Lord of the Flies opens in Eden. Ralph, fair-haired protagonist, and Piggy, faithful companion and resident intellectual, look about them and pronounce their island good. And so it is, for William Golding has set his young castaways down upon an uninhabited Pacific island as lush as it is remote. Fruit hangs ripe for the picking; fresh water flows abundantly from a convenient mountain; and the tropical climate soon prompts the boys to throw off their clothes. Ralph joyfully stands on his head, an action he will repeat at moments of high emotion. It is easy to forget that the world is at war, and that the plane that carried Ralph, Piggy, and the many other English boys stranded on the island, was shot down by the enemy.

As war and plane crash recede from memory, the visible world shrinks to the desert island and its populace of six- to twelve-year-old boys. Because of the island's fecundity and mild climate the boys are largely exempt from the struggle for food and shelter; because of their youth they are exempt from sexual longing and deprivation; because of their isolation they are exempt from adult constraints. Free to live as they choose, they can act out every boy's dream of romantic adventure until their eventual rescue. Lord of the Flies begins, therefore, as a modern retelling of R. N. Ballantyne's Victorian children's classic, Coral Island. Indeed Golding traces his book's genesis to a night when he had finished reading just such an island adventure story to his eldest child. Exasperated by the familiar cutout characters and smug optimism of the original, he conceived of breathing life into a moribund genre by isolating boys on a desert island and showing how they would really behave. Ballantyne's shipwrecked boys, somewhat older than Golding's, lead an idyllic life on their remote South Seas island. Tropical nature is benign, the boys' characters conventionally innocent. What evil exists on Coral Island enters in the form of such adult intruders as savage cannibals or pirates. Ballantyne's vision is doubly optimistic: man is inherently good; and good will win out in the end. Like most fairy tales, Coral Island is an amalgam of faith and hope.

On Golding's coral island, Piggy's allusions to atomic war, dead adults, and uncertainty of rescue barely ripple the surface of Ralph's pleasant daydreams. Soon the boys recover a conch from the lagoon. More than a plaything, the conch will become a means of communication, and ultimately a symbol of law and order. Instructed by the wise but ineffectual Piggy, Ralph blows on the conch, thereby summoning the scattered boys. Possession of the conch ensures Ralph's election as chief. Later the assembled boys agree that whoever wishes to speak must raise his hand and request the conch. Cradling the conch in one's hands not only confers instant personal authority but affirms the common desire for an orderly society.

Read as a social treatise, Golding's first chapter seems to posit notions of fair play and group solidarity familiar to readers of Coral Island. But the same chapter introduces us to Jack Merridew marching at the head of his uniformed column of choirboys. Clad in black and silver and led by an obviously authoritarian figure, the choirboys seem boy Nazis. Frustrated by Ralph's election as chief, Jack barely conceals his anger. The chapter ends with Jack, knife in hand, reflexively hesitating long enough on the downward stroke to allow a trapped piglet to escape. The civilized taboo against bloodletting remains shakily in place as the angry boy settles for slamming his knife into a tree trunk. "Next time," he cries.

