INTRODUCTION

William Golding was deeply disturbed by the atrocities perpetrated by the “civilized” world during World War II. He told Jack Biles, “We all saw a hell of a lot in the war that can’t be accounted for except on the basis of original evil. Man is born to sin. Set him free and he will be a sinner, not Rousseau’s ‘noble savage’”.

The cataclysmic experience of war fosters negative emotions like hate, alienation, nihilism and despair, for war is a tragic cleavage between nations blinded by hatred. Golding gives a powerful account of the influence of the war in his essay “Fable”:

Before the second world war I believed in the perfectibility of social man.... [A]fter the war I did not because I was unable to. I had discovered what man could do to another. I am not talking of one man killing another with a gun, or dropping a bomb on him or blowing him up or torpedoing him. I am thinking of the vileness beyond all words that went on, year after year, in the totalitarian states ....there were things done during that period from which I still have to avert my mind lest I should be physically sick. They were not done by the headhunters of New Guinea, or by some primitive tribe in the Amazon. They were done, skillfully, coldly, by educated men, doctors, lawyers, by men with a tradition of civilization behind them, to beings of their own kind.... but anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or wrong in the head.

General commentaries on post war English society and literature have noted Golding’s concern with contemporary events. Stuart Laing argues that “the reversal of texts of high bourgeois optimism” in Golding’s early work, and his focus on the irrational, follows his participation in and reflection on World War II. Alan Sinfield maintains that the reversal of imperialist ideology following
World War II atrocities was invoked by reference to the “savage” quality of human nature. He contends: “The myth of universal savagery is the final, desperate throw of a humiliated and exhausted European humanism”. Of course, Sinfield rightly draws attention to the contradictions inherent in a “savage” myth that is “informed by both an anxiety about and a continuing embroilment in imperialist ideology”. William Golding has, thus, achieved the unique distinction of being both a fabulist and a realist. He deals with the barbarity of so-called “civilized” persons. Events during World War II formed his opinion about this attitude towards “civilized” persons. Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub highlight the paradox of timeless novels that remain contemporary. Gabriel Josipovici has also expressed similar views.

Golding satirises the perverted attitude of the “civilized” persons. He reminds the English that there is a very thin line dividing civilized behaviour and utter savagery in Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors. There is a need to be vigilant about a return to totalitarianism in the future. This message is strengthened in his next two novels, Pincher Martin and Free Fall.

The reversal of binary oppositions—Civilization and Savagery, in this case, takes place in William Golding’s major novels when the so-called “civilized” characters reveal their selfishness, greed, possessiveness and cruelty. The innocent and gentle characters, on the other hand, become victims of the diabolical perversions of the civilized characters. William Golding was shaken by the atrocities perpetrated by the “civilized” world during World War II. He did not relate the progress of civilization to refinement and peace. The characters, in his novels, who are supposed to be refined turn out to be greedy, selfish, egotistical and cruel.

The boys’ landing on the island, the dead parachutist’s figure, the appearance of Naval officer in the end of Lord of the Flies point to the barbarity of “civilized” persons. Similarly, in The Inheritors, the New People, who are the progenitors of Homo Sapiens, indulge in “racially cleansing” the territory of “ogres”. This subverts the concept of evolutionary progress and the achievements
of civilization. Golding is one of those writers who deals with both contemporary and perennial issues. In his novel like *Lord of the Flies*, Golding raises both the universal concern about mankind’s barbarity or inhumanity and also instantiates a particular historical occurrence of such behaviour during World War II. According to Paul Crawford, Golding instantiates a particular historical occurrence of humankind’s barbarity in his reference to the Jewish Holocaust in *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors*.

