THE INDIAN REVIEW OF WORLD LITERATURE IN ENGLISH
A PEER REVIEWED AND INDEXED BI-ANNUAL ONLINE LITERARY JOURNAL
http://www.worldlitonline.net
ISSN: 0974 - 097X VOL. 12 NO. II July - December, 2016

When Evil Triumphs over Innocence: Revisiting Golding's Fallen World in *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors*

Mr. Saikat Guha
Research Scholar
Department of English
Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University
West Bengal, India

A product of the post-World War II disillusionment, William Golding captures in his fictional world the vulnerability of civilization which crumbles down at the slightest blow. The war-torn world witnessed enough destruction and death, and such disconcerting manifestation of its latent evil shook the foundation of traditional religion and ethics. Following the horrors of Auschwitz and other instances of Holocaust, the Western civilization saw its fall from the precinct of reason and humanity. The novels of Aldous Huxley, George Orwell and William Golding represent the capacity of the West to indulge in mayhem, anarchy and sadism. Golding's preoccupation with evil in human beings makes him interested in diagnosing the human psyche in which looms the dark intents.

In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding stretches human civilization to its edge to exemplify its plausibility, but then, only discovers its fullest evil embodiment. The novel bears testimony to Golding's concern for the lurching evil that does not spare even the children, as Kathleen Woodward observes: "Much of the power of reading Golding's novel today rests here: the fear of the child as a violent other, virulent in itself, not a mere analogy for adult brutality (which we know better and accept more easily), but a potential enemy who turns, perversely, the screw" (60). The shipwrecked boys land in the uninhabited island and their struggle for survival unfastens the hidden evil within them which only escalates at the absence of the matrix of civilization. For their survival the boys divide themselves into two groups—one of which (led by Jack) takes the hunting job. With his associates, Jack becomes more powerful and craves for ultimate power. Golding might have thought of the fascist dictator Hitler while portraying the persona of Jack both of whom are devil's disciples. Jack plans for the abduction of Ralph from his position as leader in order to make himself the leader to rule over the island.

The novel brings out the dark forces at work in the human mind. Sigmund Freud finds three basic elements in human psyche that shape one's personality—id, ego and superego (Nayar 65-65). Id is the area of gross human desires, instincts and dreams which does not care about the moral virtues. Ego is the working force in human beings. It has a tendency to function according to the elementary drives of id. The opposite of id is superego, the moral, religious or cultural force, which guides ego and restricts it from being a slave to id. In the context of Golding's novel, if Simon is motivated by the temperate influences of superego, Jack is driven by the raw energies of id, and Ralph by the mediator ego. Simon is an almost Christ figure who discovers a beautiful glade inside the forest which symbolizes the biblical paradise. Later in the novel, the glade is captured by Jack who sets up the totem of a sow's head on a sharpened stake and starts worshipping it as the Lord of the Flies (whose Hebrew name is *Beelzebub*). This symbolic incident draws a parallel between the Fall of Man from paradise after he was polluted by the devil and the children's indulgence in barbaric ritual which connotes their loss of innocence. Civilization, society, religion—these act together in fabricating one's superego to check the indiscriminate passions of human beings. But once the shackles of civilization are removed, psychic evil comes out of the appearance of civilized behaviour. The novel of Golding is a much-discussed Christian allegory which recalls the biblical notion of the Fall. The novel abounds in Christian imageries, but as Marijke van Vuuren points out these imageries are not without inherent contradictions:

> The island is both a paradise and a prison. The sea is a translucent film that gently transforms the body of a child, in line with the Scriptural notion of the water of life; in another scene it is a monstrous leviathan that sucks up the body of another. Fire is a rescue signal, sign of hope, and a destructive force by which the children wreck their environment. The "beast," a demonic animal symbol, is both imaginary and real, immanent and transcendent. Golding draws on Biblical symbolism, particularly that of the mystic narratives of origin and end, creation and the "last days." (6)

The children and adolescent boys exposed in the deserted island without the guidance of their adults soon forget their civilized nature and indulge in meaningless violence by throwing away all the scruples into air. The desire to be rescued is died away which the extinguishment of fire on the mountain symbolizes. Ironically, it is again fire that acts as signal to the naval officer who comes to the island and saves the life of Ralph. The naval officer reprimands Jack's team—all English boys—for behaving in an irrational and uncivilized manner. However, he himself is but a hypocrite. Golding reveals through the small role of the naval officer, who is clad with arms and war-dress, the pretentious solemnity of the adult, civilized world which itself propagates evil and warfare.

