ing "to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." This is the more honest, responsible way.

I have had many conversations with secondary school students about Golding—chiefly about *Lord of the Flies* which is the book principally responsible for his vogue. Whether the enthusiasm for Golding is a flash flood or—as I hope and think—a phenomenon that will last and deepen, will be tested by whether or not the other three novels are able to consolidate the attention *Lord of the Flies* aroused.

Recurrent words from school students about this book are that it terrifies, fascinates, shocks, depresses. Not so commonly articulated but widely and clearly implied is that it illuminates something about the nature of man—which is to say, something about themselves. It strikes home to students because *it is* about very young people on their own resources. Much bitter or "sensitive" writing of the day harps on the notion that the old are worse than the young. This view underlies Salinger's peculiar 20th-century innocents. Golding is saying that the young are no better than the old. The seeds of our general behavior are in them already.

Those who have heard of "original sin" (all too few) recognize the operation of it here. Those who have heard of the id (even fewer) see *it* in action. In his notes on *Lord of the Flies,* E. L. Epstein's emphasis on the id leaves gaps that the concept of original sin more fully fills. With or without those interesting terms, young readers see in this novel the powerful thrust of aggressive, destructive, irrational forces. They recognize that in spite of circumstances environmental and psychological, there are surrenders, yieldings, choices—in short, responsibilities—for all the dark acts involved. They see also a brave resistance to deterioration by a few. Many of the castaway lads fall in readily with the demonic Jack who is dragging the island band down to savagery. But Ralph and the sad-valiant Piggy resist to the extremity. They cannot win alone—they need rescue and help. What comes is the dubious rescue by warring adults. In Golding's own penetrating question about the story's end: ". . . who will rescue the adult and his cruiser?"

A theological reading of *Lord of the Flies* is possible. Students equipped for it respond to it strongly. I have read a paper by a secondary schoolgirl so interpreting it that would grace any literary journal. But it does not have to be consciously interpreted in theological terms: its message simply *is* in its self-contained frame of events. *The Inheritors* and *Pincher Martin,* each a remarkable fable in its own way, work also by metaphor and implication. The probing student will find Golding's questions and conjectural

answers about existence more overtly intellectualized in *Free Fall* which bears the stamp of individuality, yet is the most conventional of the novels in terms of social realism, the least a "fable" as he calls most of his works.

Its repeated, driving, motivating questions are: "When did I lose my freedom?" "How did I lose my freedom?" Seeking answers, his narrator says, "I have hung all systems on the wall like a row of useless hats. They do not fit." Most subtle and penetrating thought of all: "What men believe is a function of what they are; and what they are is in part what has happened to them."

Free Fall cannot have for young people the direct narrative impact and the intimate identification that *Lord of the Flies* offers. Though this book is about boys only, girls identify themselves with it in terms of human nature and the roots of behavior. But *Free Fall* can carry forward in intellectual awareness and definition what the other book establishes through intuitions. In all his work, Golding the sometime schoolmaster is teaching strongly and well. The youthful are drawn to Salinger chiefly to look for mirror images, to feel, and to lament. They are drawn to Golding to question reflectively, to try to answer and to know. /3/

GOLDING'S VIEW OF MAN

JOHN M. EGAN, O. P.

When William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was first published in this country in 1955, it sold only 2,383 copies and quickly went out of print. Imperceptibly, however, the book took hold of the undergraduate imagination, and the paperback edition published in 1959 has already sold well over 65,000 copies. *Time* magazine earlier this year estimated that the book has become the most influential novel among U. S. undergraduates since Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye,* and that it is on the required reading list of a hundred colleges. The present article is offered in the hope that it may prompt

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further discussion of a novel which offers a world view far removed from the Christian.

The book is an allegory. The boys are presented as typical of human nature as it is essentially. Their isolation on an island is a device whereby the author is able to transcend what he would consider the façade of civilization in order to reach man as he truly is. The book prescinds entirely from anything of the supernatural and, even more so, from anything derived from revelation.