Golding does not consider Good and Evil as irreconcilable Absolutes. He feels an infinite curiosity to know the other side of the known. In *Free Fall*, Sammy asks Beatrice ""What is it like to be you?"" He wishes to fathom her feminine mystery of sweetness, vulnerability, her mind and body. Sammy Mountjoy’s dilemma is that of modern man’s free fall in space and morality. His interior monologue dramatizes the psychological conflicts that torment the psyche of mankind torn between science and spirituality. In *Lord of the Flies*, Simon is killed and his body is beautified. The sea water dresses Simon’s coarse hair with brightness. Stephen Medcalf says, “The grief, terror and wrath of *Lord of the Flies* and all Golding’s novels coexist with an enjoyment of the process of things and an ecstatic apprehension of beauty”.

Golding’s heroes become aware of the evil in the human condition as a psychic reality and try to integrate it, instead of dismissing it. Pincher Martin declares, “Why drag in good and evil when the serpent lies coiled in my own body?”

War hysteria provokes sadism and pushes man to barbaric acts. The transformation of Sammy in *Free Fall* is a pointer, as is the ruthless conduct of Lord Talbot, in *Close Quarters*: “I am coming to. A weapon for the love to God! A meat axe-sledge hammer- anything. I will engage to carve and eat the first Frenchman I come across.” A person’s savagery is boosted by the brute force of violence and he becomes more aggressive.

In all his novels, Golding establishes the fallacy of linking civilization with peace, refinement and gentility. He was irate that the western world was
deeply influenced by the theories of Marx, Darwin and Freud. He writes: “The simplistic popularisation of their ideas has thrust our world into a mental straitjacket from which we can only escape by the most anarchic violence. These men were reductionist. . . I do indeed believe that at bottom the violence of the last thirty years and it may be the hyperviolence of the century has been less a revolt against the exploitation of man by man, less a sexual frustration, or an adventure in the footsteps of Oedipus, certainly less a process of natural selection operating in human society, than a revolt against reductionism, even when the revolutionary, or it may be the terrorist, does not know it”\textsuperscript{12}

Civilization was greatly influenced by the Industrial Revolution. It has been the largest, most far reaching and the least appreciated influence on human lives. It has moral, social and spiritual implications. T.H. Huxley and his successors destroyed the sanctity of traditional Christianity. Reason became the sovereign God. The soul was a fiction and the emotions could be rationalised in terms of hormones. There was a popular delusion among scientists--which they share, incidentally, with primitive witch-doctors--that by naming a thing they render it harmless. Logic and natural selection stuck their labels on the universe. The smug religious superiority of the early Victorians gave place to a similar scientific superiority of the early anthropologists. It is true that the development of science and the Industrial Revolution had a far reaching effect on humanity but Golding did not have a positive view of the scientific humanism generated thereby. He distrusted the scientific humanism of H.G. Wells and the Darwinian theory of evolution. If Darwin’s theory of natural selection were true, we should have perfect humans today, both biologically and culturally. But it is not so. Golding opines:

If you believe in evolution, then it seems to me that you believe in a pattern which is most remarkable for its rigidity. I don’t believe that the Darwinian explanation of evolution is adequate. It’s rather like looking at the sunset and saying, oh, somebody struck a match. 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 appear to be to the disadvantage of the species. It seems to me that there’s a screw loose somewhere... I kick the Darwinian idea by a kind of instinct, kind of feeling there’s something wrong somewhere. 

Philosophy always proclaimed the fact that there was no dead matter anywhere in the universe. Darwin’s theory reflects the ethos of its day by over-emphasising competition and under-emphasising human values. Perhaps, because of this reflection, the theory of ‘the origin of species’ became rapidly and bleakly influential as a work of biological fact. Golding refused to link the progress of civilization with peace and refinement. He himself denies the importance of historically specific “symptoms”. He prefers an Aeschylean commitment to “looking for the root of the disease”. Yet, his fiction retains what Gabriel Josipovici calls “immediate relevance” and betrays political engagement even when he might deny it. Paul Crawford in his book *Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside down* has said that Golding’s politics are implicit rather than explicit in his fiction. Crawford further argues that Golding “hangs on to the dream of giving an impartial ‘diagnosis’ of the human condition while at the same time satirically engaging with contemporary ‘symptoms’ of that condition” (PHWG, 3). This divided or ambivalent form of ‘commitment’ can be seen to be part of what W.L. Webb has described as the ‘combination of contradictions’ at the heart of Golding’s fiction that “has baffled many a thesis-hunter: that strange mixture of the practical and the mysterious, the bluff and the sensitive, comic and solemn-in fact, the whole English bundle of contradictions, raised to a high creative power”.

