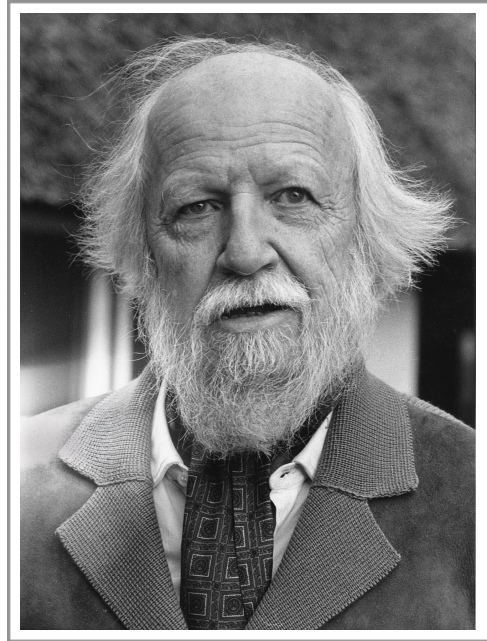


## Great Books Seminar

### Assignment 14

1. Read *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding (pictured on the right\*), chapters 1–3.
2. Your book report will be due the week we return from the break. Remember that the book report format sheet is under “Materials Needed.”
3. Read an essay by C. S. Lewis on Christmas (below).
4. What do you want to talk about on speech night? If you are not in the play or doing a dramatic monolog on *Villette*, you will be writing a narrative, persuasive, classification and division, musings or definition essay on a particular topic. You will submit a topic in class this coming lesson, and I will assign a particular format with an example essay as a model.



### Long-Range Assignments

Again, we will be working on a character monolog. Having chosen your character, now begin thinking about characteristics, thoughts, beliefs, personality, etc. of your character. The assignment should be typed, double-spaced. The length of the monolog should be about one and a half pages to four pages in length. The assignment will be due after we return from the winter break on **the third week of January**.

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\* By Unknown author - [1] Dutch National Archives, The Hague, Fotocollectie Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANEFO), 1945-1989 Bestanddeelnnummer, CC BY-SA 3.0 nl, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20440849>

**X-Mas and Christmas**  
**A Lost Chapter of Herodotus**  
by C. S. Lewis

AND BEYOND THIS there lies in the ocean, turned towards the west and north, the island of Niatirb which Hecataeus indeed declares to be the same size and shape as Sicily, but it is larger, though in calling it triangular a man would not miss the mark. It is densely inhabited by men who wear clothes not very different from the other barbarians who occupy the north-western parts of Europe though they do not agree with them in language. These islanders, surpassing all the men of whom we know in patience and endurance, use the following customs.

In the middle of winter when fogs and rains most abound they have a great festival which they call Exmas, and for fifty days they prepare for it in the fashion I shall describe. First of all, every citizen is obliged to send to each of his friends and relations a square piece of hard paper stamped with a picture, which in their speech is called an Exmas-card. But the pictures represent birds sitting on branches, or trees with a dark green prickly leaf, or else men in such garments as the Niatirbians believe that their ancestors wore two hundred years ago riding in coaches such as their ancestors used, or houses with snow on their roofs. And the Niatirbians are unwilling to say what these pictures have to do with the festival, guarding (as I suppose) some sacred mystery. And because all men must send these cards the market-place is filled with the crowd of those buying them, so that there is great labour and weariness.

But having bought as many as they suppose to be sufficient, they return to their houses and find there the like cards which others have sent to them. And when they find cards from any to whom they also have sent cards, they throw them away and give thanks to the gods that this labour at least is over for another year. But when they find cards from any to whom they have not sent, then they beat their breasts and wail and utter curses against the sender; and, having sufficiently lamented their misfortune, they put on their boots again and go out into the fog and rain and buy a card for him also. And let this account suffice about Exmas-cards.

They also send gifts to one another, suffering the same things about the gifts as about the cards, or even worse. For every citizen has to guess the value of the gift which every friend will send to him so that he may send one of equal value, whether he can afford it or not. And they buy as gifts for one another such things as no man ever bought for himself. For the sellers, understanding the custom, put forth all kinds of trumpery, and whatever, being useless and ridiculous, they have been unable to sell throughout the year they now sell as an Exmas gift. And though the Niatirbians profess themselves to lack sufficient necessary things, such as metal,

leather, wood and paper, yet an incredible quantity of these things is wasted every year, being made into the gifts.

But during these fifty days the oldest, poorest and most miserable of the citizens put on false beards and red robes and walk about the market-place; being disguised (in my opinion) as *Cronos*. And the sellers of gifts no less than the purchasers become pale and weary, because of the crowds and the fog, so that any man who came into a Niatirbian city at this season would think some great public calamity had fallen on Niatirb. This fifty days of preparation is called in their barbarian speech the *Exmas Rush*.

But when the day of the festival comes, then most of the citizens, being exhausted with the *Rush*, lie in bed till noon. But in the evening they eat five times as much supper as on other days and, crowning themselves with crowns of paper, they become intoxicated. And on the day after *Exmas* they are very grave, being internally disordered by the supper and the drinking and reckoning how much they have spent on gifts and on the wine. For wine is so dear among the Niatirbians that a man must swallow the worth of a talent before he is well intoxicated.

Such, then, are their customs about the *Exmas*. But the few among the Niatirbians have also a festival, separate and to themselves, called *Crissmas*, which is on the same day as *Exmas*. And those who keep *Crissmas*, doing the opposite to the majority of the Niatirbians, rise early on that day with shining faces and go before sunrise to certain temples where they partake of a sacred feast. And in most of the temples they set out images of a fair woman with a new-born Child on her knees and certain animals and shepherds adoring the Child. (The reason of these images is given in a certain sacred story which I know but do not repeat.)

But I myself conversed with a priest in one of these temples and asked him why they kept *Crissmas* on the same day as *Exmas*; for it appeared to me inconvenient. But the priest replied, It is not lawful, O Stranger, for us to change the date of *Crissmas*, but would that Zeus would put it into the minds of the Niatirbians to keep *Exmas* at some other time or not to keep it at all. For *Exmas* and the *Rush* distract the minds even of the few from sacred things. And we indeed are glad that men should make merry at *Crissmas*; but in *Exmas* there is no merriment left. And when I asked him why they endured the *Rush*, he replied, It is, O Stranger, a *racket*; using (as I suppose) the words of some oracle and speaking unintelligibly to me (for a *racket* is an instrument which the barbarians use in a game called *tennis*).

But what Hecataeus says, that *Exmas* and *Crissmas* are the same, is not credible. For first, the pictures which are stamped on the *Exmas*-cards have nothing to do with the sacred story which the priests tell about *Crissmas*. And secondly, the most part of the Niatirbians, not believing the religion of the few, nevertheless send the gifts and cards and participate in the *Rush* and drink, wearing paper cars. But it is not likely that men, even being barbarians, should suffer so many and great things in honour of a god they do not believe in. And now, enough about Niatirb.