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WILLIAM GOLDING

Born: St. Columb Minor, Cornwall, England;
September 19, 1911

Died: Perranarworthal, Cornwall, England; June
19, 1993

*Golding's novels explore the dark side of the human psyche. His **Lord of the Flies** became a classic fictive study in the dark side of human nature.*

BIOGRAPHY

William Gerald Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in St. Columb Minor in Cornwall, England. His father was an extremely well-educated schoolmaster, and his mother was a strong-minded suffragette. Golding grew up in the family home at Marlborough. When he left to enter Brasenose College, Oxford, he had planned to study science, but he later decided to study English literature instead. After graduating, he worked for a while in a London theater group, writing, acting, and producing. In 1939, however, he married and then followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a schoolmaster at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury. He left Bishop Wordsworth's to serve in the Royal Navy during World War II. He saw action at sea as a lieutenant on a rocket launcher and was very affected by seeing the violence of which people were capable. He returned to the school in 1945 and taught there until 1961.

As a child, Golding had been fascinated with words, and as an adult he tried his hand at writing, but with little early success. A small volume, *Poems* (1934), was published when he was twenty-three, but Golding decided he was not a poet. During the early years of his teaching career, he wrote several novels that he himself described as being too derivative, too much like works that had already been written. Publishers were not interested in

these works, either. Trying a new tactic, Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies* (1954). For this novel, he adopted an unusual perspective that he then altered at the end, and he used his experience with small boys to explore the dark side of humanity, which the war had brought to his attention. This time, Golding was more pleased with his efforts, but twenty-one publishers rejected the novel before Faber & Faber published it in 1954. Thus, Golding was forty-three when his literary career began to flourish.

A fairly regular stream of novels followed: *The Inheritors* (1955), *Pincher Martin* (1956; first published in the United States as *The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin*), *Free Fall* (1959), and *The Spire* (1964). In addition, he published a collection of essays and book reviews, *The Hot Gates, and Other Occasional Pieces* (1965).

By 1964, Golding was enjoying the respect of scholars, a widening audience, and financial security. He left Bishop Wordsworth's in 1961 and, after a year as writer-in-residence at Hollins College in Virginia, devoted himself solely to writing.

With the publication of *The Pyramid* (1967), Golding's reputation suffered a slight decline. Critics gave the novel's linked episodes and light social satire mixed reviews. The publication of three novellas in *The Scorpion God: Three Short Novels* (1971) did nothing to recoup Golding's reputation, nor did the eight-year hiatus before *Darkness Visible* was published in 1979. That novel, however, attracted favorable critical attention and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1979. Golding's reputation was on the rise again. *Rites of Passage*, the first

novel of *A Sea Trilogy*, followed in 1980, winning the Man Booker Prize and garnering much praise for Golding's parody of eighteenth century prose and for his adaptation of the tradition of sea journals. Golding also won the Man Booker Prize for his collection of essays, *A Moving Target*, published in 1982. In 1983, Golding was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, and he was knighted in 1986.

Before Golding completed *A Sea Trilogy*, three other books appeared: *A Moving Target*; *The Paper Men* (1984), a novel dismissed by most critics as the autobiographical musings of a cranky author, who both craved and rejected critical attention; and *An Egyptian Journal* (1985), an account of a trip to Egypt in the winter of 1984. The publication of *Close Quarters* in 1987 and *Fire Down Below* in 1989, however, completed *A Sea Trilogy* and confirmed the critical praise received for *Rites of Passage*. The trilogy firmly reestablished Golding as a major novelist of the twentieth century. It has since been reissued as a single volume under the title *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* (1991). Another novel, *The Double Tongue*, was published posthumously in 1995. Set in classical Greece, it centers on the priestess of the Delphic Oracle at a time of growing disbelief. The writer as prophet in a skeptical world and the communicating of wisdom are the predominant themes of the book.

