

Fable to Myth in the Novels of William Golding



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ABSTRACT

The present paper seeks to find the fabulist as myth maker. A detailed survey of his fiction shows that he is deeply concerned with the moral chaos and vacuum of his time. In faith, he is neither a puritan nor a transcendentalist. His religion is based upon the interpretation of his own experience of lifetime. His novels deal with the basic questions of life, and its goal in a universe of cosmic chaos. He has dealt with the depravity of man and cares deeply about the condition of human life, and shows great compassion for men who suffer and men who sin. Thus, Golding novels are simple in so far they deal with the primordial patterns of human in a cloak of a fable. But the narratives slowly move to mystical turns through deliberate creation of tensions, between interlocking worlds, worlds of myth to reverberate within our being to seek the pattern.

Keywords: *Fabulation, myth, Neanderthals, primitivism and theology.*

William Golding as a novelist is unique among the contemporaries of 50s and he continues to be one of the most popular novelists in the present century for his consistent argument with human values. Termed as an allegorical novelist, fabulist, anthropologist of imagination and a myth maker, Golding takes up the some basic questions of human life in his fiction for analysis. The present paper seeks to find the fabulist as myth maker. A detailed survey of his fiction shows that he is deeply concerned with the moral chaos and vacuum of his time. In faith, he is neither a puritan nor a transcendentalist. His religion is based upon the interpretation of his own experience of lifetime. His novels deal with the basic questions of life, and its goal in a universe of cosmic chaos. He has dealt with the depravity of man and 'cares deeply about the condition of human life, and shows great compassion for men who suffer and men who sin" (Cox 133).

"Myth is an image, an action out of which truth emerges" (Jestor 32). Myths are events, happenings larger than itself. The fable is a moral to which fictional circumstances must be accommodated. It's always a little less than itself, better than a sermon, but quite not so real as history. So the fabulist as artist is half doomed from the start. Golding himself has admitted in his BBC interview : "What I would regard as tremendous com-

pliment to myself would be if someone would substitute the word "myth" for "fable" (Kermode 173). He feels that fable is an invented thing on the surface whereas myth is something which comes out from the roots of things in its ancient sense as a key to existence. It's the whole meaning of life and experience as a whole.

His first and most successful novel the *Lord of the Flies* is a gripping story of small school boys placed in isolation on an Edenic island beyond the reach of adult world and let them work out archetypal patterns of human society. It is a technical device of coherence to make a permanent appeal to generations of readers. The boat-shaped island represents all mankind on their journey through life and the small boys are the people at large who realize it from their own encounter. In *The Inheritors* he made his thesis statement that our developed consciousness is mark of guilt or else, why the innocent Neanderthals would be extinct against the intelligent homo sapiens? Our experience is fragmented and to integrate this is to return to the Neanderthal people, to innocence. Modern world and science, so to say, have gifted us the myth of progress, not without the rival myth of universal guilt. Golding accepts guilt and evil as a necessary condition of life; he also believes in redemption, and divine mercy. The characters in his novels depict all the tensions and fragmenta-

tions. The fragments form part of the whole in which truth is accessible. It's the myth of total explanation. He sharply deviates from Hobbesian view of man. Sometimes his novels are termed as pessimistic or dystopian. He does not espouse "Schopenhauer an form of pessimism" (Monod 45) expecting that mankind will cease to desire life and its continuation. That man is essentially a fallen being, is not a labyrinth of self defeating nihilism. He is closer to meliorism. He has chosen a darker version of meliorism, for it exactly suits the gloom and vacuum through which the world has been passing since the Second World War. The saving grace of Sammy Mount joy and of the world depicted in Free Fall lies in the potential for compassion and communication. Sammy could not mount in joy, rather descended into sorrow. The whole problem was of free choice, free will and his fall is the fall of everyman. Free fall, perhaps, is the best of the lot in which epiphany occurs at the last moment in the darkness of a cell in a Nazi prison camp. In the face of evil and doom in the world human being must do the little s/he can. Sammy did this through his prayer. The dead Pincher Martin continued to hold on to the dreary rock in the ocean, as if he was alive, through his ravenous ego and he failed. One should have hope and faith on another life in another world. Thus, Golding creates the myth of human struggle "with Being, not Becoming" (Weeks 67).

