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English II

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Each Pray'r Accepted and Each Wish Resign'd

A pig's head, buzzing with flies, speaks to a boy. A macabre moment in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, following a group of young boys stranded on an island torn between savagery and civility in their own new world, perfectly illustrates the religious cult concept and the mind altering aspects of cult teachings. Explored within the novel is an eternal duality. Egoism versus mutualism, Locke vs. Hobbes, the right of the individual vs. the power of the state. Somewhere in a grey middleground is religion and cult-like behavior. Cults can manipulate people to conform to a rigid belief system and use said system as a weapon, to consciousness-altering effect. How can people be inducted into these organizations so easily, without force or violence? How can leaders like Charles Manson or Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh¹ hold so much power over the human mind? These questions have led me to posit this: Cult leaders have an answer that their followers need to know. Humans' natural paranoia of the unknowable attracts them to these figures who claim to hold the universal secrets that their students have been longing for, and so become dependent upon.

"Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill... You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you?" (143). The pig tells the boy, Simon, this within a hallucination or dream state. Much like Jesus to God, Simon is written as a martyr and the successor of the deictic. The

¹ Later known as "Osho", a leader of a corrupt Indian-turned-Oregon⁶ cult commune.

Lord of the Flies, through the dregs of the boys' slaughter, enlightens Simon to humanity's true fears. That the beast is within, and its presence is inescapable. Throughout the novel, the new island inhabitants go from extreme to extreme in their endeavors to suppress their fears, and to live comfortably - until rescue that is. This only acts against them, though, and their paranoia grows. There is nothing more terrifying than that you cannot fight back against. It's for this very reason that we have the term "existential crisis", it's a state of fear induced by the uncontrollable and the Lord of the Flies cashes in on this fear, in a sense. With its grim charisma, it twists Simon and man's fears into urges and commands. It says, "You're not wanted. Understand? We are going to have fun on this island! So don't try on it, my poor misguided boy, or else."

Between the years of 1969 and 1971, Charles Manson led a cult, dubbed the "Manson Family" in a series of nine murders. He often spoke to them of "Helter Skelter", his prophesied race war of apocalyptic consequences. Although his ramblings were evidently delusional and he *had* been diagnosed with mental disorders such as schizophrenia and paranoid delusional disorder, his follower base stood loyal, often committing these murders in his name as a sort of effigy or tribute to the man. He was able to keep this power over the Family through the same means as the Lord of the Flies. He said once, "Anything you see in me is in you. If you want to see a vicious killer, that's who you'll see, do you understand that? If you see me as your brother, that's what I'll be... I am just a mirror." This short quote, jumbled in with the ramblings the man was known for was a glimpse of surprising profundity. He frames his crimes and flaws as not personal, but *human*. Preaching this doctrine to the right, susceptible people had great consequences for anyone involved, including Manson. His godlike power over the Family led to the prosecution of the lot of them in court, as well as the deaths of nine innocent people.

Unlike Manson there is no such punishment for the vocalized fears, speaking through this hog's body. That's what makes it godlike in an even deeper sense. It has complete control of Simon but only through the ability of Simon's *self*. The Lord of the Flies is nothing more than Simon's own rope, tied to himself. His unshakable fears are simply so because they are primally instilled upon him. If the novel did not place the boys on their island, they would not have returned an animalistic nature and their animalistic fears. "What set me on fire was the *thought*" Manson once said. Perhaps the primitive state that the boys' secluded society reverted to wasn't the cause of their existential and internal conflict but the exact opposite; The lack of authority and answer found near constantly in adolescence² was the domino that crashed, releasing the shackles suppressing our primeval instinct³. This is the same primeval instinct that our societies and religions are built upon fighting against. From the clothes on any individual's back, to capitalism or any other monetary system, to the idea of *infrastructure* which quite literally defaces the natural world, formed by millions of years of erosion and the chaotic allocation and reallocation of Earth's matter. We have been trained to fight back against this most natural foundation of our planet in favor of our⁴ own system.

Manson gave people an attractive alternative. An alternative that went against the rhetoric proposed by any religious acolyte before him. Thinking about the word of any one large group's God, what are the faithful as well as the non-believers told? In the end any given group will tell the world this:

² The "thought".

³ The "fire".

⁴ Or someone's.

⁶ Yes, Actually.

Our deity is the truth and the truth is bound to reality. We

are all bound to that God's rule and that God knows all.

Our God is not connected to the natural world; our God is

it's sculptor and controls every action that occurs within it.

Our God is the great decider.

Charles Manson was not without his god complex but his ideology was freeing to those who longed for a divine answer yet refused the binding nature of conventional faith. In essence, his followers were seeking the fire to their thought. They required the chaos of nature, completely eradicated in modern religion - no doubt tied to the doctrine of the superiority of people that theology teaches. The idea that we are greater than a bonobo, or a jungle orchid, or the moon.

Manson does not make his "children" in his image. Summarized from his 1991 interview (mid-conviction) with Ron Reagan Jr., he does not order his followers. He reminds them of their own personal demons that haunt them. The Lord of the Flies does not command Simon, but tells him what Simon, the Manson Family, or even Judas of their own actions which they cannot control. Manson knew how we, people, worked too well and served as a catalyst to the wrong-doings of the Family. In a sense this makes *him* the Lord of the Flies. He who does not speak to our sins but knows what they are nonetheless. He who has embraced the nature world as his own but is far from its controller. Alexander Pope once wrote, "How happy is the blameless vestal's lot! The world forgetting, by the world forgot. Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind! Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd .."⁵

⁵Pope originally wrote this on a failed love of his yet I'm sure Manson would describe his affair with his demons similarly. *Fin*.

Works Cited

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