a weakling. Piggy fails to accord him even gratitude, and sees him as merely 'cracked'. Ralph respects Simon's merits ('He helps.'), and has just enough sensitivity to guess what Simon may be doing when he goes missing; but he cannot fathom Simon's strangeness, which he thinks 'queer' and 'funny'. Certainly there are occasions when Simon's behaviour seems odd: he shows his liking for Ralph by shyly stroking his arm, and walks

into a tree in what seems to be a trance. The fact is, Simon is sensitive to a whole range of experience from which the others are cut off. His understanding is strongly intuitive, but his excessive shyness, especially when he tries to speak in the assemblies, combines with the difficulty he has in articulating his intuition to render him fumbling and inarticulate, an object of scorn and ridicule. He is never given a fair hearing. Jack makes a dirty joke out of what he says; Piggy responds to his suggestion that the Beast may be only themselves by shouting 'Nuts!'.

Simon's intuition is such that it answers the intuition in the other boys. When Jack gropes for words to express what it is the littluns fear, Simon is quick to complete Jack's train of thought, suggesting that perhaps it is not 'a good island'. The other boys sense the growing antagonism between Ralph and Jack, but before they do, Simon seems to look into the future, and what he sees makes him afraid. Similarly, he is sensitive to Ralph's darkest fears, urging him to 'go on being chief', when he despairs. At the same time, Simon speaks with prophetic insight, assuring Ralph that he will 'get back all right' - an assurance that Ralph clings to desperately when, after Simon's death, he is hunted down like an animal.

But Simon is never more fully himself than when he is alone, which is something none of the others voluntarily choose to be. He is apparently unafraid of the forest, in which he makes a secret 'cabin' for himself, where he can respond undisturbed to the sights, colours, smells and sounds of the island, which he knows receptively, in all its organic complexity. Unlike the other boys, who ignore nature, except in so far as it serves their selfish purposes, Simon feels the unity of nature's life, and can surrender his own identity to it.

Perhaps as a result of such experience, Simon cannot share the other boys' superstitious dread of a Beast. As he tells Ralph, who is nerving himself to climb the mountain, he does not believe in a Beast. However he thinks of it, there rises 'before his inward sight the picture of a human at once heroic and sick'. But this intuition is backed up with tremendous moral courage. Though he is jeered at for saying so, he realises the necessity to face and reveal what it is that is on the mountain top. In the end, he knows that if this is to be done, he himself will have to do it, for, as he says, 'What else is there to do?'

Simon is committed to *understanding* (not simply to knowing, as Piggy may sometimes be said to know). But just how much courage it takes fully to understand something is clear from Simon's encounter with the Lord of the Flies. He has witnessed the bestiality of the killing, and confronted by the pig's head, he is subjected to an hallucination that is tantamount to a temptation to avoid understanding. The Lord of the Flies tries first to divert him from understanding by telling him he is

'just a silly little boy'; then the voice warns him to 'get back to the others', then cajoles him with promises to 'forget the whole thing', and finally seeks to frighten him off with the threat of 'doing' him - a threat that proves prophetic. But Simon refuses to forgo understanding by becoming one of the mob, tempting though this may be; he will not pretend that the killing is part of 'having fun', when he realises that it is an upshot of 'mankind's essential sickness': he knows the Lord of the Flies is no more than a 'pig's head on a stick', its voice a ventriloquist's of what is going on in his own mind. The stress of this leads to his having a fit, but weak as he is when he regains consciousness, he climbs the mountain and crawls forward to *examine* (Golding's word) 'the white nasal bones, the teeth, the colours of corruption'. He vomits with revulsion, but he understands; and typically, his compassion is aroused, so that he releases the 'poor body' of the dead airman from 'the wind's indignity'.

Finally, Simon tries to bring his discovery that the Beast is 'harmless and horrible' to the others, but they are in a frenzy and destroy him. Ironically, his truth goes unheard to the very end. But if he is the victim of the 'essential sickness' in the other boys, his broken, huddled body is beautified by nature, and assimilated to the grandeur of nature's processes, to which he was so responsive when alive.