It is the exploration of Jack's "next time" that will occupy much of the remainder of Lord of the Flies. By fixing incipient evil within Jack, Golding reverses the sanguine premise of nineteenth-century adventure stories that locate evil in the alien or mysterious forces of the outside world. According to Golding his generation's "liberal and naive belief in the perfectibility of man" was exploded by World War II. Hitler's gas chambers revealed man's inherent evil. His followers were not Ballantyne's savage cannibals or desperate pirates whose evil magically dissipated upon their conversion to Christianity. Rather they were products of that very Christian civilization that presumably guarantees their impossibility. Nor does it suffice to accept Ballantyne's implication that his boys' Englishness, like their Christianity, marks them as inevitably good. "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. So we've got to do the right things." Coming from Golding's Jack, these words effectively shatter Ballantyne's easy optimism. Conditioned no less by the theology of man's fall than by Nazi atrocities, Lord of the Flies traces the spreading stain of man's depravity from its first intimations in Jack to its near-total corruption of the boys and their social order. "I decided," explained Golding, "to take the literary convention of boys on an island, only make them real boys instead of paper cutouts with no life in them; and try to show how the shape of the society they evolved would be conditioned by their diseased, their fallen nature."
Too immature to account for the enemy within, the boys project their irrational fears onto the outside world. The first of these projections takes the shape of a snakelike "beastie," the product of a small boy's nightmare. One side of the boy's face "was blotted out by a mulberry-coloured birthmark," the visible sign of the dual nature of fallen man. More by force of personality than by reason, Ralph succeeds in exorcising the monster from the group consciousness. Now the boys struggle to drag logs up the mountain for a signal fire, Ralph and Jack bearing the heaviest log between them. Jack's momentary selflessness combined with the manipulation of the lenses of Piggy's spectacles to start their fire—as well as the very act of fire building itself—signal a resurgence of civilized values. But the fire soon rages out of control; exploding trees and rising creepers reinvoke cries of "Snakes! Snakes!" and the small boy with the birthmark has mysteriously disappeared. The seed of fear has been planted. Reason has failed to explain the darkness within, and the island paradise begins its fatal transformation into hell.

Soon Ralph and Jack find communication impossible, the former talking of building shelters, the latter of killing pigs. Increasingly obsessed with his role as hunter, Jack neglects his more important role as keeper of the signal fire. Painting a fierce mask on his face he is "liberated from shame and self-consciousness." Shortly thereafter he and his frenzied followers march along swinging the gutted carcass of a pig from a stake to the incantory chant, "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood." Abandonment to blind ritual has displaced the reasoned discourse governed by the conch. Meanwhile the untended fire has gone out, and a ship has sailed past the island. Lost in blood lust, Jack's thoughts are far from rescue, and he at first barely comprehends Ralph's anger. When he does, he strikes out at the helpless Piggy, shattering one of his lenses. Reason henceforth is half-blind; the fragile link between Ralph and Jack snaps; and ritual singing and dancing resume as the boys gorge themselves on the slaughtered pig. That Ralph and Piggy join in the feast indicates the all-too-human failure to resist the blandishments of mass hysteria.

Killing marks the end of innocence. It is a wiser Ralph who "found himself understanding the wearisomeness of this life where every path was an improvisation and a considerable part of one's waking life was spent watching one's feet … and remembering that first enthusiastic exploration as though it were part of a brighter childhood, he smiled jeeringly." Here at the beginning of the important fifth chapter, "Beast from Water," the regression and initiation themes converge. On the basis of his newfound knowledge, Ralph assembles the boys to discuss such practical matters as sanitation, shelter, and, most crucially, the keeping of the fire. But the tension among the boys is palpable, and Ralph soon confesses, "Things are breaking up. I don't understand why. We began well, we were happy." And he concludes, "Then people started getting frightened." Piggy's theory that life is scientific is countered by new reports of a beast from the sea. Neither Piggy's logic nor Ralph's rules can hold the boys together, and the meeting scatters in confusion.

E. M. Forster pleads in his introduction to the 1962 American edition of Lord of the Flies for more respect for Piggy. Of course he is correct. Faced with specters of water beasts and Jack's authoritarian violence, who could fail to opt for Piggy's rationalism? Yet unaided reason cannot tell Ralph why things go wrong; it can only deny the physical reality of the beast. It is left to Simon, the skinny, inarticulate seer to "express mankind's essential illness" by fixing the beast's location: "What I mean is … maybe it's only us." Golding's moral—that defect in human society can be traced back to defects in human nature—can be illustrated by the fable of the scorpion and the frog:

"Let me ride across the pond on your back," pleads the scorpion.
"No," replies the frog, "for if I let you on my back your sting will prove fatal."
"Listen to reason," cries the scorpion. "If I sting you, you'll sink to the bottom of the pond, and I'll drown."
So the frog takes the scorpion on his back and begins swimming. Midway across the pond, he feels the scorpion's fatal sting. "How could you," gasps the frog with his dying breath. "Now you'll drown."
"I couldn't help it," sighs the scorpion. "It's my nature."