ANALYSIS

Critics have called Golding an allegorist, a fabulist, and a mythmaker. Of the three terms, Golding preferred mythmaker, and when he was awarded the Nobel Prize the citation acknowledged the mythic quality of his work, his ability to illuminate the condition of humankind by means of a concrete story.

In framing the concrete stories, Golding often draws on literary precedents, both specific works and genres. For *Lord of the Flies* Golding turns to the genre of boys' adventure stories and to R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858), in particular. Where Ballantyne's boys, stranded on a desert island, have a jolly time and live harmoniously, Golding's boys become little savages. Golding turns the literary precedent on its head, using it only as a starting place for his own unique view.

Golding also draws on his interests and his biography in his works. For example, Golding grew up near the sea, served in the navy, and has written

essays on the pleasure and pain of sailing his own boat. Thus, in *A Sea Trilogy*, Golding is able to describe accurately the tensions of shipboard proximity, the moods of the ocean, and the nautical minutiae with which the crew must be concerned.

Golding once said that although he was, by nature, an optimist, he hoped that a defective logic made him a pessimist. This view in many ways sums up the themes that play in his novels. In other words, his logic and objective observation reveal the dark side of human nature that people prefer to deny or ignore. However, there may be hope and some reason for optimism if that dark side can be laid bare and acknowledged, for humankind has the potential for good as well as for evil.

The exploration of the dark side of humanity is a major thematic focus in virtually every novel, and Golding has been criticized as limiting himself to this one dimension. Even as he explores human depravity, however, Golding implies or asserts a second theme: the value of self-awareness and love as the means of coping with this inherent evil. In some works, such as *Lord of the Flies*, mostly depravity is shown. In *Darkness Visible*, however, the potential for good is explored more fully. The protagonist, Matty Windrave, devotes himself to the powers of good and saves one character from his evil impulses.

These two major themes in Golding's work are reinforced by some elements of his style and other characteristics of his novels. Often Golding creates remote or confined settings: a desert island in *Lord of the Flies*, a rock in the middle of the ocean in *Pincher Martin*, or the microcosm of the ship in *A Sea Trilogy*. In these settings, the characters may act out the evil that civilization keeps in bounds or be forced to look inside themselves to see the darkness lurking there. A restricted point of view forces readers to see from a particular, sometimes unfamiliar, perspective. In addition, Golding may suddenly change that perspective at the end of a novel, forcing the reader to see the situation anew.

Golding has been charged with obscurity, but whatever obscurity exists in his work serves a thematic purpose. He created a fictional world seen with new eyes from unusual perspectives. The degree to which readers experience a connection between the fictional world and the world they inhabit is the degree to which Golding succeeded as a mythmaker.

LORD OF THE FLIES

First published: 1954

Type of work: Novel

British schoolboys stranded on an island exhibit savagery that was suppressed in the supposedly civilized, war-torn world they left behind.

Lord of the Flies opens with schoolboys wandering out of the jungle, into which their plane has crashed, and onto the beach of a remote island. In this isolated setting, the boys first try to maintain a veneer of civilization, but they soon shed it to exhibit the evil that is inborn. Golding tells the story from the boys' perspective until the final few pages, where he then alters the perspective to enlarge the context. Little boys are not the only ones who have savagery at their core; the grown-ups do as well.

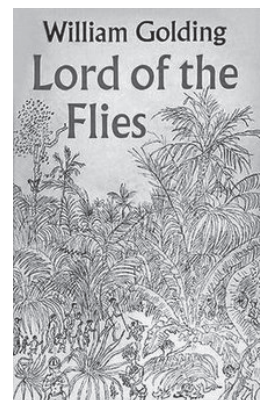
The first two boys to emerge, Ralph, an easygoing but fairly responsible boy, and Piggy, a thinker who is fat and asthmatic, gather the rest of the boys by sounding a conch shell. At their first assembly, the boys recognize the need for some rules: "After all, we're not savages. We're English." They elect Ralph chief and make Jack the leader of the boys who will hunt for food and keep a signal fire going.

