# *WILLIAM GOLDING- BETWEEN FABLE AND FICTION*

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***Abstract:*** *The paper aims to be an analysis of William Golding's "Lord of the Flies". His novels are interpreted in the light of theology, modern psychology, politics and sociology. Golding creates a universe in which ideas are more vital than the action. His knowledge about human nature is mirrored in his fiction which is full of Christian symbolism. A Golding novel has a double meaning. The deeper meaning lays in the depth of the words, both simple and complex.*

***Keywords:*** *symbols, fable, fiction, morality.*

William Golding, considered to be one of the precursors of postmodernism in the 20th century, was a prominent modern writer of English fiction. He was a great fabulist, allegorical writer and mythmaker.

His novels are interpreted in the light of theology, modern psychology, politics and sociology. It is to be noted how Golding creates a universe in which ideas are more vital than the action. His knowledge about human nature is mirrored in his fiction which is full of Christian symbolism. A Golding novel has a double meaning. The deeper meaning lays in the depth of the words both simple and complex.

The most important novels of William Golding are: *Lord of the Flies (1954), The Inheritors (1955), Pincher Martin (1956)*, *Free Fall (1959)*, *The Spire (1964)*, *The Pyramid (1967).* Golding's infatuation with writing and the power of words began in his early childhood. Describing his first days in school in an essay entitled *Billy the Kid*, he writes of his passion for words and for collecting them: "It did not occur to me that school might have discipline or that numbers might be necessary. While, therefore, I was supposed to be writing out my tables, or even dividing four oranges between two poor boys, I was more likely to be scrawling a list of words, (…). While I was supposed to be learning my Collect, I was likely to be chanting inside my head a list of delightful words, which I had picked up God knows where." (Golding, 1965: 159-160)

Although educated to be a scientist at the request of his father, the young Golding developed an interest in literature, becoming devoted first to Anglo-Saxon texts and then to poetry, which he wrote avidly. At Oxford he studied natural science for two years and then transferred to a program for English literature and philosophy. In his own assessment of this transition, Golding stated that: "The answer is really this, that my father was a scientist, and I took from him a great admiration for science, which, in a curious way, I've still got. It took me a long time at Oxford to find that I was simply pushing a ball uphill, and I really didn't care about it." (Biles, 1970: 88) Golding's scientific background exerted an obvious influence on his fiction.

In 1934, while still a student at Oxford, Golding published his first work, a collection of poetry entitled simply, *Poems,* but which the author would prefer to forget as can be observed from the following: "I don't own a copy… . Actually, I'd rather forget it… . You might say I write prose because I can't write poetry." (Dick, 1965: 480)

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But, even at this early stage, the poems hint at Golding's dual interest in science and literature and question the stylish rationalism of science. Following a short period of time in which he worked in various positions at a settlement house and in small theatre companies as both an actor and a writer, Golding became a schoolmaster at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury.

In 1940, at the age of twenty-nine, Golding entered the Royal Navy and was involved in the sinking of the German battleship Bismarck. It was during the war that Golding lost faith in human progression as the writer himself confesses in one of his several interviews: "It is too easy a thing to say that before the war I believed one thing and after the war I believed another. It was not like that. I was gradually coming up against people and I was understanding a bit more what people were like; and, also gradually, learning that the things I hadn't really believed, that I had taken as propaganda, were, in fact, done." (Biles, 1970: 33-34) This is also the idea that dominates Golding's early novels, especially *Lord of the Flies.* Following the war, Golding returned to Bishop Wordsworth's School, where he taught until the early 1960's. During those years, he began to experiment with writing fiction. Between 1945 and 1954, he produced three novels that no publisher would accept. Then, in 1954, *Lord of the Flies* was accepted by *Faber and Faber* after being rejected by twenty-one publishers. Although its success was not immediate, the novel gradually gained recognition.

E.M. Forster declared *Lord of the Flies* the outstanding novel of its year, while *Time and Tide* called it *not only a first-rate adventure story, but a parable of our times*. Golding continued to develop similar themes concerning the inherent violence in human nature in his next novel, *The Inheritors* (1955). His subsequent works include *Pincher Martin* (1956) and *Free Fall* (1959), each of which deals with the depravity of human nature. Although *Lord of the Flies* was awarded and gained success, the novels that followed it were criticized by a number of scholars who focused on their thematic.

Commenting upon William Golding's novels, Gindin succeeded in capturing the essence of the fabulist school of criticism: "*Lord of the Flies*, by its very form, insists on the recognition of the truth of the orthodox Christian version of essential human depravity; the concept and meaning of the novel rely on the validity of their Christian parallels. Similarly, the whole organization and direction of *Free Fall* depends on accepting the relevance of a Faustian bargain, the anguish of selling one's soul to Satan, just as *The Spire* is dependent on realizing the combination of pain and glory in building the monument that aspires to touch the heavens." (Gindin, The Fable Begins to Break Down, p.3-4)