Though his irrationality, like the scorpion's, may cost him his life, man is his own worst enemy. Undone by the beast within, man self-destructs no matter what form of social organization he adopts.

"Beast from the Air" opens with the sign from the world of grown-ups that answers Ralph's desperate cry for help after the breakup of the assembly. Dropping from the air battle high above the island, a dead parachutist settles on the mountaintop where fitful breezes cause him spasmodically to rise and fall. This grotesque "message" recalls the adult savagery that marooned the boys on the island. Moreover, the boys now take the faraway figure for the beast that haunts their dreams. Confronted by its apparent physical reality even Ralph succumbs to fear. The ironic appropriateness of the man-beast foreshadows Jack's growing power and the final unraveling of the social order. Now that the primary task is to kill the beast, Jack assumes command. Promising hunting and feasting he lures more and more boys into his camp. Man regresses from settler to roving hunter, society from democracy to dictatorship.
It is at this point, shortly after the collapse of social order under the pressures of inherent evil associated with Jack and irrational fear embodied in the beast from the air, that Golding paints his most startling and powerful scene. Simon, the only boy who feels the need for solitude, returns to his place of contemplation, a leafy shelter concealed by the dense growth of the forest. There he witnesses the butchering of a frantically screaming sow, its gutting and dismemberment, and the erection of its bleeding head on a pole. This head, abandoned by the hunters as a "gift" to the beast, presides over a pile of guts that attracts great swarms of buzzing flies. And the Lord of the Flies speaks: "Fancy thinking 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?" Looking into the vast mouth, Simon sees only a spreading blackness into which he falls in a faint.

As previously noted, Golding has called himself a fabulist and his novel a fable. All fables contain morals; and the moral of Lord of the Flies is stated most explicitly in the confrontation between Simon and the pig's head. "I included a Christ-figure in my fable. This is the little boy Simon, solitary, stammering, a lover of mankind, a visionary." Since the Lord of the Flies is Beelzebub, the Judeo-Christian prince of devils, the scene dramatizes the clash between principles of good and evil. To accept the consequences of Golding's symbolism is to recognize the inequality of the struggle between Simon and the head. The Lord of the Flies has invaded Simon's forest sanctuary to preach an age-old sermon: evil lies within man whose nature is inherently depraved. Simon cannot counter this lesson. Engulfed by the spreading blackness of the vast mouth, he is overwhelmed by Beelzebub's power and loses consciousness. While it does not necessarily follow that Christ's message is similarly overpowered by Satan's, the forest scene strongly implies that innocence and good intentions are lost amidst the general ubiquity of evil. That evil cannot be isolated in Jack or in the beast; it is "close, close, close," a part of all of us.

The Simon who awakens from his faint trudges out of the forest "like an old man," stooping under the heavy burden of revelation. Immediately he comes face-to-face with a second awful symbol of human corruption—the rotting body of the downed parachutist. It, too, has been found by the flies; like the pig's head it too has been reduced to a corrupt and hideous parody of life. Releasing the broken figure from the tangled parachute lines that bind it to the rocks, Simon staggers back down the mountain with this news that the beast is harmless. But he stumbles into the frenzied mob of dancing and chanting boys who take him for the beast, fall upon him, and tear him apart.

The ritual murder of Simon is as ironic as it is inevitable. Ironically, he is killed as the beast before he can explain that the beast does not exist. His horrid death refutes his aborted revelation: the beast exists, all right, not where we thought to find it, but within ourselves. Inevitably, we kill our savior who "would set us free from the repetitious nightmare of history." Unable to perceive his truth, we huddle together in the circle of our fear and reenact his ritual murder, as ancient as human history itself. Golding's murderous boys, the products of centuries of Christianity and Western civilization, explode the hope of Christ's sacrifice by repeating the pattern of his crucifixion. Simon's fate underlines the most awful truths about human nature: its blindness, its irrationality, its blood lust.