Before long, the boys' immaturity and irresponsibility are clear and are a source of frustration to Ralph and Piggy. After building a couple of shelters, the boys would rather swim and roll rocks than work. The hunters would rather hunt than follow through on their other job of keeping a signal fire going. As a result, they miss the chance to signal a passing ship.

Immaturity and irresponsibility soon give way to violence and fear-inspired frenzy as the last vestiges of the veneer of civilization disappear. For Jack the early fun of hunting becomes a compulsion to track down and kill. He teaches his hunters to circle and close in on their prey, and in the circle the boys become bloodthirsty savages.

Fear works to intensify the power of the mob. Some of the little boys are afraid of a "beastie," and their fear spreads to all the boys. Only one boy, Simon, has the insight to know that the beast is inside them and the savagery they have always suppressed is what they should fear. Seeing something move among the rocks, the boys conclude that they have found the beast and are terrified. Only Simon has the courage to investigate. He finds a dead aviator, his parachute lines entangled in the rocks. Exhausted from his search and sick at what he has found, Simon crawls down the mountain, arriving on the beach to find himself in the middle of a circle of madly dancing, paint-smeared boys. In a blind frenzy, somehow thinking Simon is the beast crawling toward them, they kill him.

Although Piggy refers to Simon's death as an accident, Ralph knows it was murder and says he is scared "of us." Like Simon, Ralph knows the beast is within; he becomes the next scapegoat. The circle is closing on Ralph when the boys are rescued by officers from a cruiser. The perspective changes immediately. One officer remarks, "Fun and games." He asks Ralph jokingly, "Having a war or something? . . . Nobody killed, I hope? Any dead bodies?" The reader knows, as Ralph does, the awful truth of two dead bodies. The officer's naïveté reinforces the irony of the entire novel. The boys come out of a world at war. They land in an idyllic spot where their basic needs are met and where they can escape the carnage of the adult world. Since evil is within them, however, they, too, war on one another. They return, finally, to a world at war because escape from the island is not escape from evil. Evil is in the hearts of people.



THE INHERITORS

First published: 1955

Type of work: Novel

A group of Neanderthals comes into contact with a group of Homo sapiens and perishes in the encounter.

Golding's second novel, *The Inheritors*, is set in a similarly exotic location as *Lord of the Flies*, and, like it, traces the process of civilization and its disintegration. Unlike *Lord of the Flies*, however, it is set in the distant past rather than the near future, and it describes forces of both progress and dissolution.

Taking as his subtext the popular social evolutionism in vogue at the turn of the twentieth century, as exemplified by the work of H. G. Wells, Golding traces the demise of Neanderthal man in the face of the advent of *Homo sapiens*. To both species of humans, life is, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, "nasty, brutish, and short," though in somewhat different ways. Golding questions whether *Homo sapiens* is the "fitter" of the two species.

The narrative is told from the viewpoint of a small group of Neanderthals, returning from their winter quarters in a coastal cave to their summer gathering grounds in a forest at the base of the mountains, by a lake and waterfall. The Neanderthals quickly discover a group of *Homo sapiens* encamped on an island by the waterfall. This is a species they have never encountered before. Instinctively, they seek their company as fellow humans. The Neanderthals are portrayed as simple, instinctive, intuitive, living in harmony with nature, and with a sense of the sacredness of life. They are afraid to kill any living being. They possess a language, though this is implemented by an almost telepathic communication. In the course of the novel, the main character, Lok, discovers the force of simile.

The humans of *Homo sapiens*, however, are terrified of these small, red-haired creatures who sometimes walk on all four limbs; they view the Neanderthals as wood-demons. In contrast to the Neanderthal group, the *Homo sapiens* group is portrayed as fearful, cannibalistic (they eat the Neanderthal girl, Liku, in their hunger), and orgiastic. They hunt and get drunk. They also propitiate the

dark forces by chopping off human limbs and clearly are prepared to make human sacrifice. Their rituals stand in great contrast to the Neanderthals' numinous reverence for the Earth Mother. The Neanderthals are finally destroyed by their attempted contact with the *Homo sapiens*, with only the group's baby surviving as a kidnap victim, for the purposes of being a trophy or pet.

