Lord of the Flies:

A Call for Initiation and Integration

By Shannan H. Butler

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> "Just as the mathematicians say the rainbow is an appearance of the sun embellished by its reflection into a cloud, so the present myth is the appearance of a reality which turns the mind back to the other thoughts."
> Plutarch - Isis et Osiris (Fitzgerald)

Fable and myth were terms immediately applied to William Golding's first novel Lord of the Flies (Anderson 206). Three years after its 1954 publication the work was outselling J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye, a perennial favorite on college campuses (208). This slight novel, some 190 pages, befuddled literary critics. The story was an exercise in simplicity, yet it came across with incredible strength. The formula was familiar, almost trite; another group of adolescent boys stranded on a deserted island. But this was no standard boys adventure story; here things went awry. Golding would go on to write several other books, would even win the Nobel Prize for literature but would never surpass his first novel in scope or impact.

My first encounter with Lord of the Flies was in 1983 through the lens of experimental filmmaker Peter Brooks. Lord of the Flies was Brook's sophomore film which he shot using only two hand-held cameras. He chose to shoot in black-and-white to mute the tropical appeal of the Jamaican island. Brooks even went as far as to recruit a group of British boys who had never before acted for this low-budget adventure.

Although I'll concentrate primarily upon Brook's 1963 film, I will cross-reference Golding's book from time to time. The overwhelming majority of criticism concerning Lord of the Flies has been literary. This should not cause a problem since Brooks

followed the book in infinitesimal detail, even to how Ralph pulls at his socks. Some who chide Brooks for creating a film so true to the book's narrative (Travers) probably prefer Harry Hook's 1991 version. For me, however, the latter film strips away the darkness of the novel and makes the characters rather one-dimensional (Ulstein). If we are to unravel some of this stories deeper meanings, we must stick to the version where they are articulated most clearly.

In his forward to Lord of the Flies, E.L. Epstein states, "In this book, as in few others at the present time, are findings of psychoanalysts of all schools, anthropologists, social psychologists and philosophical historians mobilized into an attack upon the central problem of modern thought: the nature of the human personality and the reflection of personality on society" (Golding 187). When asked for his own view, Golding responded, "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system...The whole book is symbolic in nature..." (Babb 7). But here is a curiously bifurcated view of social life that assumes that the ethical nature of the individual person is somehow independent from and immune to social conditions in which he exists. The irony of this is that the film choreographs how a seemingly idyllic natural setting can, in fact, corrupt an uninitiated group of boys. I will take a cue from Janice Rushing and Thomas Frentz who argue that the meanings of any text derive simultaneously from psychological, mythic, and social forces. I argue that Lord of the Flies allows us to examine a microcosm of uninitiated young males in conflict with the no-longer existent solar authority and experiencing the 'Great Mother' of an untamed island.

What's in a name? Quite a lot, according to previous analyses of Lord of the Flies. The four main characters are Ralph, Jack, Simon, and Piggy. Interestingly, the characters in a 1857 book Coral Island by Ballantyne are Ralph Rover, Jack Martin, and Peterkin Gay. Coral Island tells of three boys shipwrecked on a desert island who live in "uninterrupted harmony and happiness." Golding clearly sees Lord of the Flies as a realist's answer to Coral Island.

> You see, really, I'm getting at myself in this [novel]. What I'm saying to myself is, "Don't be such a fool, you remember when you were a boy, a small boy, how you lived on that island with Ralph and Jack and Peterkin...Now you are grown up, you are an adult; it's taken you a long time to become adult, but now you've got there you can see that people are not like that; they would not behave like that if...they went to an island like that." (Dick 6)

So we can see that Ralph and Jack were easily taken from Coral Island, but what of Simon and Piggy? Both derive I think from a split in the Peterkin Gay character. It is not difficult to assume that Simon comes from Simon Peter of the New Testament. However, that Piggy derives from the alliteration of PeterkIn GaY is a bit of a stretch (Fitzgerald). Not only are the names taken from Coral Island, but on Coral Island the boys also spend their days hunting pigs.