#### Roger

A 'slight, furtive' boy, always grave, gloomy and humourless, Roger is a born sadist. In the early part of the novel, he mutters his name and is dark, taciturn and menacing. His psychology is never examined or explained.

In Chapter 4 we see him leading the way straight through the sandcastles, 'kicking them over, burying the flowers, scattering the chosen stones'. His satisfaction lies in spoiling the littluns' game. He lingers to watch Henry become absorbed 'beyond mere happiness' as he plays with the 'transparencies' that scavenge the beach. Some falling coconuts suggest to Roger not his own danger, but a menacing game of his own. He throws stones that only just miss Henry. As Golding says, Roger's arm 'was conditioned by a civilisation that knew nothing of him'; but this conditioning quickly weakens. The violence of rolling rocks fascinates Roger, and when Ralph is anxious to get a fire going, Roger defies him, wanting to topple the rocks of Castle Rock (Chapter 6).

When Ralph and Jack climb the mountain in Chapter 7, Roger silently joins them. This takes courage, even if when they creep forward towards the Beast, Roger lags a little (though less, finally, than Jack). We see Roger most actively himself when the sow is killed in Chapter 8. His bear is cruelly forced up the pig's anus, and there are overtones of his

being sexually excited, as if by a perverted rape. Though 'uncommunicative by nature' he speaks the crude words that release the boys' tension: 'Right up her ass!' But it is Jack who brings about Roger's final 'illumination', by arbitrarily beating Wilfred. From this point on, Roger abandons all restraint, all memory of civilised standards. His sadism is released unchecked, and he becomes overtly a killer and torturer. He topples the rock that kills Piggy 'with a sense of delirious abandonment'; his enthusiasm for torturing Sam and Eric is so compulsive that he edges past Jack, 'only just avoiding pushing him with his shoulder', and it is Roger who sharpens the stick at both ends for Ralph. The twins know to their cost that he is 'a terror', and we are told that 'the hangman's horror clings around him'. He is cast in the same mould as the Nazi commandants of Belsen and Auschwitz and is fulfilled only when he wields an authority that is 'nameless' and 'irresponsible'.

#### Maurice

Maurice follows Roger in kicking over the littluns' sandcastles but has enough vestigial civilisation and decency to feel an impulse to apologise. He relives the tense antagonism between Ralph and Jack (Chapter 4) by acting the part of a pig, in a re-enactment of the killing, and does much the same by diverting the littluns with his clowning (Chapter 5). However, his talk of squids 'hundreds of yards long' does little to soothe the littluns' terrors, and he contributes to the making of tribal ritual by suggesting that the savages' dance should be done properly, with a drum accompaniment.

#### Sam and Eric

Since they are identical twins who feel, think and act alike, Golding emphasises their essential unity by making a compound 'Samneric' out of their separate names. Even their talk is antiphonal, one completing whatever the other says. They are by nature cheerful, easy-going and good-natured, though rather too easily influenced. While happy to help Ralph and keep the fire, they abandon their duty to join Jack's hunters, and are given the chore of carrying the carcass of the pig. Their panic at seeing what they imagine is a Beast is extreme, and their account of it very highly coloured. Because of their essential decency, they support Ralph, preferring him to Jack; but their polite, middle-class exclamations, 'out of the heart of civilisation', cannot save them from being captured by Jack, to whom they at least *attempt* to be loyal out of fear. They do not willingly betray Ralph, but do so under torture. There is nothing heroic about them: they are *average* boys, too shallow to face up to their part in Simon's death, too weak to withstand pain too malleable to resist Jack. They represent ordinary humanity, the crowd and the masses.

### Percival

One of the very smallest of the boys, Percival is unattractive, badly adjusted and whimpers from having sand kicked in his eyes by Roger and Maurice; but he is similarly persecuted by the other littluns, Henry and Johnny, too. Pushed into the assembly by the littluns, he pathetically recites his name, address and telephone number, though by the end of the story he has forgotten even his name. He is shown as weeping and wailing even in his sleep, and is tormented by nightmares in which he lives 'through circumstances in which the incantation of his address is powerless to help him'. Percival has a reputation for being 'batty' because of his odd behaviour and constant crying, but he is in fact a figure of pathos.