Golding raises the question of evolutionary loss, as well as gain. Though technically more advanced, *Homo sapiens* has little reverence for earth, gaining only terror and panic from the inexplicable forces in the otherness of nature. Golding's point is that contemporary human beings are the inheritors of this tradition. To make this point more dramatically, the perspective of the narrative suddenly changes in the last chapter, where the terrified humans are in their dugout canoe, sailing away from the haunted forests. Readers suddenly see the last little, hairy Neanderthal from the perspective of *Homo sapiens*.

PINCHER MARTIN

First published: 1956

Type of work: Novel

A self-centered man, stranded alone on what seems to be a rock in the middle of the ocean, faces the dark center of his being as he struggles to evade the nothingness of death.

Pincher Martin (first published in the United States as *The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin*) depicts one man's ferocious struggle against the nothingness, the loss of identity that death brings. Typically, Golding places the main character in a remote setting, where he is forced to take a long, hard look at himself. Also typically, what the character sees is a darkness at his core. A quintessentially self-centered person, Martin realizes that in his life he did whatever was necessary to come out on top or to have his own way. In death, however, he is fighting the one force that will erase all that he is and he has. Thus he fights death with all his strength.

Seemingly the only survivor of a torpedoed ship, Martin is in fact alive only inside his own

head. That is where his struggle takes place, but he imagines the battle raging on a rock in the middle of the ocean, a rock he has created from the memory of one of his own teeth.

Appropriate to the focus of the story, Golding tells virtually the whole story from Martin's perspective. Initially, Golding elicits sympathy for Martin by describing in detail the horror of his near drowning. Once Martin reaches the rock, he admonishes himself to think, to use his intellect and reason to survive. Admiration grows for this man who can keep his wits about him, devise shelter, and find water and food. Since the story is being told from inside Martin's mind, he also returns to memories that reveal a self-centeredness at the core of his being. Thus Golding moves to a familiar theme, the revelation of the darkness and depravity in the heart of humanity.

Using Martin's memories and repeated images of eating, Golding slowly paints a picture of an unscrupulous, cruel man who nevertheless once felt moved by a love that was his one chance to experience something other than self-satisfaction. Martin remembers all the people he "ate": a nameless woman and a young boy whom he used sexually and tossed aside and the producer whose wife he seduced. More specifically he remembers Nathaniel, whom Martin loved for some reason that he cannot understand. He also hated him because Nat, without apparent effort, had obtained what Pincher could not get by force: Nat had peace of mind and also had Mary. For Martin, hate was stronger than love, so he raped Mary and tried to kill Nat.

All the images of eating converge into one symbol, the Chinese box. Martin recounts that the Chinese bury a fish in a tin box. Maggots eat the fish first and then each other until there is one maggot left, a rare dish. The sound of a spade knocking on the side of the box as it is dug up is like the sound of thunder. Pincher Martin lives his whole life trying to be the last successful maggot. When he realizes that the rock is only his tooth, imagined out of his effort to hang onto his identity, the only thing he has, he hears thunder and knows that the black lightning of God is coming for him. When the black lightning comes, he will be eaten.

After the lightning takes Martin's center, the perspective must change, for Pincher Martin no longer exists, even in his own mind. The end of

the novel relates a conversation between the man who discovered Martin's body washed ashore and the officer who identifies and removes the body. The former wonders if Martin suffered; the latter tells him Martin never had time to kick his sea-boots off. From Martin's perspective, however, the power of the imagination at the moment of death and his self-centeredness have extended his agony.

DARKNESS VISIBLE

First published: 1979

Type of work: Novel

A deformed and unlikely savior appears in the modern wasteland, bringing a message of spiritual power and love to its inhabitants.

