Introduction
Without much preliminary ado, I shall examine in the following chapters the series of novels that William Golding began publishing in 1954, for they seem to me extraordinary books, more so than their public reception would indicate. The first of them, *Lord of the Flies*, has proved by all odds the most successful, and Golding's fame depends on it in large part. *The Inheritors*—rather oddly, I think—has never caught the public fancy. *Pincher Martin* is much more widely known, achieving a certain notoriety, indeed, because of its ending, which reveals that the leading character has in fact died near the start of the story. But neither *Free Fall* nor *The Spire*, though published with some fanfare, has demonstrated anything like the appeal of *Lord of the Flies* for the general reader, and certainly *The Pyramid* does not seem to have captured his attention. Probably at present the body of Golding's work is more esteemed by critics than by the public. Although *Lord of the Flies* has had its detractors—in part, I suspect, precisely because of its popular success—it has generated a good deal of critical discussion in the years since its publication, and *Pincher Martin* provoked a controversy of its own when it appeared. While *Free Fall* and *The Spire*, to say nothing of *The Pyramid*, evidently disappointed some of the critics who had eagerly awaited them, others have continued to claim for Golding a place in the first rank of contemporary novelists. And the amount of criticism devoted to his fiction continues to increase.

Despite the growing attention to Golding's work, only one book has been written which to my mind seeks to explore both the structures of his novels in some detail and their meanings in a sufficiently sustained fashion: the extremely perceptive *William Golding: A Critical Study* (New York, 1967), by Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor. Although its authors deal intensively with each of Golding's books (up
to *The Pyramid*) and provide an exemplary analysis of *The Inheritors*, they seem to me somewhat too committed in their discussions of the later stories to developing several overarch­ing claims about differing imaginative modes—either within the given novel or in Golding’s progress from novel to novel—and I also sense that they regard the conclusions to several of the books somewhat more optimistically than I do. In any case, the primary value which my own chapters can pretend to is that they attempt to make clear, through fairly strict formal analyses, the ways in which the novels develop as stories and dramatize their meanings. In this enterprise, I have taken encouragement from the words of Frank Ker­mode, perhaps Golding’s most influential champion: “If crit­ics have any reason for existence, this is it: to give assurances of value, and to provide, somehow—perhaps anyhow—the means by which readers may be put in possession of the valuable book.” In the very act of attending to the stories as closely as I shall, I am giving all the assurance I can of their value, and I trust that my discussions will enable any reader to grasp Golding’s books more securely. For his novels consti­tute a major achievement in contemporary English litera­ture and deserve to be better known than they yet are. He is a master of narrative, for one thing, most of his stories de­veloping a tremendous thrust as they advance irreversibly towards an explosive climax, and one of my concerns will be to illuminate his skill in managing this typical narrative line. He is also a gifted and versatile writer of prose, capable of rendering in some of his novels an exceptionally substan­tial and meticulously observed physical world, and of re­creating in others the inner lives of characters who range from an almost mindless Neanderthal man, through the Dean of a church in medieval England, to a twentieth-cen­tury artist. In fact, one mark of Golding’s originality is his
willingness to risk rather different verbal modes in several of his works; thus, in the chapters that follow I shall be insisting periodically on his accomplishments as a stylist. Most strikingly, he is a fiercely intelligent novelist who brings all his intellectual power to bear in imagining his stories, which has meant that the later ones, especially, have become increasingly difficult to comprehend on a first reading—even *The Pyramid*, so much more relaxed in manner than the earlier novels, reveals its theme only gradually and obliquely. This helps to explain, of course, the diminishing appeal of his books to the general public, and it is my excuse for dwelling, in treating the later novels, on their meanings as they unfold. Most fundamentally, however, he is intensely honest as a novelist: although a religious view of man has manifested itself more and more clearly in his fiction up through *The Spire*, for example, Golding refuses to represent his characters as transcending the limitations of the human condition. While I shall from time to time be pointing out what seem to me weaknesses in these stories, the virtues I have just claimed for Golding as novelist will indicate the perspectives from which I examine the separate novels through the following pages—in hopes of demonstrating that these virtues are indeed substantial.

1. This treatment of Golding's fiction up through *The Spire* was published shortly after I had completed my own chapters on the first five novels, and I have been delighted to find its authors confirming, for one thing, my sense of the richness as fictions of Golding's stories or seizing on many of the same ambiguities that I regard as problematic, especially in the later novels—though I think that Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor tend to view the ambiguities at the close of *The Inheritors* or of *Free Fall*, to name major instances, as more fully resolved than I can. But I have taken advantage of their insight to
correct several misreadings I had made of details in the novels, and no one interested in Golding's fiction can afford not to read their sensitive and stimulating critical study.