On the question of the fabled debate between innocence and evil, Golding takes an obvious turns to Christianity. Nevertheless, Golding's attitude to Christianity is somewhat ambivalent, as David Anderson cites: "Golding is a maker of myths, not a debater of doctrines: his concern is the creation of theologically significant experience rather than theological statement. He describes realities of human behavior and consciousness which theological statements indicate but do not enact" (in Bloom 55). But Golding's belief in "Original Sin" is strong in his works. In his interview with James R. Baker, as in many others, Golding asserts his belief in "Original Sin" which is inherent in human beings. He further says:

> Now with our awareness of ourselves as individuals inescapably comes in this other thing, this destructive thing, the evil, if you like. It seems to me that this self-awareness, intelligence, with these come the defect of their virtue. We have to learn, and it's quite possible, I think, that we never shall learn, that as a species that will be the thing which will trip us up, our own intelligence and our own lusts. But if we are going to survive those two aspects of man, his selfishness and his intelligence, we've got to learn to control those, otherwise they tend to destroy us. ("Interview" 135)

The novel *Lord of the Flies* vividly records the fall of the boys from their innocence. But the possibility of their indulgence in evil is inherent in them as Original Sin. It is ironic that the choirboys become the most violent and sadistic in their metamorphosis into savages hunting and dancing in cannibalistic ecstasy. This is, however, not "metamorphosis" in the proper sense of the term; they only set free what was already in them. The children's brutality exposes the utter hollowness of civilization—once the children are hurled into the face of wild ambiance the mask of decency is removed and their civic qualities take savage turn. They lay bare their evil nature hidden within their very minds. The rational, scientific voice in the novel is Piggy who from the beginning has revealed his disbelief in the "beast," but his murder signals the defeat of reason which cannot control the inherent chaos of the boys' nature, as James R. Baker cites: "In their innocent pride they attempted to impose a rational order or pattern upon the vital chaos of their own nature, and so they commit the error [...] The penalties [...] are bloodshed, guilt, utter defeat of reason" ("Meaning of Beast" 77). The worshipping of the head of a dead sow as the Lord of the Flies denotes the veneration for evil which it embodies. The totem is only the concrete form of the abstract already in existence within the boys. Yet this evil is a necessity of the children, as Anderson observes:

> It is possible to argue, as Piggy does, that demons do not exist and that a cool rationalism will expose the deception. The impotence of this program is, Golding shows, due to the fact that man comes to cherish the demons because they endorse his own will to power. The demons are objectifications of lust masquerading as

> ultimate reality, and man needs the demons because they are the means by which he writes himself large upon the universe [...] (in Bloom 57)

Piggy, the rational boy, must die, because the fault of Piggy lies in that he has a "short sighted" scientific mentality. He tries to dismiss the "beast" as mere ghost "not understanding that the whole of society is riddled with ghosts" (Golding, qtd. in Baker, in Bloom 66). Jack is possessed by this ghost/beast which pervades the entire human civilization. He is blinded by his lust for power, and he can go to any extent where his id leads him.

The choirboys soon lose their religious teachings and ethical traits because such qualities are not inherent in them but imposed on them. The only natural good character of the novel is Simon, the Christ-figure, who meets the sad fate of all saints: "the truth he brings would set us free from the repetitious nightmare of history, but we are, by nature, incapable of perceiving that truth" (Baker, "Meaning of Beast" 80). Simon's midnight journey inside the forest, to the glade, where the Lord of the Flies seems to talk to him about an impending danger is reminiscent of Christ's trail by the devil. The Lord of the Flies tells Simon that he is inside everyone: "I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go!" (*Lord of the Flies* 161-62). He is the omnipresent evil of modern civilization, as John Peter says: "The incomprehensible threat which has hung over them is […] identified and explained: a nameless figure who is Man himself" (qtd. in Vuuren 12). Simon is not afraid of the beast because his psyche is not nurtured by the hypocrisies of civilization which only distances one from evil without elimination evil. Like Christ, he undertakes a journey to the hill to discover the truth of the "beast" which he finds to be a dead parachutist hanging from the hill and flapping in the air. But he is unable to communicate the truth to others. Ironically, the hunters kill the innocent Simon whom they conceive to be an embodiment of the "beast." In the end, they set the entire forest in fire in order to kill Ralph. This is the destruction of the paradise-like island—the Fall being initiated by the adult-world or civilization itself of which children are but minor associates.