That the human condition is hopeless is revealed in the fact that even Ralph and Piggy felt the need to join in the "demented but partly secure society" of the hunters just prior to Simon's murder. Later, they console themselves with the excuse that they remained outside the dancing circle. When Ralph recalls the horror of the murder, Piggy first tries to deny its reality. And when Ralph refuses to drop the subject, Piggy shrills again and again that Simon's death was an accident. His desperate rationalizations point to the inability of human reason to cope with the dark reality of human nature. Piggy's excuses are mere frantic attempts to explain away our basest instincts and actions. Their transparent failure to do so marks the limits of the human intellect. Symbolic of the fall of reason is the loss of Piggy's sight. His broken glasses, the means of fire making, are stolen in a raid by Jack and his hunters. As Jack stalks triumphantly off with the glasses dangling from his hand, the reign of savagery is all but sealed.

Jack's victory comes swiftly in the following chapter, "Castle Rock." Again Golding sets up a contest between principles of good and evil. But this time the outcome is a foregone conclusion. The pack of painted savages who blindly murdered Simon has by now abandoned all restraints. Personified by Roger, Jack's fanatical self-appointed "executioner," the hunters turn viciously against Ralph and Piggy and the twins Sam and Eric, the last four remnants of an orderly society. From high atop a cliff Roger pushes a great rock that, gathering momentum, strikes Piggy, killing the fat boy and shattering the conch. Although the conch has long since lost the power to invoke order, its explosion signals the final triumph of lawlessness. Screaming wildly, "I'm chief," Jack hurls his spear at Ralph, inflicting a flesh wound, and forcing the former chief to run frantically for his life.

"Cry of the Hunters," the novel's concluding chapter, marks the final degenerative stage in Golding's fable of man's fall. Ralph's
Golding has often acknowledged the formative influence of the ancients. Together with the biblical version of man's fate expressed in the doctrine of original sin, Greek drama fleshes out the myth of the fall. If it is true that a writer's forebears surface most apparently in his early work, then the final hunt of *Lord of the Flies* is second only to Simon's "passion" in fixing the origins of Golding's most cherished ideas. While it is true that Simon's confrontation with the pig's head and his subsequent martyrdom are couched primarily in Christian terms, the Greek influence is also apparent. The pig's head is at once the Judeo-Christian Beelzebub and the king of the Olympian gods. Thus Jean-Paul Sartre's modern reworking of Greek motifs in *The Flies* opens on a public square in Argos, "dominated by a statue of Zeus, god of flies and death. The image has white eyes and blood-smeared cheeks." Zeus himself appears in the play to explain the great swarms of buzzing flies that plague the city. "They are," he says, "a symbol," sent by the gods to "a dead-and-alive city, a carrion city" still festering fifteen years after the original sin of Agamemnon's murder. The citizens of Argos are "working out their atonement." Their "fear and guilty consciences have a good savor in the nostrils of the gods." Zeus implies that man's blood lust is balanced by this reverence for the gods, a view shared by Golding: "As far back as we can go in history we find that the two signs of man are a capacity to kill and a belief in God." Human fear and guilt are perverse affirmations of the gods' existence and therefore find favor with the gods. For Sartre, the existential philosopher, man's awful freedom, won at the expense of breaking his shackles to the gods, is all-important. But for Golding, the Christian believer, man is lost without God. The absence of prayer, even among fearful young choirboys, is one of the darkest aspects of *Lord of the Flies*.