### 5.3 STYLE

There are two fundamental and related questions we must ask about the style of any novel. First, what is the author's attitude to his readers? Second, what is the author's attitude to his materials?

*Lord of the Flies* is remarkable for its author's detachment. Golding tells his story with vividness and economy, but keeps himself well out of it. There are no intrusions of the kind found in Dickens and many living novelists, who permit themselves to comment on the characters and plots they invent. On the contrary, Golding appears to write impersonally, unfolding his story without moralising and with apparent neutrality. There is no attempt on his part to alert the reader to the horrors he describes, and no indication that his own emotions are involved in what he so painstakingly records. But we should not be deceived by this. We know that Golding set out to expose Ballantyne's idealised *Coral Island* for a fake, and because his story is a 'fable' we can be certain that he foresaw its outcome from the start - an outcome that is profoundly moralising, even if the question of morality is never directly or explicitly raised. *Lord of the Flies* has all the appearance of being straightforward narrative, but this is simply a novelist's device, cleverly handled by Golding. His art is to conceal art.

Formally, Golding writes as the 'omniscient author', which means he chooses not to write the story from the point of view of one of its characters, but to write it with the detachment of someone who surveys all the characters, and all the action, all the time, from a vantage point the reader is permitted to share. But this too, is deceptive, since at certain points in the novel he obliges the reader to identify with his characters, and does this by cutting out all words except those directly

relating to what the *characters themselves* use, or think, or feel. In the first chapter, for example, Ralph, Jack and Simon are toppling a rock:

'Heave!'

Sway back and forth, catch the rhythm.

'Heave!'

Increase the swing of the pendulum, increase, increase, come up and bear against that point of furthest balance - increase - increase -

'Heave!'

This, far from being an objective account, is an account perceived subjectively, from inside the skin of the boys themselves. Or consider how we are made to share the terrors of Ralph in the last chapter:

'Think.'

What was the sensible thing to do? ...

Break the line.

A tree.

Hide, and let them pass. ...

Don't scream.

You'll get back.

Now he's seen you, he's making sure. A stick sharpened.

The language is reduced to essentials only. It is all that we are given, and we cannot but make it our own and so identify with Ralph, whose internal dialogue it is.

When we turn to Golding's attitude to his materials, we again find it to be formal, and *apparently* uninvolved and objective. There are no explicit comments on the action, however horrifying it may be; there is no overt approval of the good, or criticism of the bad, characters. Indeed, the aloofness of the author from both action and characters is often reinforced by his use of images that seem to distance and reduce what happens to virtual insignificance. When, for example, the boys discover Castle Rock, Golding notes that the neck of land connecting it to the island will be eroded by the sea 'soon, in a matter of centuries'. The perspective of time is on an even grander, evolutionary scale when, at the beginning of Chapter 3, Jack is shown naked on all fours and 'ape-like' in a shadowy forest disturbed by a bird that rises from its 'primitive nest' with 'a harsh cry that seemed to come out of the abyss of ages'. The tide that claims Simon's body is deliberately related to cosmic images:

Somewhere over the darkened curve of the world the sun and moon were pulling; and the film of water on the earth planet was held, bulging slightly on one side while the solid core turned.

The vast scale of such images reinforces the elemental and universal themes that Golding explores (man and man's nature and his place in the scheme of things); but the author's detachment and objectivity are more apparent than real. When they have killed Simon, it is said of the boys: 'Even in the rain they could see how small a beast it was. . .'. This smallness, set against the majesty of the cosmic forces, serves only to deepen and enrich the pathos we feel. Or consider Piggy's death:

Piggy fell forty feet and landed on his back across the square, red rock in the sea. His head opened and stuff came out and turned red. Piggy's arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig's after it has been killed.