Golding's attitude to Christianity is at once his appropriation of the religion and the reverse of it. He places the biblical doctrines in trial to look into their empirical prevalence at the backdrop of the disillusioned post-War scenario of the West. Golding seemingly loses faith in the biblical notion that the meek and gentle would inherit the earth. In Psalm no. 37 of the *Old Testament* we find these comforting assertions:

> Cease from anger, and forsake wrath:
> fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.
> For evildoers shall be cut off:
> [...]
> But the meek shall inherit the earth;
> and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.
> [...]
> The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow,
> to cast down the poor and needy,
> and to slay such as be of upright conversation.
> Their sword shall enter into their own heart,
> and their bows shall be broken. (*Holy Bible*, Ps. 37.8-15)

But such unquestioning optimism seems to have lost validity at the setting of the World Wars which were trials of Mankind in which it failed to qualify. Contrary to the biblical notion, it is the strong and fittest who would inherit the earth with blood in their hand and evil in their head. It is this Darwinism which Golding refers to although he is not unaware of the danger it entails. The darker side of the "survival of the fittest" myth is amply put into question in the novel *Lord of the Flies* where Golding exposes the theme of dispossession of the innocent and the good. It is the strong, cunning and power-monger who exhibit the possibility to survive and rule. Golding's depiction of the Neanderthal life in *The Inheritors* again reveals the darker side of Darwinism. As he says in his interview with Baker:

> I don't believe that the Darwinian explanation of evolution is adequate. […] I admit it seems to work, but, for example, I don't know that I can think of a mutation that's ever been advantageous. The overwhelming number of mutations appears to be to the disadvantage of the species. It seems to me that there's a screw loose somewhere. […] It's not that I know what it is, it's just that it seems to me it's incommensurate: the alleged mechanism and result don't seem to match up. (141)

The innocent Neanderthals are defeated by the more intelligent but malevolent "New Men," the progenitors of *Homo sapiens*. While the historian-writer H. G. Wells hails the transference of inherence of the earth as positive and consequential Golding is profoundly suspicious of it. In such works as *Outline of History* and the short story "The Grisly Folk," Wells represents the Neanderthals as primitive, barbaric and inhuman creatures who were not only physically ugly but essentially evil and harmful in nature. Wells's description of the Neanderthals in the short story can be quoted at length to demonstrate his profound disdain for the early men:

> Most fascinating riddle of all these riddles of the ages of ice and hardship, before the coming of the true men, is the riddle of the Mousterian men […] They lived thirty or forty thousand years ago […] These Mousterians are also called Neandertalers [*sic*]. Until quite recently it was supposed that they were true men like ourselves. But now we begin to realise that they were different, so different that it is impossible that they can be very close relations of ours. They walked or shambled along with a peculiar slouch, they could not turn their heads up to the sky, and their teeth were very different from those of true men. […] […] Probably he did not talk at all. He could not hold a pin between his finger and thumb. […] And as we realise the want of any close relationship between this ugly, strong, ungainly, manlike animal and mankind, the less likely it becomes that he had a naked skin and hair like ours and the more probable that he was different and perhaps bristly or hairy in some queer inhuman fashion […] Like them he lived in a bleak land on the edge of the snows and glaciers that were even then receding northward. […] Almost certainly they met, these grisly men and the true men. The true man must have come into the habitat of the Neandertaler [*sic*], and the two must have met and fought. Some day we may come upon the evidences of this warfare. ("The Grisly Folk")

Wells in a way demonizes the Neanderthals by imposing evil qualities on them. But Golding does not quite agree with this (mis)representation. He criticizes Wells on the ground of his "nonsensical optimism," as he says that Wells "does stand everything on its head and pretend that the history of Man is a gradual improvement which is going to go on. And yet if you look at his science fiction you find an absolute dark horror, there in *The Time Machine*, for example. It's nothing like his science of life or his history. He's a divided person" ("Interview" 138). Golding has portrayed the Neanderthals as innocent, systematic and bound by community feelings. Their world is in that of a pre-civilization state where good qualities are not affected and contaminated by the evils of civilization, as Bishnupada Ray observes,

> Golding depicts the Neanderthal life a prelapsarian, prelinguistic, presocial, unself-conscious stage of human evolution which he considers synonymous with the life in the Garden of Eden, whereas the life of *Homo sapiens* is considered to be fallen, burdened with the sin of language and self-consciousness. (76)