Jack is related to another name in other children's literature, namely, Merridew. Merridew is the name Jack first uses; apparently Jack would rather go by his surname than by his first name. He is one of only two children to mention his last name. "Ginger" Merridew is one of the main characters in a William Brown series popular from 1917-1960. Both Jack and Ginger are red-haired lieutenants as was Judas Iscariot (Myer). This dark polemic is set against a backdrop of familiar, innocent characters

which makes their ultimate descent into depravity all the more troubling. The connection of Jack and Judas Iscariot expresses how Jack is seen as betraying the group. Yet, it may be that Jack's actions were necessary for the boys ultimate survival.

In keeping with Biblical allusions, the phrase Lord of the Flies comes from the Hebrew Ba'al zevuv or Greek Beelzebub (Johnston 13). In the Old Testament Beelzebub was one of the names for Satan. And in the New Testament, Simon Peter may be the biblical precedent for Simon who truly understands the beast in the Lord of the Flies. Simon in many ways is the focal point of the story. Whereas Piggy is Ralph's "brain trust", the purveyor of reason, and Ralph is the communicator, Simon is the mystic. Epileptic and misunderstood by the others, he has an intuitive connection with the island, spending much of his time in isolation communing with the nature around him (Kinkead-Weekes 29). While he is on one of his pilgrimages, Simon sees Jack and the 'hunters' kill and desecrate a pig. They cut off the pig's head and place it atop a stick as a sacrifice to the beast. Here is the ensuing scene.

> Simon stayed where he was, a small brown image, concealed by the leaves. Even if he shut his eyes the sow's head still remained like an after-image. The half-shut eyes were dim with the infinite cynicism of adult life. They assured Simon that everything was a bad business.
>
> "I know that."
>
> Simon discovered that he had spoken aloud. he opened his eyes quickly there was the head grinning amusedly in the strange daylight, ignoring the flies, the spilled guts, even ignoring the indignity of being spiked on a stick.
>
> . . .
>
> "Well then," said the Lord of the Flies, "you'd better run off and play with the others. They think you're batty. You don't want Ralph to think you're batty do you? You like Ralph a lot, don't you? And Piggy, and Jack?"
>
> "What are you doing out here all alone? Aren't you afraid of me?"

> Simon Shook.
>
> "There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast."
>
> Simon's mouth labored, brought forth audible words.
>
> "Pig's head on a stick."
>
> "Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!" said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated
>
> places echoed with the parody of laughter. "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?"
>
> . . .
>
> "I'm warning you. I'm going to get angry. D'you see? You're not wanted. Understand? We are going to have fun on this island. Understand? We are going to have fun on this island so don't try it on, my poor misguided boy, or else --"
>
> . . .
>
> Simon found he was looking into a vast mouth. There was blackness within, a blackness that spread. . . Simon was inside the mouth. he fell down and lost consciousness.
>
> (Golding 125-130)

The film does not include this inner dialogue but rather recreates it silently with only the stare of Simon into the pig's mouth swarming with flies. After recovering from his seizure, Simon proceeds up the mountain to see for himself this Beast. We see Simon's head, diminutive against the sky, as he marches slowly up to the camera. The Beast is revealed to be the body of a paratrooper whose parachute is still flapping in the wind.

Simon then comes down from the mountain much like a modern-day Moses. And, like the Israelites, the island children are in a frenzy worshiping the false gods. When

they see Simon they fear he is the beast, and furiously begin beating and stabbing him as he tries to tell them what he has seen. Simon is brutally murdered and becomes a martyr. Many critics invoke this incident to link Simon to the Christ. Golding himself calls Simon a "Christ figure" (Johnston 14), and the figurative imagery does little to dispel the connection.

> Along the Shoreward edge of the shallows the advancing clearness was full of strange, moonbeam-bodied creatures with fiery eyes. Here and there a larger pebble clung to its own air and was covered with a coat of pearls. The tide swelled in and over the rain-pitted sand and smoothed everything with a layer of silver. now it touched the first of the stains that seeped from the broken body and the creatures made a moving patch of light as they gathered at the edge. The water rose farther and dressed Simon's coarse hair with brightness. the line of his cheek silvered and the turn of his shoulder became sculptured marble. The strange attendant creatures, with their fiery eyes and trailing vapors, busied themselves round his head. The body lifted a fraction of an inch from the sand and a bubble of air escaped from the mouth with a wet plop. Then it turned gently in the water.
>
> Somewhere over the darkened curve of the world the sun and moon were pulling, and the film of water on the earth planet was held, bulging slightly on one side while the solid core turned. The great wave of the tide moved farther along the island and the water lifted. Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellations, Simon's dead body moved out toward the open sea. (Golding 40)