The directness and simplicity of this is obvious. No moral tone is evident. The second sentence is heavily monosyllabic and adopts a kind of schoolboy idiom, with 'stuff' used at the crucial point. Even here, at a tragic climax, Golding risks a bad pun and bad joke by the analogy he draws between Piggy and the animal he is named after. Detachment could hardly go further. So how can we account for the tragic impact that the account of Piggy's death makes? Surely it comes precisely from the assumed detachment, and even callousness, of the author, who refuses to weaken his effects by coming between the action and the reader, and allows the facts to speak starkly and horrifyingly for themselves.

The novel begins and ends abruptly, and develops at a rapid pace, allowing for a few flash-backs that establish, in sharp contrast to the savagery of the island, the secure middle-class world Ralph comes from. In general, the sentences are short, though varied in structure, and where they are long and more elaborate, as in the description of the tide that claims Simon's body, they slow to a majestic pace for obvious reasons. The abrupt, broken, exclamatory sentences of Ralph, when he is hunted down, are no less functional and appropriate in their context.

The dialogue, rich with the rather dated schoolboy slang of the post-war period, is natural and convincing. Golding's psychological understanding of his characters extends to their use of language. Simon's hesitancy and incoherence relate to his shyness and to an intuition that puts too great a strain on words; Jack's sentences are abruptly expressed, conveying a man of action's impatience with language; Piggy is distinguished by his plebeian speech, but this is often sustained through several sentences, in keeping with his intellectual pretensions, whereas

the other boys typically speak in single or fragmentary sentences, and this is particularly true of Sam and Eric, who think and speak so alike that one of them is constantly completing what the other begins to say. The slang they habitually use binds the boys together, and so too does the ritual chanting; but we should note that once Jack becomes Chief, he requires his savages to speak to him, and about him, in a language that is formal and impersonal.

#### 5.4 IMAGERY

The power of the novel resides in the power of its language, and Golding's language is remarkable for its precision, vividness and impact. *Lord of the Flies* uses a wide range of formal figures of speech; but more importantly, it uses them functionally and with poetic intensity, so that they come to us laden with significance. In the first chapter, for instance, where the island seems Eden-like, we are given a hint of menace and horror in the reference to 'skull-like coconuts' and the square black caps of the choirboys who perch 'like black birds' on the tree trunks near Ralph. Or consider how Eric, in Chapter 6, watches 'the scurrying wood-lice that were so frantically unable to avoid the flames' - an image that glances back to the fire that claimed the littlun in Chapter 2, and that points forward to the conflagration of the whole island in Chapter 12. Indeed, the images Golding uses, striking in themselves, are often repeated and integrated with related sets of images. For example, the 'quivering tangle of reflections from the lagoon' (Chapter 1) is matched by the 'tangle of golden reflections' (Chapter 5). Both these belong to the imagery of light, associated with common sense, and of darkness, associated with fear and superstition; and at the same time they relate to the mirage imagery, which Golding constantly uses to signal confusion between what is real and what is unreal. The 'tangle of golden reflections' quickly sets Ralph asking himself what a face is, or indeed, what *anything* is.

Listing striking figures of speech in *Lord of the Flies* is an easy matter. There are numerous instances connected with the sow, for example (Chapter 8). It is a 'bloated bag of fat', with a 'great bladder of a belly, 'fringed with a row of piglets'; its guts look 'like a heap of glistening coal' and are surrounded by flies that buzz 'like a saw'; its skull seems 'to jeer. . . cynically', and its 'grin', when Ralph strikes it, breaking it in two pieces, expands to be 'six feet across'. But however telling such figurative language may be, the images employed have a resonance and significance that point far beyond themselves, and are, in fact, contributory to the novel's central symbol of the Lord of the

Flies, on to which the boys' fear and loathing and savagery and hatred are all projected. Though brilliantly realised in their physical details, the images add up to something that wholly transcends the overt reality they depict. Golding's genius lies precisely in his ability to portray abstract moral and metaphysical themes in sensuous, and seemingly every-day, language. His art is to invest apparently natural objects and events with an enriching imagery, implying a new dimension of meaning, and it is this we refer to as symbolism.