

his finest books. It received the 1968 Hugo Award for best novel. Like his earlier novel, *The Dream Master* (1966), *Lord of Light* weaves a complex and compelling story, taking actual history and legend for its basic pattern and extrapolating outward. Although it is possible to enjoy Zelazny's work without an in-depth knowledge of his sources, a passing familiarity with the fact and legend surrounding the historic Siddhartha may deepen the reader's appreciation for the facility and brilliance of Zelazny's craftsmanship.

Some primary points of similarity are that Siddhartha, like Sam, was familiar with warfare, being born into the warrior caste. Both turned away from luxury and privilege, leaving behind a wife and son. Both men were in rebellion against the propagation of misery and the oppression of the many for the benefit of the few. Sam was the Lord of Light and Siddhartha took the title Buddha, which means "the enlightened one." The Buddha had command of the four elements. Sam commanded Taraka, king of the fiery demons; Garuda, master of the air; Dalissa, who made the waters of

Vedra boil; and the earth that threatened to swallow Yama. Both heroes were possessed by demons in the bowels of the earth, and both faced their greatest personal challenges from Mara, the god of illusion. In an interesting case of cross-pollination, Zelazny's *Lord of Light* has to be considered as an influence for Gore Vidal's *Kalki* (1978), which takes the concept of ordinary people becoming Hindu gods out of the genre of science fiction and plants it firmly in the mainstream.

Although *Lord of Light* has received nearly universal praise, the work has its problems. Like many books that depend on a gimmick (placing the story of Buddha on another planet) for their impetus, the novel's idea easily subsumes its characters. Sam's life and motivations are templated and do not grow naturally from a clearly defined personality. The emphasis of plot over character, however, is a hallmark of classic science fiction and should not diminish Zelazny's extraordinary achievement.

—Tony A. Markham

LORD OF THE FLIES

A group of British schoolboys stranded on a deserted tropical island quickly degenerates into a precivilized, totalitarian hunter society

Author: William Golding (1911–1993)

Genre: Science fiction—closed universe

Type of work: Novel

Time of work: An indeterminate time in the future

Locale: A previously uninhabited tropical island

First published: 1954

THE STORY

A plane evacuating a group of schoolboys following an atomic war apparently is shot down, but not before a passenger capsule containing children is ejected. Initially happy to enjoy an adult-free, fruit-filled, sunny environment on a tropical island where they land, all the boys are determined to have fun. They soon see the need for governance and choose the "fair-haired" Ralph as their leader.

Ralph, like the others, at first sees the absence of adults as an opportunity to have fun, but he soon feels burdened with the weight of a leader's responsibilities. He symbolically holds a conch shell, which assembles the boys and stands as a symbol of authority. Piggy, a weak-sighted, overweight, asthmatic, cowardly boy, is the group's source of rational thought and knowledge. He supports the ritual of leadership by finding and identifying the conch as a symbol of leadership.

Ralph's authority is challenged by Jack, the former leader of the choirboys. Jack, with his red hair and wild blue eyes, eventually extends his power as leader of the hunters to force all the boys into his group. Roger distinguishes himself from the beginning as a person who enjoys hurting others. He deliberately discharges the rock that kills Piggy.

Fear disturbs this boyhood paradise. First articulated by one of the smallest boys, who sees ropes turning into beasts in the night, fear spreads to the

older boys, who interpret the corpse of a downed aircraft pilot as a phantom beast. They offer a sacrifice of a pig's head to appease it. Simon, a quiet, meditative boy, recognizes that the "beast" the boys fear actually is located within the boys themselves. When he crawls out of the jungle to tell the chanting boys of his insight, they attack and kill him.

Rivalry between Ralph and Jack precipitates a breakdown of the decision to build shelters, maintain hygienic conditions, hunt for meat, and maintain a signal fire to effect their rescue. Before long, the faction of hunters has degenerated into paint-wearing, ritual-chanting warriors who first pursue pigs but finally hunt Ralph. In their pursuit, they throw all self-preserving caution to the wind, setting the island on fire and destroying the fruit-bearing trees.

Complete self-destruction is prevented by the arrival of a rescue ship. An officer from the ship is astonished by and disappointed with the apparent misconduct of the dirty young savages who face him.

ANALYSIS

Placing a group of English schoolboys on a deserted tropical island sets up a what-if situation. The novel presumes an atomic war that threatens to wipe out civilization and a small group of children managing to survive on a previously uninhabited island. It asks whether such children will re-create the democratic civilization they have experienced during their short lives or instead, because of animal survival instincts, revert to some precivilized form of existence. Finally, if children do slough off the veneer of cultural and ethical standards of conduct, the novel raises the question of the conclusions to be reached concerning human nature.

Lord of the Flies, William Golding's first published novel, apparently did not appeal to the many editors who rejected it. Once it was published in England, however, it achieved immediate success. In this work, the author expresses his feelings after having spent World War II as a naval officer and having witnessed the devastations of that war. These wartime experiences underlie his basic disillusionment with humanity, expressed

in this fable of children losing their innocence and precociously assuming adult guilt. Although Golding continued to express his feelings and questions about the nature of existence in other novels, he never achieved the success of this early venture.

The power of *Lord of the Flies* stems in part from the credibility of the dialogue and conduct of the young characters. The complexity of the characters avoids the oversimplification that this parable-like story otherwise supports. Boys experimenting with behavior when there are no adults to set limits, seeing rock formations as a castle fortress, and seeking emotional support in friendships all appeal to the reader.

The plausibility of the futuristic conditions, in which life choices must be made by survivors of an atomic war, is maintained by the gradual change in the conduct of the boys. Although their initial choices support the democratic lifestyle they have experienced, they slip into swimming in the lagoon rather than helping to build shelters, into neglecting the fire in order to join in the hunt for meat, into submitting to Jack's autocratic leadership, and finally into hunting another human being.

One of the catalysts Golding uses in *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors* (1955), his second novel, is refutation of the worldview expressed in an earlier and popular work. *Lord of the Flies* challenges the unrealistic outlook expressed in *The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean* (1858), by Robert Michael Ballantyne. That Victorian adventure novel features three boys marooned on an island with pirates and cannibals. The boys cheerfully maintain their Christian moral outlook and gentleman's manners until they are able to escape. *The Inheritors* refutes H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History* (1920), which expresses an optimistic belief in rationalism and progress.

Golding was awarded the 1983 Nobel Prize in Literature. The presenter of this award noted that "Golding's novels and stories are not only . . . dark myths about evil and treacherous, destructive forces. They are also colorful tales of adventure, full of narrative joy, inventiveness, and excitement."

—Agnes A. Shields

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