Brooks visually captures every nuance of this passage. C.B. Cox observes, "As Simon's body moves out to open sea under the delicate yet firm lifting of the tide, it seems impossible that his sacrifice has had no ultimate meaning" (Carnegie 4). Simon brings

the "good news" that the Beast is our fear within, for which he in turn becomes the beast.

There can be no doubt that this scene is of great importance. Truly, Simon is a mystic with great insight whose murder will change the boys forever. There is no other scene as venerable elsewhere in the film. However, Simon is not the only one to die for his convictions—What is to be made of the death of Piggy? His death does not receive the cinematic caressing of Simon but rather ends with crashing waves and the fleeing of Ralph. Simon cannot be the "Christ" as he is unable to get his message to the other children, thusly, there is no salvation in his death.

A more accurate reading is that of Bernhard F. Dick who compares Lord of the Flies to Euripides', the Bacchae , a work well known to Golding (Dick 9). Two mythological characters, those of Dionysus and Apollo, dominate this tragedy. Dionysus was the god of animal potency and the incarnation of the life principle. His followers, the Bacchae, often celebrated wildly, and sometimes in their frenzy made human sacrifices. Dionysus personified all that was elemental, emotional and wild. His antithesis was Apollo, god of reason, order, healing, illumination and civilization. Apollo is "the god of light in whom is no darkness at all, and so he is the god of truth" (Hamilton 30).

In Bacchae, King Pentheus, representative of extreme Apollonian intellectualization and reason, is troubled by hordes of Bacchae not only invading Thebes, but even converting the king's immediate family to their ways. Refusing to acknowledge the new religion, Pentheus will not even give the Bacchae a hearing. Dionysus appears to Pentheus in disguise and asks him to dress as a woman and attend the Bacchaen worship himself. He does and at the height of the orgy Dionysus

unmasks the king whereupon he is dismembered by the women at the festival, his head being placed atop a thyrsus.

There are transparent connections to Lord of the Flies. For example Ralph becomes Pentheus and Jack plays Dionysus. The boys are the Bacchae but when they kill the scapegoat, he is Simon, not Ralph, and we must ask why this important substitution was made? Dick sees this switch as the only departure from the Bacchaen formula.

Dick argues that Jack is not predestined to become Dionysus but rather, through subtle sublimation, is forced to assume that role by the others. Jack, he thinks, wants order and rules as much as the others, but as Jack is constantly one-upped by Ralph, he begins to rebel until he eventually breaks from the group. Dick asserts that Jack was born to lead the boys, not Ralph, and Jack does provide meat to the diarrhea-raveged fruit eaters. Ultimately Jack's fire (intended to smoke out Ralph) signals the plane that rescues the boys. Dick concludes that if the Dionysian wildness had been incorporated into Ralph's reason all would have been better off (Dick 16).

Dick takes us in the right direction, Lord of the Flies is to be interpreted mythically. Where Dick sees the absence of wildness as a fault in Ralph, John F. Fitzgerald uses the very existence of wildness in Ralph to discredit him from primary mythical importance. Fitzgerald illuminates the above interpretations by recontextualizing the story in Egypt. He suggests that Golding was intrigued not only with Greek literature, but with Egyptian literature also, as many Egyptian references appear in his later writings.

Fitzgerald sees the original 'beastie' as a snake-thing that suggests images from both Eden and Egypt. Set-Typhon, an Egyptian god of wind, is associated with the

snake. The boys are stranded on this deserted island by a typhoon which, coincidentally, derives from Typhon. Mythically, Typhon becomes Baal to the Assyrians and Beelzebub to the Hebrews. Fitzgerald relates the myth of Set-Typhon and Osiris.