Paul Crawford’s historicised and politicised reading of William Golding’s major novels is significant as it tries to probe Golding’s satirical way of dismantling the façade of civilization. He tells us that in reality, the English society is as cruel and violent as the Nazis were. This contention offers us an important aspect of Golding’s work. It shows his hatred of reductionism, violence and the atrocities perpetrated by the “civilized” world.
Lewis Mumford has spoken about “the invisible breakdown in our civilization,” the “erosion of values, the dissipation of humane purposes, the denial of any distinction between good or bad, right or wrong, the reversion to sub-human levels of conduct.” Man has rapidly extended the range and quantity of his knowledge, but advanced little toward happiness and well-being. A person may devise numerous plans and organisations for gaining greater security and comfort, yet he suffers from intellectual and emotional insecurity because he is uncertain about the meaning of life, the nature of the world in which he lives, and the kind of life he wants to live with his fellows.

Human civilization has witnessed great advances in knowledge, general science, technology, agriculture, medicine, social sciences and education. Longevity of life has taken place along with economic prosperity. The extension of the “age of automation” will undoubtedly eliminate drudgery. Controlling new sources of energy has changed our lives. Along with these advances, we have witnessed in our world a great struggle for the minds and loyalties of men. There is widespread confusion and possibly disintegration among people. Albert William Levi remarks, “There is in the climate of the modern world a sense of impending disaster, a rootlessness of the person, a pervasive terseness which points to certainties dissolved and emotional centres displaced”.

Civilization is basically a set of ideas and ideals by which man lives. These ideas and ideals are embodied in rules of living and in institutions. When they are lost sight of, or fail to motivate, civilization either changes or tends to decline. With man’s rapidly increasing knowledge and power over the physical and intellectual world, his potentialities for good as well as for evil are greater than ever before. The quality of life we lead depends in a large part on whether we have the intelligence, the sense of responsibility, the courage, and the determination to reconstruct a set of values to which we can relate and in which we can believe.

We live in an age of uncertainty and change, when many of the older beliefs and ways of doing things have become inadequate. Under such
conditions, a new scale of values and a sense of direction are needed. Just as we feel physical discomfort in the midst of material disorder and moral discomfort in the face of cruelty and injustice, so there is intellectual discomfort in the presence of fragmentary and confused views of the world. Without some unity of outlook and response, there may result, as Irwin Edman has pointed out, “a divided self, which in turn may lead to psychological tension or nervous collapse”\textsuperscript{18}

The definition of man as a “rational animal” has long been the measure for the West. In this way reason’s freedom functioned in the locus of unreason. The animal lost its negative aspect when philosophy became anthropology. Animals came to be seen as a positive form of an evolution between the determinism of nature and the reason of man. The formula of the “rational man” has changed its meaning and unreason is not considered the origin of all possible reason. On close examination, it becomes clear that the animal belongs to an anti-nature, to a negativity that threatens order and by its frenzy, endangers the positive wisdom of nature\textsuperscript{19}.

C.S. Lewis remarks that “Civilization by which I mean barbarism made strong and luxurious by mechanical power hates civility from below; sanctity rebukes it from above”\textsuperscript{20} Golding’s theme in \textit{Lord of the Flies} is that Civilization is a moral paradox, a mere facade of refinement. His world is pre-social and atavistic in its features. He studies the constant battle between primitive levels of response and deceptive consciousness viz., the beast and the human. In short, “Golding rejects the idea of progress through history, and history figures in his work as a paradox…. there is a deeply modernistic and post-Freudian elements in Golding’s fictive universe”\textsuperscript{21}. The brutalities of World War II proves that history is not a saga of continuous progress. Golding was utterly shaken by these brutalities.