Although *The Flies* may have no direct bearing upon Golding's novel, its title as well as its identification of Zeus as god of flies and death reveal the same backdrop of Greek tradition. At the end of Sartre's play, the hero Orestes, drawn directly from Greek drama, is pursued by the shrieking Furies. No such deities hunt Ralph, only his fellow boys. Yet chase scenes of all kinds fill Greek drama, and Golding the classicist seems indebted not merely to the general metaphor of the hunt but specifically to its powerful treatment in two plays of Euripides: *The Bacchae* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

Euripides wrote *The Bacchae*, his greatest and most difficult play, in the wake of a disillusionment with the Peloponnesian War as profound as Golding's with World War II. As skeptical about human nature as Golding, Euripides had already written the most devastating antiwar play that survives from antiquity, *The Trojan Women*. Both *Lord of the Flies* and *The Bacchae* are anthropological passion plays in which individuals—children in Golding, adults in Euripides—revert to savagery and murder during a frenzied ritual. At Thebes, where Dionysus (Bacchus) comes to introduce his worship to Greece, King Pentheus adamantly denies the new religion. To Dionysus's orgiastic revels Pentheus opposes the rule of reason. Yet he is tempted to disguise himself in the fawn skin of a Dionysian follower in order to watch the rites of the female devotees. Spied by the Bacchants, he is hunted down and torn to pieces by the frenzied women, led by his own mother, Agave. Maddened by the god, the hapless Agave bears Pentheus's head, which she imagines is a lion's, triumphantly back to Thebes. There she comes to her senses and awakens to the horrid proof of Dionysus's power. To deny Dionysus is to deny a fundamental force in human nature. That the destruction of Pentheus is so disproportionate to his offense constitutes poetic justice in *The Bacchae*: Pentheus denies the primitive power of unreason only to become its victim. Yet the orgiastic worship that transforms Agave into the unwitting murderess of her son is hardly preferable to Pentheus's denial. Euripides, in dramatizing the clash between emotionalism and rationalism, may be arguing the primacy of neither. However one interprets *The Bacchae*, its affinities with *Lord of the Flies* are striking:

Specifically, both drama and novel contain three interrelated ritual themes: the cult of a beast-god, a hunt as prefiguration of the death of the scapegoat-figure, and the dismemberment of the scapegoat. Golding deviates in only one respect from Euripides: logically Ralph, the Pentheus in embryo, should be the scapegoat; but the author assigns this role to Simon, allowing Ralph to live instead with his new-found knowledge of "the darkness of man's heart."

Dionysus is the true hero of *The Bacchae*: his merciless destruction of Pentheus is but the opening salvo in his campaign to establish his worship in Hellas. Golding is no less concerned with the primitive force that Dionysus represents; but his primary concern is the impact of that force upon his hero. Ralph, the latter-day Pentheus, must therefore survive the ordeal of the hunt and live with his hard-won knowledge. Against the backdrop of the flaming island, a hell that once was Eden, the savage tribe pursues Ralph until, stumbling over a root, the frantic boy sprawls helplessly in the sand. Staggering to his feet, flinching at the anticipated last onslaught, Ralph looks up into the astonished face of a British naval officer. Ralph's miraculous salvation completes the drama of his initiation as, in a shattering epiphany, he weeps "for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the
Although Golding shifts the focus from God's power to man's knowledge he relies on a familiar Euripides device for ending his novel. Golding calls the timely arrival of the naval officer a "gimmick," a term subsequently used by critics to plague him. Yet the officer is neither more nor less than the Greek deus ex machina in modern uniform. Employed most strikingly by Euripides in The Bacchae, the "god" in the machine is hoisted high above the other actors to solve the problems of the preceding action and to supply a happy ending. Most often, when the deity imposes a happy ending, the normal consequences of the action would be disastrous. Neither The Bacchae nor Sartre's The Flies employs the device in its purest form. In the former, Dionysus resolves the action by heaping even more woe upon the Thebans who denied his god head. In the latter, Sartre's Zeus absents himself from the ending, having already explained its significance. Moreover, both gods take major roles from the outset of their respective plays. Neither makes the single in-the-nick-of-time appearance to reverse the action that generally characterizes the deus ex machina.

