The child or adolescent, identified for so long with the idea of an innocence as yet uncorrupted by the dissimulations of adulthood, bringing into this world recollections of the truths and ethical principles existent in the eternity it had so recently left, could no longer function in the new dispensation. The basic savagery of human instincts, chillingly revealed by Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, and powerfully reinforced by Frazer and Conrad, had exposed how far the supposedly civilised societies of the West were motivated by the same greeds, cruelties, superstitions and lusts for power as had animated the most primitive tribes – promptings not inculcated in adulthood but now seen as innate in the human condition, waiting only for the tools and facilities that maturity would provide. That concept animated William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), which constituted in many respects a re-enactment of the story of Cain and Abel, the scriptural account of the results of original sin, but transferred to a setting in which the gradual eruption of human savagery takes on Freudian and Darwinian undertones. Unlike Defoe’s imagined island where Crusoe must rely upon his intelligence and resourcefulness to survive, theirs is an almost idyllic setting, with food and water in plentiful supply, perfect weather and excellent beaches for bathing. The enemy they must face is the emergent brutality of their inner selves as the restraints instilled by their upbringing fade away, and fierce tribal rivalries, culminating in a craving for blood and a crushing of the weaker members of society take hold. The only adolescent horrified at the barbarity, struggling like the anti-hero in loneliness against society’s evils, is, by the end of the novel, in the process of being hounded to his death by his peers, saved only by the arrival of adult rescuers. The conclusion, with its echo of Conrad, offers a dismal picture of the mid-century concept of human depravity:
The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart . . .

The allusion to Original Sin in this novel was not an isolated instance. While the centrality of Catholicism in Graham Greene’s fiction might appear attributable to an entirely personal factor, namely his religious conversion in 1926 when he was still an unpublished writer, an overview of the mid-century reveals an emergence of religious themes in the leading literary works of that period. Evelyn Waugh, a personal friend of Greene and, like him, a convert to Catholicism, in 1944 suddenly abandoned the mordant secular satire of his earlier novels in favour of a religious topic. In the earlier part of his Brideshead Revisited, the Catholic interest is subdued, seemingly peripheral, but gradually Charles Ryder’s friendship with Sebastian and his romantic attachment to Julia, which had seemed to constitute the main themes, recede into the background as the concealed sub-stratum of the novel, the need for religious belief in the wasteland of the modern world, comes to the fore. Ryder’s interest in architecture, expressed professionally in his water-colour paintings of the great country houses of England, becomes symbolic as the monumentality and grandeur of the Flytes’ aristocratic home, Brideshead – a structure improved and added to over the years by successive generations – comes to represent to him the Catholic faith of its owners. Billeted there as an officer during the war, several years after his relationship with the family has ended, he discovers a lamp burning in its chapel, a source of comfort to him after the empty materialism represented by his adjutant, Hooper:

The builders did not know the uses to which their work would descend; they made a new house with the stones of the old castle; year by year, generation after generation, they enriched and extended it; year by year the great harvest of timber in the park grew to ripeness; until, in sudden frost, came the age of Hooper; the place was desolate and the work all brought to nothing; Quomodo sedet sola civitas. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

And yet, I thought . . . something quite remote from anything the builders intended has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; something none of us thought about