Golding asserted in his Nobel Prize lecture that just as bad money drives out good, so inferior culture drives out superior culture. Ideas often experience a change which probably begins with an erosion from outside. But this erosion
from outside is due to a thought, which has never been an inseparable part of that culture. In the novel *The Inheritors*, the New Men occupy the land of the Neanderthals. They are supposed to exhibit superior culture. But they show their inferiority to the Neanderthals by becoming cruel and violent. Lok is attracted towards the ways of the New Men. It ultimately leads to the destruction of the Neanderthals.

In his novels, Golding concerns himself with what is basic in the human condition, not with the political and social conditions of the moment. He does not talk as an anarchist asserting that everything must be pulled down or blown up in order to make a new start. Golding has described himself as 'a citizen, a novelist and a schoolmaster'. The citizen is concerned with the defects of the society; the schoolmaster with correcting them by proper instruction. The novelist finds appropriate forms of expression for the embodiment of man’s own nature.

Golding has the will-to-instruct which makes him an unusually disciplined writer. Also, he distrusts irrational and intuitive views of literary creation. Samuel Hynes remarks, “The meaning of the work comes first for Golding and then the character or situation. This does not imply that Golding’s meanings took the form of abstract moral propositions which were then clothed in plot”22. According to Golding, a serious preoccupation with the human tragedy is to look for the root of the disease instead of describing the symptoms.

Golding once wrote about the job of the novelist – “His job is to scrape the labels off things, to take nothing for granted, to show the irrational where it exists”23. The framework of Golding’s novels is conceived in terms of traditional Christian symbolism. But Golding seeks to use symbols which are familiar and readily comprehended, preferably those that have sunk into the archetypal consciousness of the European readers. Golding is in search of cosmological truth, and labels do not matter to him. Virginia Tiger has rightly said that Golding takes upon himself “the formidable task of arousing the religious
impulse and restoring to this recalcitrant time the spiritual dimension which is the stuff of vital religious mythopoeia”

Golding demonstrates that the concomitants of civilization can check the tide of savagery only temporarily. Violence is a basic and a baser instinct in man’s psyche. It is a part of the primitive, barbaric self that seeks power, gratification and comfort at any cost. It stems from the negative emotions of anger, hate, jealousy, revenge and pride.

Golding was not a pessimist. His views come closer to George Eliot’s ‘meliorism’. A person should strive to combat evil and doom in the world. This is only possible through compassion, sympathy, solidarity, communication and sharing. Sufferings can be alleviated by bringing forth these qualities in relationships. We remember Sammy’s statement in Free Fall: “To communicate is our passion and our despair” (FF, 251). Sammy is genuinely moved after seeing Beatrice Ifor’s decrepit state – “Suddenly the image of thick Beatrice started up behind my eyes, green, tense and nittering. I covered them with my hand” (FF, 188). Feeling for others makes Sammy’s experience cathartic.

Once William Golding told Frank Kermode: “I see, or bring myself to see, a certain set of circumstances in a particular way. If it is the way everybody sees them then there is no point in writing a book”

Calling Golding a fabulist is not to say that his total story is reducible to a moral proposition. The fact is that Golding’s strong moral assumptions give form and direction to his fictions. We can call Golding’s fiction ‘tropological’ i.e. novels individually ‘suggest a shape in the universe and are constructed as models of such moral shapes or ‘moral models (MM, 100).
Golding compels the reader to stand with one foot in this world and one in the other world of mystery and supernaturalism. It reflects the divided influence of his more spiritually minded mother and the rationalist and scientific nature of his father. Golding forces the reader to confront the ambivalence of human actions in its wartime atrocities, ethical-religious fall out, and post modern productions.

