

While it is possible to read *Lord of the Flies* as allegory, the work is so complex that it can be read as allegorizing the political state of the world in the postwar period; as a Freudian psychological understanding of human kind; or as the Christian understanding of the fall of humankind, among others.

As a political allegory, each character in *Lord of the Flies* represents some abstract idea of government. Ralph, for example, stands for the good-hearted but not entirely effective leader of a democratic state, a ruler who wants to rule by law derived from the common consent. Piggy is his adviser, someone who is unable to rule because of his own social and physical shortcomings, but who is able to offer sound advice to the democratic leader. Jack, on the other hand, represents a totalitarian dictator, a ruler who appeals to the emotional responses of his followers. He rules by charisma and hysteria. Roger, the boy who takes the most joy in the slaughter of the pigs and who hurls the rock that kills Piggy, represents the henchman necessary for such a totalitarian ruler to stay in power.

Such a reading takes into account the state of the world at the end of the World War II. For many years, leaders such as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt led democratic countries against totalitarian demigods such as Germany's Adolf Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini. Further, in the early 1950s, the world appeared to be divided into two camps: the so-called Free World of Western Europe and the United States, and the so-called Iron Curtain world of communist eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. At the time of the writing of *Lord of the Flies*, the world appeared to be teetering on the brink of total nuclear annihilation. Thus, by taking into account the historical context of *Lord of the Flies*, it is possible to understand the work as political and historical allegory, even as a cautionary tale for the leaders of the world.

Freudian psychological critics, on the other hand, are able to read *Lord of the Flies* as an allegory of the human psychology. In such a reading,

each of the characters personifies a different aspect of the human psyche: the id, the super ego, and the ego. According to Freud, the id (located in the unconscious mind) works always to gratify its own impulses. These impulses, often sexual, seek to provide pleasure without regard to the cost. Jack's impulse to hunt and kill reaches its peak with the killing of the sow pig, a killing rife with sexual overtones. Jack never considers anything but his own pleasure; thus he can be considered an allegorical representation of the id. The superego is the part of the mind that seeks to control the impulsive behavior of the id. It acts as an internal censor. In *Lord of the Flies*, Piggy serves this role. He constantly reminds Ralph of their need to keep the fire burning and to take proper responsibility for the littluns. By so doing, he urges Ralph to control Jack. Piggy understands that Jack hates him, because he stands between Jack and his achievement of pleasure. Further, just as the superego must employ the ego to control the id, Piggy cannot control Jack on his own; he must rely on Ralph to do so. Finally, the ego is the conscious mind whose role it is to mediate between the id's demand for pleasure and the social pressures brought to bear by the superego. Freud calls this mediation process the reality principal; that is, the notion that immediate pleasure must be denied in order to avoid painful or deadly consequences. Ralph clearly fills this role. He attempts to control Jack and engage his energy for the tending of the fire. To do so requires him to put off the pleasure of the hunt in order to secure rescue. In a Freudian reading of *The Lord of the Flies*, Golding seems to be saying that without the reinforcement of social norms, the id will control the psyche.

Finally, it is possible to read *Lord of the Flies* as a religious allegory. In such a reading, the tropical island, filled with fruit and everything needed for sustenance, becomes a symbol of the Garden of Eden. The initial identification of the beastie as a snake also brings to mind the story of the Fall of Man. Indeed, it is possible to read the fall of the parachutist as the event which leads to the ouster from Eden of the boys. Further, Jack's identification with hunting and Ralph's identification with shelter as well as their natural antagonism appear to be allegorization of the Cain and Abel story. Indeed, it is only the intercession of the adult who comes looking for them which saves Ralph from murder. Many critics have attempted to read Simon as a Christ figure; he is the one boy who has the true knowledge which can save them. Like Christ, he is martyred. Unlike Christ, however, his death

seems to have no significance for the boys; his knowledge dies with him.

More recently, critics have recognized the technical and artistic skill exhibited by Golding in *Lord of the Flies*. Especially notable is the way in which Golding fuses allegorical structure with strong, realistic descriptions, well-developed characterizations, and a coherent, fast moving plot. The description of the death of Piggy, for example, demonstrates Golding's skill with realistic, graphic prose:

The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee; the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist. Piggy, saying nothing, with no time for even a grunt, traveled through the air sideways from the rock, turning over as he went. The rock bounded twice and was lost in the forest. Piggy fell forty feet and landed on his back across the square red rock in the sea. His head opened and stuff came out and turned red. Piggy's arms and legs twitched a bit, like a pig's after it has been killed. Then the sea breathed again in a long, slow sigh, the water boiled white and pink over the rock; and when it went, sucking back again, the body of Piggy was gone.

Golding also provides strong characterizations. While it is possible to see each boy fulfilling an allegorical role, none of the characters (with the possible exception of Simon) functions solely as part of the allegory. This can perhaps best be seen in the development of Jack. During the first trip into the jungle, he is unable to kill the pig with his knife; by the end of the book he is hunting human quarry. Jack's growth from choirboy to murderer is accomplished with great skill.

Finally, Golding writes a fast-moving, suspenseful adventure story. The book moves quickly from the first days on the beach to the final hunt scene, reaching a feverish pitch that is broken abruptly by the appearance of the naval officer, just as it appears that Ralph will be killed. While the appearance of the adult, however, closes the action, it does not provide us with a happy ending. Indeed, at the moment of the climax of the adventure story, Golding suddenly reminds us of the allegorical nature of the book: the naval officer's cruiser is a weapon of war. Although we feel relief over Ralph's rescue, we suddenly understand that the adult world is little different from the world of the island, a place where men hunt and kill each other indiscriminately, a place where men can blow up the entire planet, our island in the sea of the universe.

Source: Diane Andrews Henningfeld, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1997.