Golding maintains a constant system of symbolism that allows for allegorical meaning. He has created modern tabulations which tend away from representation of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy. Allegories are a form of extended metaphor in which action, persons, meanings, etc. lie outside the narrative itself. His allegories as found in his series of novels are on man's propensity to evil as "a bee produces honey" (Fleck 198). He deviates from the optimism of evolutionary progress of Darwin or Huxley. His allegories on man's inherent imperfection are not something original, but it has to be stated differently in different times.

Golding's vision of the world is a complex one in which a number of conflicting ideas and philosophies exist in tension. The mutually opposed

ideas, the dichotomy of good and evil are complex in their presentation and coexistence. There is no straight forward answer to what man's nature is. The message in Golding novel is not a straight forward account for; there is always an alternative answer or solution. Human being is neither fully rational nor fully if irrational. Both will and fate, chance or action plays its role in life. So, he creates a myth of a concrete situation in which different conflicting ideas are in tension. The situation is of prime importance. The process of interpretation plays a great role. The Spire is the diagram of prayer, but built on ill gotten money. It also symbolizes the phallus. The end in Jocelyn's life is both visionary and equivocal. Like his own life he dies with unresolved tension and dies like a bird shouting, screaming to leave behind the world of magic and incomprehension. He realizes: 'Now I know nothing at all.' Rites of Passage, the first book of the trilogy, won the Man Booker award in 1980 and it deals with Talbot's reversion to savagery in the wake of isolation. In the beginning of the Lord of the Flies Simon is quiet and retained; he never really voices his opinion. He represents the innocence on the island as well as a Christ like figure. His death assists in the fall of civilization and the loss of innocence as Ralph and Jack lack the balance in coping with their environment. He even shows this when he isolates himself in a glade in the forest, which somewhat appears as a church. Finally, William Golding explains the fall of civilization on the island through the boys' primitive way of life.

Lord of the Flies is a very pessimistic novel-this pessimistic view is based, primarily, on Golding's experience from the Second World War. Like in his other novels, Golding is concerned with morality, and the purpose of the novel is, in fact, to reveal the truth about real human nature. To be more precise, he attempts to find a solution to the problems of good and evil in human beings. John Bayley speaks about Golding's ability to describe good and evil in his novels: "Good and evil in Golding's work are all the more convincing, and goodness all the more moving [. . .]. It is their spontaneity which is so moving and so powerful [. . .]" (12).

Animal nature is, according to Golding's view, "the essential nature of all human beings"

(Thornley and Roberts 151). Not only does Golding talk about the sinfulness and the evil nature of man in his novels, he also shows to the reader, what the life far away from the civilized society might look like. What Lionel Trilling claims is that the behaviour of the boys is due to the fact that they "are not finally under the control of previous social habit or convention" (Johnston 10). But is that the right reason? There are statements that disprove Trilling's opinion.

Golding himself said that, "evil arises from man's essential being" (Johnston 8), which is related to the theme of "the darkness of man's heart" (Johnston 17). Or rather, in compliance with the definition of Golding's view by Tiger, "[. . .] the innocence of the child is a crude fallacy, for homo sapiens has by nature a terrible potentiality for evil. This potentiality cannot be eradicated or controlled by a human political system no matter how respectable" (54). This implies that the animal

instinct, or inherent evil, is stronger than any political system. Golding also points out that, "[. . .] the Evil Tree grows in the human brain, in human consciousness [...]" (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 21).

Golding novels are simple in so far they deal with the primordial patterns of human in a cloak of a fable. But the narratives slowly move to mystical turns through deliberate creation of tensions, between interlocking worlds, worlds of myth to reverberate within our being to seek the pattern, the way Sammy at one stage finds no bridge yet, seeks forgiveness and walking into the world of vision. Rousseau, the political scientist, pointed out that society corrupts man whereas Golding fable proves that it's man that corrupts society. Here lies the visionary power of the man who is now in the hallowed precincts of novelist as theologian with his myth of total explanation.

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