In Iphigenia in Tauris, however, Euripides relies upon the deus ex machina for a resolution markedly similar to that of Lord of the Flies. Iphigenia, her brother Orestes, and his friend Pylades, pursued by the minions of the barbarian king Thoas, reach the seacoast where a Greek ship waits to carry them home. But Thoas's troops control the strait through which the ship must pass; and a strong gale drives the ship back toward the shore. Enter the goddess Athena, who warns Thoas to cease his pursuit. It seems that the fates of Iphigenia and her companions have been foreordained, and against this "necessity" even gods are powerless. Thoas wisely relents, the winds grow favorable, and the ship sails off under Athena's divine protection.

Barbarian pursuit, friendly ship, and miraculous rescue are no less present in Golding's conclusion. And when these elements are added the hunt for sacrificial victims and the bloody rites of the Taurian religion, the resemblances between Iphigenia in Tauris and Lord of the Flies seem more than skin deep. Yet the lessons of the two works radically differ. Greek drama is ultimately conditioned by the proximity of the gods: omnipresent yet inscrutable they influence human action and determine human destiny. Since, as Sartre's Zeus admits, the gods need mortals for their worship as much as mortals need objects for their devotion, it follows that Greek drama chronicles this interdependence. In The Flies, Sartre's Zeus, the fading though still powerful king of the gods, owes his rule to human fear and superstition and relies upon man's willing servitude. When Orestes finally strides boldly into the sunlight, the spell of the gods is broken; henceforth he will blaze his own trail, acknowledging no law but his own. For Sartre, man's freedom begins with his denial of the gods and his full acceptance of responsibility for his actions and their consequences. And while existential freedom is as fearful as it is lonely, it is infinitely preferable to god-ridden bondage. Whether Dionysus stalking through Iphigenia in Tauris, or Zeus brooding in The Flies, the gods play a role in the human drama. Note that all three deities carefully define their roles: Dionysus to punish the errant Thebans whose king denied him; Athena to ensure the proper worship of her sister, Artemis; and Zeus to warn the recalcitrant Orestes of the consequences of rebellion. So closely are the gods involved with mortals that their interventions, no matter how arbitrary, take on a certain inevitable logic.

What Golding calls the "gimmicked" ending of Lord of the Flies and the Greek deus ex machina used most conventionally in Iphigenia in Tauris are alike in their technical function: to reverse the course of impending disaster. Yet their effects are quite different. Athena's wisdom is incontrovertible, her morality unassailable. High above the awed mortals she dispels chaos and imposes ideal order. The very fact of her appearance underlines the role of the gods in shaping human destiny. Golding's spiffy naval officer is, however, no god. Nor does he represent a higher morality. Confronted by the ragtag melee, he can only wonder that English boys hadn't put up a better show, and mistakes their savage hunt for fun and games à la Coral Island. While he cannot know the events preceding his arrival, his comments betray the same ignorance of human nature that contributed to the boys' undoing. Commanding his cruiser, the officer will direct a maritime search-and-destroy mission identical to the island hunt. Lord of the Flies ends with the officer gazing at the cruiser, preparing to reenact the age-old saga of man's inhumanity to man.

Just as the naval officer cannot measure up to Euripides' Athena, so Ralph falls short of Sartre's Orestes. Orestes strides into the sunlight of his morality to live Sartre's dictum that existence precedes essence. Creating himself anew with each action, he will become his own god. Ralph can only weep for the loss of innocence from the world; he shows no particular signs of coping with his newfound knowledge. To understand one's nature is not to alter it. Morally diseased, mired in original sin, fallen man can rise only by the apparently impossible means of transcending his very nature. In man's apparent inability to re-create himself lies the tragedy of Lord of the Flies. The futility of Simon's sacrificial death, the failure of adult morality, and the final absence of God create the spiritual vacuum of Golding's novel. For Sartre the denial of the gods is the necessary prelude to human freedom. But for Golding, God's absence leads only to despair and human freedom is but license. "The theme of Lord of the Flies is grief, sheer grief, grief, grief."