The theme of the book is that the human condition is irrational. Man has no nature, but rather is an excrescence from chaotic, cruel and blind forces which are violent and yet meaningless. Man springs forth from these forces and regresses into them. The violence which develops on the island only reflects in microcosm the violence of the rest of the world: the boys appear on the island as the result of some atomic catastrophe, the sole intruder on the island is the dead pilot who is shot down from the firmament overhead, and the boys leave the island in the company of armed men traveling in a warship. When all is said and done, man's condition is represented as something hateful. Thus the novel is representative of the spirit of much of modern thought and art.

Ralph's obsession with maintaining a fire is symbolic of man's illusion that civilization will bring salvation. The usage of fire to symbolize the arts and sciences of civilization was canonized in the Prometheus legend, and a reflection of that myth is found in the book when the forces of chaos plan to steal back the fire. Civilization, however, is merely a momentary veneer which ill conceals man's essential nature. Under pressure, even Ralph, the protagonist of civilization, begins to revert to his primal condition, forgetting the importance of the fire.

Almost immediately after the boys' arrival on the island, the forces of violence, blind power and cruelty, typified by Jack, Roger and their associates, begin to struggle to attain ascendency over the values of civilization and traditional authority, represented by the fire and Ralph with his conch. These boys hanker for violence and a return to the primordial chaos, typified by the hunt. Soon their antagonism becomes hostility, as the hunt and blood-lust become responsible for the fire dying out and the chance for a return to civilization being missed. It is at this time, significantly, that the specter of some mysterious beast begins to loom up before the boys. The beast becomes a source of terror and division among them as fear grows of some unchained and superior force in their midst.

What is the beast? It is man himself. Piggy intimates this. "I know

there isn't no beast—not with claws and all that, I mean. But I know it isn't fear either—unless we get frightened of people." But it is Simon, the seer, who spells out the truth explicitly. " 'Maybe there is a beast. . . . What I mean is—maybe it's only us. We could be sort of. . . .' Simon became inarticulate in his effort to express mankind's essential illness. Inspiration came to him. 'What's the dirtiest thing there is?' As an answer, Jack dropped into the uncomprehending silence that followed it the one crude, expressive syllable'."

This paragraph is critical. The vilest of human things is used as a symbol of man himself. This is not a random remark, for an underlying concern with human excrement runs throughout the book. Any doubt as to the correctness of this interpretation is dissipated when the beast appears to Simon and confirms Simon's insight. "Fancy thinking that the Beast was something you could hunt and kill! You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?" And what name is given to this beast? He is the "lord of the flies." This is a cryptogram for the reader because the Aramaic word in question, "beelzebub," is not always translated thus. Another meaning given for this word is "lord of dung." The beast then is human nature itself /140/ —vile and hateful, worthy to be symbolized by human excrement. It is this hateful power which Jack apotheosizes and begins to worship.

Man, however, is merely part of a larger chaos from which he has come and toward which he regresses. The murder of Simon takes place when the boys are in an orgy of frenzied dancing, a frenzy which reflects in microcosm the tearing wind, jagged lightning and powerful rain of the universe. And where do the dead return? Simon, the aviator and Piggy, the book explicitly states, all are carried out to sea, to the sea which in its ineluctable movement reflects the vast and meaningless movement of the universe. This is the significance of the last paragraph of chapter nine. "Only two dead," Ralph later informs his rescuers, and then he adds significantly, "and they've gone."

The book, then, presents man and the universe as a cruel and irrational chaos. This artistic vision, typical of modern art, induces a sense of despair and even hatred of what is human. One joins with Satan himself in the devil's loathing of man. This is why certain critics have termed some aspects of modern art diabolic. There is supreme irony in the title of the book itself. The term "lord of the flies" is, as has been mentioned, a translation of the word "beelzebub." And Beelzebub is Satan. /141/