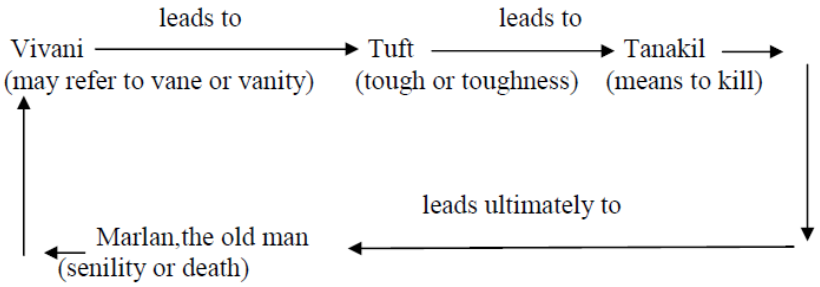
The Neanderthals are closely associated with nature whose pulse they feel with their own nerves. According to Rousseau's early philosophy, nature is good and benevolent and it is civilization which corrupts human souls. The nature-loving Neanderthals are like Rousseau's "noble savage"—"self-reliant and self-sufficient, living independently of other people and untroubled by competition for precedence, unconcerned for the future, living a life of primitive innocence and plainness" (Dent 41). The Neanderthals are not aware of the wicked intents which are but products of human civilization manoeuvered at the teleological motifs of evolution. It is civilization, with its dreary lifestyle, ruthless struggle to survive, selfishness and to overpower others, which inculcate immoral and vicious qualities in its citizens which mount up on their inherent wickedness. The earlier men Neanderthals had a well-

structured society in close contact with nature. They did not have any language but used to communicate among themselves with various signs and gestures. The Neanderthals' "pictures," Kinkead-Weeks and Gregor cite, "are visualizations, not conceptualizations. If they are part of the people's subnormally rich life of sense and instinct, they are also part of their incapacity for abstract thought" (73).

The Neanderthals portrayed by Golding used to live in a group, and they were full of sympathy for each other. It was only the entry of the "New Men" or the ancestors of *Homo sapiens* into their territory that marked the beginning of their trouble. The new people are depicted as violent creatures who too often indulge in bloodshed. They abducted and killed Ha and Nil. They sacrificed Liku as part of their ritual worship, and roasted and ate him—incidents which reveal their devilish brutality. The Neanderthals, on the other hand, are so non-violent that they do not even kill the animals to feed upon. Instead, Lok brings a dead deer killed by a "cat" for his clan. The Neanderthals have full of sympathy for each other. They mourn the death of their wise leader Mal who had known many pictures (their standard mode of communication). On the other hand, towards the end of the novel, we find the craving for power of the New Men—Tanakil's conspiracy to kill their leader Marlan to make himself the leader.

As the protagonist Lok observes the New Men, he is attracted by their lifestyle and language. The journey of Lok from a happy, pre-linguistic state towards the comprehension of language is marked by his journey from innocence to experience. As his conscience dawns, he comes to realize the evil in human beings and yet he is drawn irresistibly to them. According to Jacques Lacan, the child's entry into the "symbolic" stage from "imaginary" stage signifies his entry into a domain of politics. The symbolic stage "in which the child enters society and social relations" is politicized with the interventions of power, especially the threat of the father and the separation from the mother (Nayar 75-76). If the "imaginary" of Lacan is heavenly bliss which Lok enjoys prior to his dawn of conscience, the child-like creature's entry into the "symbolic" or linguistic domain of the New Men connotes his fall from paradise who now feels the horror of the wor(l)d. It signals the onset of his entry into an unhappy and frightened mode of living characterized by the "lack" of pre-linguistic innocence. As Lok comes in contact with the New Men he starts conceptualizing the evil in their nature. Nevertheless, he is gradually attracted towards their lives. Once he conceptualizes their language, logical deduction of the chain of events occurs within him and the pictures get clearer in his mind. But this acquiring of language and conscience makes him aware of the evil in human nature which now seeks to engulf him in darkness. Golding, observes Paul Crawford, is concerned "to highlight the destructive quality that comes with intelligence" while he portrays the Neanderthals as "sensitive and gentle and bound to their kin by a collective consciousness" (68).

Like *Lord of the Flies*, this novel of Golding is also full of symbolic and metaphoric significances. Both the novels present a forest as an idyllic, serene and benevolent world which resembles the biblical paradise, and both the novels end in the destruction of the forests by men which is similar to the Fall. Fire is another such symbol which the boys in *Lord of the Flies* use as a means to call for rescue and also as a means of destruction, while in *The Inheritors* the New Men's use of fire is perceived with awe by the Neanderthals who are afraid of it. Blood is another strong image of violence and brutality inherent in the human nature. When Lok and Fa was wandering in search of the missing Ha, they come across "blood on the rock by the water […] and a little milk" (*The Inheritors* 114). While blood is the symbol of violence, milk is of innocence. The predominance of blood over milk emphasizes the raging evil in the New Men who has abducted Ha, Liku and the little one. Then, blood is used in their sacrificial ritual which is against the norms of humanity. Again, Lok observes the lovemaking of Tuami and Vivani who are smeared with blood: "There was blood on the woman's face and the man's shoulder, the fighting done and peace restored between them, or whatever state it was restored, they played together" (*The Inheritors* 177). The new people are evil, violent and blood-thirsty. The names of the new people also signify evil, as Waleed Abid Hussein points out in a chart (31):



