jects. In our world, which is so closely organised we are hardly aware of what we are privately up to. We use large words like calamity, disaster, racial suicide, devastation; they are meaningless to us until an artist appears who is gifted enough to identify himself with a precise body being washed up against a precise collection of rocks, a precise being sniffing the night air for his enemy or feeling the full force of a particular blow. Until then, we are muffled in our alibi: 'the imagination cannot grasp'.

Lord of the Flies is the most accomplished of Mr Golding's novels. Its portraits of the shipwrecked boys and its understanding of them are touching and delightful and he is master of a rich range of scene and action. In this book his spirit and his serenity are classical. *Pincher Martin* is more chock-a-block, but it has fine descriptions of the roaring, sucking, deafening sea scene on the rock which we know stone by stone. He is a modern writer here in that his eyes are pressed close to the object, so that each thing is enormously magnified. We see how much a man is enclosed by his own eyes. The important quality of all Golding's descriptions is that they are descriptions of movement and continuous change and are marked by brilliant epithets. (One remembers: 'three prudish anemones'.) There is this picture of the swimming sailor, almost at the rock:

> Ropes held him, slipped and let him go. He saw light, got a mouthful of air and foam. He /146/ glimpsed a riven rock face with trees of spray growing up it and the sight of this rock floating in mid-Atlantic was so dreadful that he wasted his air by screaming as if it had been a wild beast. He went under in a green calm, then up and was thrust sideways. The sea no longer played with him. It stayed its wild movement and held him gently, carried him with delicate and careful motion like a retriever with a bird. Hard things touched him about the feet and knees. The sea laid him down gently and retreated. There were hard things touching his face and chest, the side of his forehead. The sea came back and fawned round his face, licked him. He thought movements that did not happen. The sea came back and he thought the movements again and this time they happened because the sea took most of his weight. They moved him forward over the hard things. Each wave and each movement moved him forward. He felt the sea run down to smell at his feet then come back and nuzzle under his arm.

But this book succeeds less when it takes us into the sailor's chaotic recollections of his life. It contains some flashes back to scenes of jealousy and rivalry which are hard to grasp. It may be that Golding's sense of theatre—often strong in writers of romance—has overcome him here. (He is the author of a witty satirical play, *The Brass Butterfly*, which is excellent reading.) But in making us feel in the current in the modern world, instead of being stranded and deadened by it; in providing us with secret parables; in unveiling important parts of the contemporary anguish and making them heroic, knowable and imaginable, he is unique. /147/

CORAL ISLANDS

FRANK KERMODE

Ballantyne published *The Coral Island* in 1858. It is still reprinted, and the copy in the local children's library seems to be taken out at least once a fortnight, from what strange motives of pubescent piety or hypocrisy I do not understand. Ralph Rover, the narrator of the story, addresses himself 'especially to boys, in the earnest hope that they may derive valuable information, much pleasure, great profit and unbounded amusement from its pages,' but adds this warning: 'if there is any boy or man who loves to be melancholy and morose, and who cannot enter with kindly sympathy into the regions of fun, let me seriously advise him to shut my book and put it away.' For Ralph and his Bible go cheerfully to sea. The ship is full of jolly, clean-spoken tars, but they are all drowned through lack of common sense when the ship strikes a coral reef. Ralph and a ghastly comic boy called Peterkin are saved because they take the advice of Jack, an imperturbable leader-type. 'You see it is impossible,' he explains as the ship founders, 'that the little boat can reach the shore, crowded with men. It will be sure to upset, so I mean to trust myself rather to a large oar. I see through the telescope that the ship will strike the tail of the reef, where the waves break into the quiet water inside; so, if we manage to cling to the oar till it is driven over the breakers, we may perhaps gain the shore.' This they do, conversing the while in semi-colons. Under Jack's benevolent discipline they have small difficulty in leading civilised lives on the island; he understands the flora and fauna, knows how to light fires with bowstrings and spyglasses and can

Frank Kermode, "Coral Islands," *The Spectator*, CCI (August 22, 1958), 257. Reprinted by special permission.