William Golding composed *Lord of the Flies* shortly after the end of WWII. At the time of the novel's composition, Golding, who had published an anthology of poetry nearly two decades earlier, had been working for a number of years as a teacher and training as a scientist. Golding drew extensively on his scientific background for his first narrative work. The novel's plot, in which a group of English boys stranded on a deserted island struggling to develop their own society, is a social and political thought-experiment using fiction. The story of their attempts at civilization and devolution into savagery and violence puts the relationship between human nature and society under a literary microscope. Golding's allusions to human evolution also reflect his scientific training. The characters discover fire, craft tools, and form political and social systems in a process that recalls theories of the development of early man, a topic of much interest among the mid-century Western public. The culmination of the plot in war and murder suggests that Golding's overarching hypothesis about humanity is pessimistic,



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that is, there are anarchic and brutal instincts in human nature. Ordered democracy or some other regime is necessary to contain these instincts. As an allegory about human nature and society, *Lord of the Flies* draws upon Judeo-Christian mythology to elaborate on the novel's sociological and political hypothesis. The title has two meanings, both charged with religious significance. The first is a reference to a line from King Lear, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to gods." The second is a reference to the Hebrew name Ba'alzevuv, or in its Greek form Beelzebub, which translates to "God of the Flies" and is synonymous with Satan. For Golding however, the satanic forces that compel the shocking events on the island come from within the human psyche rather than from an external, supernatural realm as they do in Judeo-Christian mythology. Golding thus employs a religious reference to illustrate a Freudian concept: the Id, the amoral instinct that governs the individual's sense of sheer survival, is by nature evil in its amoral pursuit of its own goals. The *lord of the flies*, that is, the pig's head on a stick, directly challenges the most spiritually motivated character on the island, Simon, who functions as a prophet-martyr for the other boys.

Published in 1954 early in the Cold War, *Lord of the Flies* is firmly rooted in the socio-political concerns of its era. The novel alludes to the Cold War conflict between liberal democracy and totalitarian communism. Ralph represents the liberal tradition, while Jack, before he succumbs to total anarchy, represents the kind of military dictatorship that, for mid-century America and Great Britain, characterized the communist system.

*Lord of the Flies*, with its dystopian and speculative characteristics, established Golding as a solid author with an interest in the science-fiction literary genre that was popular in the 1950s. The novel depicts realistic characters, but the plot, which follows a small group of humans isolated within an alien landscape, employs or alludes to the conventions of popular science fiction novels of the time.

Golding's early novels are defined by some critics as being allegories and succeed in providing correlations between Golding's moral message and that machinery of stories and characters that he implies in its articulation. The critical comments on Golding's novels are reduced to some point to the insistence on a dominant moral dimension in each novel. The general view expressed in Golding's art is at the same time rationalistic and religious, the conception of a universe in some constantly expanding limitations. For the writer, human nature is synthetic, both rational and religious: *Cause and effect. The law of succession. Statistical probability. The moral order. Sin and remorse. They are all true. Both worlds exist side by side. They meet in me. We have to satisfy the examiners in both worlds at once.* (William Golding, *Free Fall*).

Golding admitted that his first real novel is a fable, meant to express a particular moral viewpoint: "With all its drawbacks and difficulties, it was this method of presenting the truth as I saw it in fable form which I adopted for the first of my novels which ever got published." (Golding, *Fable*, in *The Hot Gates*, p.86-87)

The basic problem with Golding fables appears when the reader tries to distil from a particular novel the explicit moral. In *Lord of the Flies*, for example, it is about the natural human depravity which is inescapable. It is about an ideal terror. During history, man has been forced to suffer the role of a victim. In the same way, one can see in Golding's youngsters some unfortunate victims of circumstance and in the writer's novels, the image of a humanity permanently divided between reason and religion, common-sense and ritual, terror and pity. The novels represent descriptions or portrayals of moral facts.



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In point of the characters that appear in the novel *Lord of the Flies* it is to be noted: "On one level the story shows how intelligence (Piggy) and common sense (Ralph) will always be overthrown in society by sadism (Roger) and the lure of totalitarianism (Jack). On another, the growth of savagery in the boys demonstrates the power of original sin. Simon, the Christ figure, who tries to tell the children that their fears of a dead parachutist are illusory, is killed in a terrifying tribal dance. The Lord of the Flies is the head of pig, which Jack puts up on a stick to placate an illusory beast. As Simon understands, the only dangerous beast, the true Lord of the Flies, is inside the children themselves. Lord of the Flies is the Old Testament name for Beelzebub." (Cox, 1960, *Critical Quarterly*, II: 112) It is also to be mentioned the fact that the characters are not simple characters, but symbolical characters. They interact at different points in the novel and the most important among them are: Ralph, Jack, Simon and Piggy.

*Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel, and many of its characters signify important ideas or themes. Ralph represents order, leadership, and civilization. Piggy represents the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization. Jack represents unbridled savagery and the desire for power. Simon represents natural human goodness. Roger represents brutality and bloodlust at their most extreme. To the extent that the boys' society resembles a political state, the little boys might be seen as the common people, while the older boys represent the ruling classes and political leaders. The relationships that develop between the older boys and the younger ones emphasize the older boys' connection to either the civilized or the savage instinct: civilized boys like Ralph and Simon use their power to protect the younger boys and advance the good of the group. The savage boys like Jack and Roger use their power to gratify their own desires, treating the littler boys as objects for their own amusement.

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