Golding believes in the taint of the Original Sin on man’s soul. This soul longs for the paradisal innocence of Adam in *Lord of the Flies*. It also aspires for the pre-lapsarian innocence of Lok and Fa in *The Inheritors*. Samuel Mountjoy, in *Free Fall*, is poised between the worlds of the flesh and the spirit. Self-awareness shows him the light. He admits to the mad Beatrice — “The innocent and the wicked live in one world – But we are neither the innocent nor the wicked. We are the guilty. We fall down. We crawl on hands and knees. We weep and tear each other” (FF, 7). When Sammy bitterly observes that “there is no bridge” (FF 253) between the worlds of experience and innocence; between the worlds of flesh and spirit, he has felt but not accepted the fire of selfless love that forges all links. This bridge hinted at in *Free Fall* is built by Golding in *The Spire* when Jocelin, the corrupt Dean of Stilbury, gets a four hundred foot spire erected. It is not only “an apocalypse in stone”26 but a sublimation of his phallic lust for Goody. He ruins the lives of Roger, Goody, Pangall and others. His sanctity is a mask of hypocrisy. Jocelin’s perception of the spire on his deathbed is as two eyes that slide together in one vision. Virginia Tiger observes that “Jocelin’s divine exultation of the apple tree completes his spiritual regeneration. The spire connects heaven and earth”.27

Golding was aware of the savagery and darkness in a person’s heart. Golding was fascinated with the idea of darkness. Golding’s parents had desired him to study science. But he was aware of the inadequacy of science to give any answer to him about the terror of darkness which he experienced: “My career was to be a scientific one. Science was busy clearing up the universe. There was no place, in this exquisitely logical universe for the terror of darkness. There was darkness, of course, but it was just darkness, the absence of light; had none of
the looming terror, which I knew night-long in my very bones....". Darkness could be a scientist’s mere ‘absence of light’ or a ‘looming terror’ motivating the actions of men or the mystery through which one must go to find God. In *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph weeps ‘for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart’. Here, ‘darkness’ refers to the evil side of man’s nature. Juxtaposing ‘innocence’ with ‘darkness’ suggests that ‘darkness’ also connotes ‘experience’. Experience means the adult point of view as against the uncorrupted vision of the child. Ironically, on the advice of Piggy, the boys organised themselves to fight like grown-ups. ‘Experience’ is the loss of innocence, exchanged for the dubious benefits of civilisation, itself embodied in the myth of the fall. In, *The Inheritors*, the darkness is the darkness of the strange creatures for the new men. But for Golding, the real darkness is the bleak and uncertain future into which the New Men sail away.

The treatment of darkness in *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors* is not like Golding’s awesome boyhood experience of looking into the Egyptian mummy’s eye. He felt the scalp-tingling sensation of a gaze which was “prepared to go down and through, in darkness” into a central mystery whose exploration was at once dangerous and yet held the promise of a new mode of understanding. Darkness in *Pincher Martin* is the dark night of the soul itself between this life and the surrender to one beyond. In *Free Fall* through Sammy’s ordeal in a completely blacked-out cell, darkness had been made visible and became a source of revelation. This meaning of darkness, in the end, is in total contrast to Sammy’s reference to the innocence/experience dichotomy when he states that he was ‘looking for the beginning of darkness, the point where I began’. *Free Fall* is, thus, governed less by its actual programme i.e. Sammy’s view of things than by its own inner necessities.

For Golding there is a seething cauldron of primitive, barbaric and distorted energies beneath the facade of so-called civilization. His novels explore the hidden springs of man’s socio-sexual desires and needs and their turbulent conflict with conventional mores. “Pincher” Martin is shocked at Mary’s prudish fear of him in the twentieth century. Golding’s irony is implicit. Only a
moralistic Mary or a timid Beatrice in *Free Fall* would consider pre-marital sex an outrage. The mere life of the body, like “Pincher’s” is incomplete. The denial of the body, on the other hand, and the escape into false spiritual adventures such as those that Jocelin lives by, are equally a lie. A person belongs to the earth and lives with the dichotomy of good and evil.