hunt and kill pigs with much ease and a total absence of guilt, or indeed bloodshed. They are all Britons—a term they use to compliment each other—all brave, obedient and honourable. There is much useful information conveyed concerning tropical islands, including fieldworkers' reporting of the conduct of cannibals; but anthropology is something nasty that clears up on the arrival of a missionary, and Jack himself prevents an act of cannibalism by telling the flatnoses not to be such blockheads and presenting them with six newly slaughtered pigs. The parallel between the island and the Earthly Paradise causes a trace of literary sophistication: 'Meat and drink on the same tree! My dear boys, we're set up for life; it must be the ancient paradise—hurrah! . . . We afterwards found, however, that these lovely islands were very unlike Paradise in many things.' But these 'things' are non-Christian natives and, later, pirates; the boys themselves are cleanly (cold baths recommended) and godly—regenerate, empire-building boys, who know by instinct how to turn paradise into a British protectorate.

The Coral Island could be used as a document in political, social or educational history, but also in the history of ideas. It belongs to the period preceding the breaking of that great wave of primitivism which has so altered the features of the modern mind; and in 1954 Mr. William Golding had the idea of studying Ralph and Jack against this altered landscape. (Peterkin is replaced by a fat, asthmatic, shortsighted butt called Piggy, who is nevertheless one of the two wise men of the book.) The device is interesting in itself; but rereading *Lord of the Flies* after the publication of two more major novels by its author we should be able to keep it in perspective. It is interesting, certainly, that so evident a master should want to use it; Mr. Golding, who knows boys well enough to make their collapse into savagery perfectly plausible, has, strangely, a profound and tragic interest in what interests them. Among the half-dozen really potent boyhood myths there are two he dwells on; the old one, of an individual or group facing natural problems unaided by adults, and a newer one, of prehistoric fantasy—steaming swamps and megatheria and men primitive in language and techniques. The first makes for tragedy, the second for its explanation; enormously refined, they come together as an animating conviction which is essentially close to Rousseau's *l'homme est un animal dépravé.*

The price of human consciousness, of technical and linguistic power, is guilt. This theme is not centrally placed in *Lord of the Flies,* which is therefore much illuminated by *The Inheritors,* a novel about the supersession of an innocent predecessor by *homo sapiens.* The intellectual superiority which enables this victory is precisely measured by the cruelty and guilt invented in the process. Man, who cooks, makes drawings, alcohol and love, can think; he replaces with language that picture-dialect, guiltless of all abstraction, which the victim used, and which is found in *homo sapiens* only in certain pathological conditions. *The Inheritors* is Mr. Golding's most perfect book, ambitious in design and of terrific imaginative force, though, since it is concerned only with the Fall and not with the Last Things, it offers a less complete account of the Golding world than *Pincher Martin.* Together, these later books suggest that the author is much concerned with redemption. It cannot be had by retreat to primeval innocence; this we know from the superb conclusion of *The Inheritors.* Nor can the intellect, any more than the pig's snout, command death and hell, or, when the stolen fire destroys, blame its source; but that evil is human, and would vanish if the mind could alter its theme, is what the queer religious Nathaniel tells Prometheus-Pincher in the last Æschylean novel. It is also what Simon, the sick visionary, discovers in *Lord of the Flies.*

Once more, then, Ralph the Rover and Jack the leader and Piggy the fool drop—this time from the stratosphere—into the Earthly Paradise, where 'flower and fruit grow together on the same tree.' Once more, every prospect pleases, but the vileness proceeds, not from cannibals, but from the boys, though Man is not so much vile as 'heroic and sick.' Unlike Ballantyne's boys, these are dirty and inefficient; they have some notion of order, symbolised by the beautiful conch which heralds formal meetings; but when uncongenial effort is required to maintain it, order disappears. The shelters are inadequate, the signal fire goes out at the very moment when Jack first succeeds in killing a pig. Intelligence fades; irrational taboos and blood-rituals make hopeless the task of the practical but partial intellect of Piggy; his glasses, the firemakers, are smashed and stolen, and in the end he himself is broken to pieces as he holds the conch. When civilised conditioning fades—how tedious Piggy's appeal to what adults might do or think—the children are capable of neither savage nor civil gentleness. Always a little nearer to raw humanity than adults, they slip into a condition of animality depraved by mind, into the cruelty of hunters with their devil-liturgies and torture; they make an unnecessary, evil fortress, they steal, they abandon all operations aimed at restoring them to civility. Evil is the natural product of their consciousness. First the smallest boys create a beastie, a snake—'as if it wasn't a good island.' Then a beast is created in good earnest, and