Darkness Visible, by its title, conveys Golding's central preoccupation, that of making the darkness within visible through fiction. This novel focuses on the spiritual darkness of the modern world and its accompanying loss of love. The urban wasteland is represented by Greenfield, an English village once aptly named but currently suffering all the ills of urbanization, such as pollution, noise, and overcrowding. Two overlapping tales show that the people who live there are also suffering. For them, love is either distorted or absent; the old rituals have either died or lost their power to put people in touch with the divine.

The story begins in war-ravaged London, where the central character, Matty Windrave, emerges in flames like a burning bush from one of the fires. This child survives but is extremely deformed and without any family. He is shuttled from place to place, his distorted features making people uncomfortable. They see only the outside and do not value his kindness, honesty, or hard work. Although Matty craves love, he is rebuffed or used at every turn.



His teacher, Mr. Pedigree, likes handsome young boys and sits Matty almost behind a cabinet. Pedigree's perversity leads him to ask favorite boys to his rooms under the guise of helping them with their lessons. When he is warned by the headmaster about these meetings, Pedigree uses Matty to screen himself. Knowing that no one would think he had ulterior motives for inviting such an ugly child, he asks Matty to come to his rooms. The current favorite cannot deal with his rejection and falls to his death, which ultimately leads to Pedigree's imprisonment. Pedigree tells Matty it is all his fault. Matty believes him. He thinks Pedigree is a friend he betrayed and resolves to make amends.

To those who reject him, Matty looks inhuman, but he is perhaps more than human. Unlike others who have lost touch with the spiritual world, Matty communicates with angels who help him in his quest to answer questions about who he is and what his mission is. Matty knows that the old rituals have lost their power, so he creates his own or endures new versions of the old ones. He memorizes and recites Bible passages, walks in chains through a swamp in self-baptism, and suffers a mock crucifixion. He knows he may be perceived as mad but feels that he needs the rituals to cleanse himself of his perceived sin, ward off evil, and gain the more-than-human power he will need for his mission of salvation.

The second story focuses on Sophy Stanhope, one of twin girls who grow up in Greenfield. Unlike Matty, Sophy and her sister, Toni, are beautiful. They are objects of attention and affection for everyone except their father, from whom they want love. Sophy's frustration comes out in violent, destructive impulses. Like Matty, she is in touch with mysterious forces, but she taps into them for evil purposes. Her first experience involves sensing and acting on the synchronous moment when a small duck swimming by can be killed by a large stone thrown into the water. Also like Matty, Sophy craves love. She has a family, but in her part of the wasteland world, family love is a joke. Her mother has abandoned the family, and her father consorts with a series of "aunties." Sophy's own love life involves an undercurrent of risk, violence, or manipulation.

The paths of the characters converge after they are grown up or have grown old. Matty's mission is to guard the messianic child that his angels tell

him will be the new representative of divine power on earth. Sophy plots with others to kidnap the same child, the ransom and the evil adventure appealing to her. When Sophy's cohorts bomb the school where the child lives, Matty whirls through the fire to save him, becoming the burnt offering the angels have told him he must become.

Matty must also save Pedigree from himself. An old man who preys on children in the park, Pedigree knows that his compulsion will one day lead him to murder a child to keep him from telling. Nevertheless, he cannot stop himself. Pedigree is in the park waiting for his next boy to come close when he has a vision. The dead Matty approaches to take away the brightly colored ball that Pedigree uses to entice the boys. As Pedigree clutches the ball to his chest, it becomes his beating heart; when Matty pulls it from him, his heart stops and he dies. However, Pedigree dies with insight. It is he who realizes that Matty was the only person who loved him and that love is what all people are searching for, whether they call it sex, money, or power. Thus Matty is vindicated and evil thwarted at the end of the novel by the power of love and a higher, inexplicable power with which Matty was in tune.