> The Osiris myth accounts for the emergence of discord and hence, war. It thereby demonstrates the precariousness of civilization. According to Plutarch, while reigning as king on earth, the god Osiris gave the Egyptians civilization by introducing laws, worship of the gods, marriage, and agriculture. Before Osiris gave them agriculture the Egyptians had been savages and cannibals. Osiris's brother, the daemon Set-Typhon, filled with envy and pride, sought to usurp his throne. Frustrated in his attempt to take his brother's place, Typhon tricked Osiris and drowned him.Isis, the wife of Osiris, searched for the body, regained it and concealed it in the woods. Typhon, while hunting pigs during a full moon discovered and mutilated it. A war, punctuated with "terrible deeds" and "confusion," ensued until Horus, son of Osiris, appears to have defeated Typhon. But as Plutarch notes, although "weakened and shattered [the] power of Typhon still gasps and struggles." (Fitzgerald 80)

This myth represents the recurrent victory of Osiris over Typhon. Typhon and Dionysus derive from the same god. Apollo and Osiris are similarly related by their commitment to law, order, and reason. However, it must be pointed out that Apollo is a god of the heavens and Osiris a god of the underworld. In these similar characters an Eros and Thanatos dichotomy is at work.

In Lord of the Flies, the myth is continued as Jack represents Typhon and Ralph Osiris. But this isn't the complete picture, for although Fitzgerald equates Typhon with

Jack, Ralph differs in important ways from the rational Osiris. Fitzgerald grounds his argument on the following passage.

> 'Kill him! Kill him.'
>
> All at once, Robert was screaming and struggling with all his strength of frenzy. Jack had him by the hair and was brandishing his knife. Behind him was Roger, fighting to get close. The chant rose ritually as at the last moment of a dance or a hunt.
>
> 'Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig! Bash him in!'
>
> Ralph too was fighting to get near, to get a handful of the brown vulnerable flesh. The desire to squeeze and hurt was over-mastering.
>
> Jack's arm came down; the heaving circle cheered and made pig-dying noises. Then they lay quiet, panting, listening to Robert's frightened snivels...

Clearly, Ralph has his Typhonic side. Osiris is rational and intuitive and creative. Ralph, by contrast, relies on his two friends, Piggy and Simon, for these qualities For Fitzgerald Ralph is just your above average guy, nothing more. Piggy and Simon represent for Fitzgerald the true qualities of Osiris. Piggy is the rational civilizer and Simon the intuitive mystic. Only Piggy and Simon are killed by the Typhon Jack, their bodies drifting out to sea like Osiris before them. Fitzgerald argues that the pride of Typhon is the flaw of humanity.

Both Dick and Fitzgerald have pieces of the interpretation which I propose. Dick's focus that Apollo needs some wildness is a very important one. Also, his assertion that Jack is socially constructed is worthy of further examination. Fitzgerald's emphasis on the split in Osiris between Simon and Piggy is crucial. These mythological interpretations are, I believe, merely partial. Important modifications are needed to make the characters fit their mythological counterparts. And, although they frame the

film in a mythological context, little is suggested as to the film's real message. This motion picture has had a profound effect on those of this generation who have viewed it, and I believe it resonates on a far deeper level than as a reenactment of Greek or Egyptian myths. It is my contention that these proposed mythological interpretations are merely more recent incarnations of a far more primitive mythological system.

What happens on this troubled island has much to do with how the male ego as hero subjugates the Great Mother as island. Wilber sees this as a struggle between the Apollonian reason, civilization, creative, ordered and light, and the Great Mother frenzied, emotional, sexual, earthy, and dark (Wilber 225). He suggests that the Typhon represents the Great Mother and Apollo, god of light, the hero (184). Here's still another mythic version of the struggle others have noted. In this version Piggy and Simon stand for Apollo and Osiris, and Typhon and Dionysus are condensed in Jack. This realignment of mythic characters reveals how the Great Mother is defiled by Apollonian young men. Or put another way, in this tale we see how uninitiated young men experiencing wild nature for the first time try to control and conquer what they should value and respect.