defined in a wonderful narrative sequence. The emblem of this evil society is the head of a dead pig, fixed, as a sacrifice, on the end of a stick and animated by flies and by the imagination of the *voyant,* Simon. But Simon understands, and this is the wisdom Golding treats with awe, that evil is 'only us'; he climbs up to where the dead fire is dominated by the beast, a dead airman in a parachute, discovers what this terrible thing really is, and rushes off with the good news to the beach, where the maddened boys at their beast-slaying ritual mistake Simon himself for the beast and kill him. As Piggy, the dull, practical intelligence, is reduced to blindness and futility, so Simon, the visionary, is murdered before he can communicate his comfortable knowledge. Finally, the whole Paradise is destroyed under the puzzled eyes of an adult observer. Boys will be boys.

The texture of Mr. Golding's writing is highly individual and proper to the heroic scale of his fictions. He keeps one aware of many contexts, his men live in a world of rock and sea and amoebae heaving in the pull of the moon, refusing to be locked fast by human imaginings of good or evil, obstinately talking its own language of sucking, plopping and roaring, against the human language which gives it another kind of life. The difference of this world from Ballantyne's simpler construction from similar materials is not merely a matter of the incomparability of the two talents at work; our minds have, in general, darker needs and obscurer comforts. It would be absurd to suppose that the change has impoverished us; and it will not do so provided that Ballantyne's Jack, confident in some laboratory, can exist side by side with Golding's Simon, crouched in his horrible solitude, observing and naming the beast. /257/

THE NEW REALISM: THE FANCY OF WILLIAM GOLDING

RALPH FREEDMAN

I

More, perhaps, than he knows, William Golding represents the Inheritors. Without Osborne's impatience or Amis' easier wit, he has presented us with several workable alternatives to the Symbolist approach to fiction. For the Romantic heritage, crystalized in the symbolic patterns of *Ulysses* and *The Waves,* had reached a mode of expression beyond which it was impossible to go without being imitative or dull. There had been, of course, other alternatives to Joyce and Woolf: D. H. Lawrence's fervor, the existential symbology of Graham Greene, the Trollopian visions of Cary and Snow, the survival of satire in Huxley, Orwell, or Waugh. But a generation of men, who had entered their manhood early in World War II, have introduced new forms. They have returned us to the origins of the English novel: the eighteenth century.

A self-conscious use of wit, of pseudo-picaresques, of ironic distortions, recalls Fielding and Swift. But in the hands of William Golding (and to some extent also of John Wain), these techniques have freed the concept of self from the Coleridgean vision which underlies the novel of subjectivity: that of the self as recreating the world in its internal perceptions. For though Golding is as passionately involved in the nature of self as Virginia Woolf had been in *Mrs. Dalloway* or Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist,* his vision has consistently focused on the self as distinct from the universe of characters and objects. The psychological notion of sensibility becomes the epistemological notion of cognition; the aesthetic problem of objectifying internal perception in art becomes the existential problem of identity. Instead of being the means of attaining mystical recognitions, self acts as the inviolable core matched with and defined by a gross but external reality.

The contours of Golding's phantastic vision are clear enough. In a manner reminiscent of Kafka and Swift, without undue borrow-

Ralph Freedman, "The New Realism: The Fancy of William Golding," *Perspective,* X (Summer-Autumn, 1958), 118-28. Reprinted by special permission.