A SEA TRILOGY

First published: *Rites of Passage*, 1980; *Close Quarters*, 1987; *Fire Down Below*, 1989

Type of work: Novels

In the journals chronicling his voyage to Australia, Edmund Talbot comments on fellow passengers, the crew, and shipboard events while revealing his own maturation.

Rites of Passage, *Close Quarters*, and *Fire Down Below* constitute Golding's *A Sea Trilogy*. The focus of the trilogy, taken as a whole, is Edmund Talbot's maturation. Showing Talbot from his departure as a young upstart, sure of preferment and success, to his reflections as an old man, the novels allow Talbot to demonstrate his growth as a human being. Using the literary genre of the sea journal, Golding allows Talbot to speak for himself. Talbot's eighteenth century prose and his insistence on learning sailors' jargon lend authenticity to his

record of the physical journey, while the content and tone of his journals reveal the results of his psychological journey and growth. In particular, his maturity is revealed in his record of his relationships with the other passengers and the crew and in his comments about himself.

In *Rites of Passage*, Talbot is a snob, easily impressed by titles, fine clothing, or fancy manners. He holds himself aloof and seems quite self-satisfied, certain of his intellect, his talents, and his future success. Any insecurity is revealed in the obsequious tone he sometimes adopts in his journal, which is written for his benefactor and godfather in England. He is very much concerned with being witty and painting a favorable picture of himself on the voyage.

As part of his commentary, Talbot introduces the other people on board. The passengers include Zenobia Brocklebank, an older woman attempting to seem younger and more socially prominent than her condition warrants; her father, who resorts to drink; Mr. Prettiman, a rationalist; Miss Granham, a spinster dismissed by Talbot as cold and unattractive; and the Reverend Colley, an earnest but overzealous clergyman. The crew includes Captain Anderson, the chief officer, who is strongly anticlergy; Billy Rogers, a handsome sailor who becomes Colley's shame; Mr. Summers, a lowborn officer with highborn qualities; and Wheeler, servant to Talbot.

The central event of this first novel is the death of Colley. Talbot finds Colley a ridiculous figure for much of the novel, and it is clear why Colley becomes the butt of jokes. A practical joke played by the sailors as part of the rites of crossing the equator is carried too far, however, and Colley simply wills himself to die of shame. After reading the letter that Colley left behind, Talbot must take a second look at the man. In addition, Talbot examines his own role in Colley's death, sensing that blaming the sailors is too easy. In this way, Talbot takes the first major step toward maturity. Examination of cruelty and blame—and the evil in human nature that prompts such tormenting—also allies *Rites of Passage* with earlier Golding novels.

With *Close Quarters*, Talbot begins a new journal. This one is to be written for himself rather than his patron, so he is freed from the necessity of banter and afforded the opportunity for introspection. In this novel, Talbot is less snobbish and

displays an improved sense of humor. Still bristly when teased by being called "Lord Talbot," he can sometimes laugh at himself. Primarily, though, he matures in his relationships and has his courage tested. With one exception, his focus shifts somewhat from the passengers to the crew as the decrepit condition of the ship becomes significant.

When the ship is becalmed beside the *Alcyone*, Talbot finds new interests. In particular he falls in love with Marion Chumley, the ward of the captain of the *Alcyone*. His infatuation at first seems ridiculous, but his intentions are honorable and he remains true through their subsequent separation. In addition, he has a new officer to observe. Lieutenant Benet is sent to Talbot's ship in order to end an affair on board the *Alcyone*.

A risk taker, Benet is soon in conflict with Mr. Summers, who conservatively calculates the odds before acting. Their disagreements with each other and with Captain Anderson about how to handle the ship's broken mast afford Talbot an opportunity to admire the discipline of the ship's social order, particularly the way Summers yields to it despite his frustration at having to carry out orders with which he disagrees. As Talbot becomes better acquainted with Summers, his admiration and their friendship develop. It is a mark of Talbot's maturity that their friendship can survive a falling out.