I begin with gendered Images in Lord of the Flies. Two phallic symbols recur throughout the story the conch and the spears (Freud 354). The conch is 18" long and wields authority over the boys. In the opening paragraphs, Ralph uses the conch to seemingly call the children to come into being:

> He laid the conch against his lip, and took a deep breath and blew once more. The note boomed again: and then at his firmer pressure, the note, fluking up an octave, became a strident blare more penetrating than before. Piggy was shouting something, his face pleased, his glasses flashing. The birds cried small

> animals scattered. Ralph's breath failed; the note dropped the octave, became a low wubber, was a rush of air.The conch was silent, a gleaming tusk; Ralph's face was dark with breathlessness and the air over the island was full of bird clamor and echoes ringing.
>
> . . .
>
> Signs of life were visible now on the beach. The sand, trembling beneath the heat haze, concealed many figures in its miles of length; boys were making their way toward the platform through the hot, dumb sand. (Golding 16)

The feminine is the island itself, its pink granite, the scar of the beach, and the pink pigs which live among the growth. A perfect example of this gendered symbolism at work is Jack's ordering the boys to "sharpen a stick at both ends." One end of the shaft is forced into the earth and the other end pierces into the pig's head. This refers to the young men's dual penetration and defilement of the feminine other. A pig hunt makes clear the sexual and aggressive energies released in killing the Great Mother.

> The afternoon wore on, hazy and dreadful with damp heat; the sow staggered her way ahead of them, bleeding and mad, and the hunters followed, wedded to her in lust.
>
> . . .
>
> Here, struck down by the heat, the sow fell and the hunters hurled themselves at her. This dreadful eruption from an unknown world made her frantic; she squealed and bucked and the air was full of sweat and noise and blood and terror. Roger ran round the heap, prodding with his spear whenever pig flesh appeared. Jack was on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife. Roger found a lodgement for his point and began to push till he was leaning with his whole weight. The spear moved forward inch by inch and the terrified squealing became a high-pitched scream. Then Jack found the throat and the hot blood spouted over his hands. The sow collapsed under them and

> they were heavy and fulfilled upon her. The butterflies still danced, preoccupied in the center of the clearing. (Golding 123)

Clearly, when fear is projected onto the Great Mother, it is too quickly purged by senseless acts of violence, and from pigs, it is an all too easy move to attack members of their own group, who, like the pig, might be marked by difference. But if Lord of the Flies is an allegory of a mythic struggle between the Sun God and Great Mother does the text offer any way out of the dilemma it constructs? Let's look more closely at each character.

Ralph longs for home, order, and authority. When a plane flies past without seeing them because Jack let the fire go out, Ralph screams at the sky, "Stop! Come back! Come back!" His desperation betrays his deep need for the return of solar authority. He is disoriented and alone without the social structure of civilization. His fear of the unknown island depths paralyzes his ability to lead.

Piggy possesses the natures of Osiris and Apollo. He dispenses reason and logic as easily as the Promethean fire he makes with his glasses. But Piggy too is inflexible and only perpetuates the Dionysus side of Jack. At a few points in the film Ralph wishes to concede some leadership responsibilities to Jack. Piggy, though, knowing his only power lies in his connection to Ralph, convinces Ralph to reconsider. Piggy dies futilely trying to regain his power of fire and sight. He, like Ralph, cannot exist without an outside civilizing structure. Simon, on the other hand, does not fear the dark unknown, but is in touch with nature. However, It would go too far to exhort Simon too highly, for in the end he was unable to save his friends from their fear. Simon lacks the ability to communicate his insights.

However, If we were able to marry Simon's intuitiveness with Piggy's reason we might have a true leader for the children on the island. A leader in touch with nature and able to express and defend his beliefs. But even if we construct Peterkin Gay from his composite parts he is still incomplete. Robert Bly, a proponent for the modern-day initiation of men, has suggested, "Men need to make a parallel connection with the harsh Dionysus energy that the Hindus call Kala." If so then
maybe Dick is right about Ralph's inflexibility and the virtues of Jack. Maybe, our savior, Peterkin Gay needs an initiation into the ways of Dionysus. For it is in Dionysus or Typhon that he will come in contact with the wildness of his Anima.

So it is my belief that Lord of the Flies compels us to take a look at ourselves, to put behind us our ego pride, and to initiate ourselves with the earth. It challenges us to get away from our modern dichotomy, that creativity and reason are mutually exclusive. Lord of the Flies leads us to seek integration and initiation, yet it also serves as a chilling fable to show us what can happen if we do not.

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