Unlike the Neanderthals, there is no compassion, meekness and sympathy in the New Men. The New Men in *The Inheritors* exterminate the innocent and meek Neanderthals to inherit the earth while their progenies destroy a paradise-like part of the earth in *Lord of the Flies*. Hussein argues that *The Inheritors*, written out of Golding's bitter and frightening experiences of the World Wars, displays his disbelief in Man in general whose nature is to capture what is others by violence and dominate over others. Golding's representation of the Neanderthal life is in sharp contrast to the life of *Homo sapiens*:

> The Neanderthals are true representatives of those humans who want to live their life peacefully and harmoniously. […] While the new people are the perspicuous examples for those people who try to intrude upon other places and occupy them by force and oppression as demonstrated and seen in the two world wars. (Hussein 32)

The very name "New Men" is sardonic as there is nothing good in them. They unequivocally reveal their id-ridden passions for power and violence, and thus amplify "the irony of intellectual evolution when a full account of humankind's history of violence, war and destruction is made" (Crawford 73).

Crawford argues that the "fantastic" in *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors* is a technique of "literature of atrocity" which is significant "in terms of the Holocaust experience, and its theme of demonization joins the noncelebratory carnivalesque in foregrounding exclusionary gestures toward the Jews" (50). The critic finds striking similarities between the adolescent boys' hunting of pigs as well as the extermination of the Neanderthals by the New Men and the Nazi execution of the Jews during the World War II. In both the cases, however, Golding adheres to the fable form of writing to give expression to his Christian sentiments which is at once respectful and reactionary. Golding's discomfiture with the evil in human nature is characterized by the intangibility of evil obfuscating the boundaries of spaciotemporality. The evil in question might come into visibility at the starkest events of the World Wars but the continuum of evil has been accompanying Man since his very existence. Christianity attempts to rationalize and discipline the essentially chaotic human psyche with its sermon of virtues and ethics, and as such, the ambition is bound to fail. Golding draws upon and transgresses from the Christian axioms to expound the paradox of Man's inheritance of the earth—neither the New Men in *The Inheritors* nor the boys in *Lord of the Flies* substantiates the claim for spiritual betterment because both of them represent the end of innocence. What makes Golding's version of "paradise lost" further remarkable is its contextualization in the war-torn England undulating at the dusk of humanity.

WORKS CITED

- Baker, James R. "The Meaning of the Beast." *Readings on* Lord of the Flies. Ed. Clarice Swisher. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2002. 75-82. Print.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *William Golding's* Lord of the Flies. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008. Print.
- Crawford, Paul. "Literature of Atrocity: *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors*." *Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside Down.* Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2002. 50-80. Print.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. *Gutenberg.org*. Project Gutenberg, n.d. Web. 21 Jul. 2015.

- Dent, Nicholas. *Rousseau*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.
- Golding, William. *The Inheritors*. 1955. London: Faber and Faber, 1977. Print.
- ---. Interview by James R. Baker. *Twentieth Century Literature* 28.2 (1982): 130-70. Web. *JSTOR*. 5 Mar. 2015.
- ---. *Lord of the Flies*. 1954. New Delhi: UBSPD, 2004. Print.
- *The Holy Bible*. *Gutenberg.org*. Project Gutenberg, n.d. Web. 11 Jul. 2015. King James Vers.
- 10. Hussein, Waleed Abid. "Sin Versus Innocence in William Golding's *The Inheritors*." *Journal of the College of Arts, University of Basrah* 46 (2008): 23-36. Web. 15 Jul. 2015.
- Kinkead-Weeks, Mark, and Ian Gregor. *William Golding: A Critical Study*. London: Faber and Faber, 1970. Print.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. New Delhi: Pearson, 2006. Print.
- Ray, Bishnupada. "Language as Modes of Imagination and Consciousness in William Golding's *The Inheritors*." *Language and Aesthetics*. Ed. Raghunath Ghosh and Bhaswati B. Chakrabarti. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2013. 76-99. Print.
- Vuuren, Marijke van. "Good Grief: *Lord of the Flies* as a Post-War Rewriting of Salvation History." *Literator* 25.2 (2004): 1-25. Web. 9 Jul. 2015.
- Wells, H. G. "The Grisly Folk." *Gutenberg.net.au*. Project Gutenberg (Australia), n.d. Web. 15 Jul. 2015.