Once the mast breaks, all aboard are in grave danger, and Talbot records their ways of facing impending death. One drinks, another prefers a quick, self-inflicted gunshot to longer suffering, and some retain their dignity. Talbot is among the latter despite his very real fear. In *Close Quarters*, Talbot is tested in love, friendship, and courage and is not found wanting.

Fire Down Below further demonstrates Talbot's maturation as he continues to learn to look beneath surface appearances in order to find true worth. The novel also returns to the theme of accountability, touched on in *Rites of Passage*. As Talbot's friendship with Summers is renewed and grows, Talbot sees clearly the qualities that make Summers superior to an officer who trades solely on his good family ties. Talbot appreciates Summers's kindness and concern, even for little things like helping to relieve the itch of being salty all the time. He recognizes Summers's sensitivity, his allowing Talbot to stand the night watch to avoid

being in the cabin where Wheeler, Talbot's servant, committed suicide. Talbot also reforms his opinion of Miss Granham, now Mrs. Prettiman, appreciating her strength and intelligence. Talbot is more willing to learn from others about the practicalities of what to wear to be comfortable for months at sea or about social philosophy, which he discusses with the Prettimans.

If Talbot's character is in better shape in *Fire Down Below*, the ship is in worse shape. It survives a terrible storm and an encounter with an iceberg, but the foremast is shifting, slowing the ship's progress. Benet proposes running a hot metal bolt through the foremast, and Anderson agrees. The ship moves faster, but Summers alone acknowledges the danger that the mast will be smoldering on the inside. The ship safely reaches port, and Summers's loyalty seems to be rewarded when he is given command of the ship. In fact, Anderson and Benet have simply walked away from the responsibility for what they have done. When the ship catches fire and sinks, it is Summers who dies on board.

Events move swiftly once the ship reaches Sydney. Talbot's fortunes are reversed and then reversed again. When his patron dies, he must adjust to being penniless. However, he later learns that he has been left a seat in Parliament, enabling him to marry Marion and return to England. It is to Talbot's credit that he can accept his misfortune and rejoice in his good fortune. He has

developed an equanimity he lacked when he first set out.

At the end of *Fire Down Below* Talbot speaks not to himself in his journal but, as an old man, to an audience of "dear readers." Looking back over his life, Talbot has some regrets that he turned down the adventure of setting off with the Prettimans to build a new world in Australia and instead chose the safer path of life as a member of Parliament. His final assessment, however, is that while his life has not been without disappointment or sorrow, it has been a good one. The self-satisfied narrator of *Rites of Passage* has become, by the end of the trilogy, simply satisfied.

SUMMARY

As a mythmaker, William Golding writes stories that illuminate a truth about human nature. He sometimes creates those stories by presenting literary precedents in new ways and sometimes supplies the concrete details by drawing on his own experiences and interests. The truth he most often reveals is the existence of a depravity most humans would like to ignore or deny. The pessimism of such a focus is sometimes balanced by the possibility that self-awareness empowers goodness in people. In those novels that present both the darkness and the potential light, Golding's pessimistic logic and optimistic nature merge.

Rebecca Kelly; updated by David Barratt

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DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Discuss why the norms of civilization break down so quickly in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. What are the individual steps of the breakdown?
- What is the "price" of erecting the spire in *The Spire*? Is it worth the price?
- Discuss the symbolism of the sea voyage to Australia in *The Sea Trilogy*. What are the symbols that seem to typify Golding's view of human nature?
- Discuss which of Golding's novels seem to best exemplify modern society's search for spirituality and which novels most mark its absence.
- Golding frequently talks of The Fall. What does he mean by this idea, and how does he show that its effects may be overcome, if at all?
- Which novels seem to best show Golding as a writer of hope and which as a deeply pessimistic writer?
- Discuss Golding's use of fire in his novels. What is its function?
- What does the word "epiphany" mean, and what is the importance of epiphanies in Golding's novels?

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