The European novel documents the actual worlds and places a high value on rationality. In contrast, classic American literature is more metaphysical. Melville and Hawthorne made extensive use of allegory and symbol in their works. Although Golding was an Englishman devoted to literary ancestry of British tradition, yet he was most successful when writing like an American. He seemed to be in control when dealing with the remote, the bizarre, and the apocalyptic.

In his novel *Free Fall*, Golding dealt for the first time with normal human relationships in a contemporary setting. Like the European novel, the context had been narrowed down. But like the American novel, the themes still remain large. He is a nostalgic primitivist who postulates some kind of golden age in the past before the fall into the present world in which there has been an increase of scientific knowledge but human qualities lost.

Golding has been called a writer of ‘fables’. But Golding wanted the word ‘fable’ to be replaced by the word ‘myth’. It means, Golding’s novels are usually tight, conceptualised, analogical expressions of moral ideas. Golding accepts the description ‘myths of total explanation’ for his works. His myths are different from those of Joyce or Eliot. For him, strong reaction against new knowledge was an art in love with the primitive. Both terms, fable and myth, are insufficient to describe Golding’s novels because both imply a degree of abstraction and an element of the legendary that his novels simply do not have. It is better to call his novels just novels.

Golding’s civilized stance is inseparable from his religious stance. He favours the innocence which civilization has lost. This was the reason he called himself “a propagandist for Neanderthal man”. In *The Inheritors*, till the last
pages, we watch the enactment of the innocence of the doomed Neanderthal man. Homo Sapiens are intelligent, but they are also capable of doing evil. Neanderthals watch them in bewilderment. Golding points to our incapability of recapturing that innocence of the Neanderthal man. Also, we have lost our natural awe for Oa, the mother-goddess. His concern is the relationship of the individual to the universe and through the universe to God. He searches for the basic truths obscured by the materialism of the present civilization.

William Golding has expressed the hope of a world religion in the future. Walter Sullivan has rightly observed, “One of Golding’s remarkable qualities is his compound of traditional and modern, his curious mix of existentialism and Freudianism with the old heritage of Christian mystery now passing out of vogue” It means that Golding does not have much faith in any religious institutions, dogmas and hierarchies.

A true kind of religion, according to Golding, implies an intense and deep-rooted admiration of something of unique significance. Matty in Darkness Visible deserves this spiritual admiration. Christlike in his self-sacrifice, Matty accepts a position as handyman at Wandicott House School, where he labours for over ten years. Desire to serve is the only shred of selfishness left in Matty. Golding’s definition of religion comes from the journal entry in which Matty writes: “The truth is that between book and since the eyes of my understanding have been opened. What God is not directly breathed into the world by the holy spirit must come down by and through the nature of men” Religion is not just the apprehension of the sacredness in existence; it is a way of life based upon love.

Saintly characters in Golding’s novels, like Simon in Lord of the Flies and Matty in Darkness Visible, point out the significance of intuitive divine sense, merciful love and forgiveness in a person’s life. These qualities can surely make a person’s life purposeful and civilised. The saints awaken us to the fact that this rag-bag personality is not our true being and the deterministic philosophy of life is only a dangerous half-truth. In Darkness Visible, Pedigree recognises in his
sorrow that the dead Matty alone had loved him all along. Matty had found his inner happiness in the ritual of the Old Testament and in the mysteries of the New Testament, particularly the book of the Revelation. Matty, in Pedigree’s dying vision, is transformed into God who shows unique compassion beyond human comprehension.

Golding’s saints concern themselves with psychical phenomena and with religious and mystical experience. Both evil and suffering have been allotted roles in human development from the very beginning. The novels of Golding have been able to arouse mystic otherness in his readers through his saints.

Golding’s credo is Conradian in two respects. Firstly, the worth of a man is judged by his behaviour in a crisis. As Golding says, his themes are concerned with “man at an extremity, man obsessed, man drowning in the literal sea or in the sea of his own ignorance”33. Secondly, the belief in the presence of a treacherous streak, some malice or malignity in nature that threatens man’s fate or honour. The tragic vanity of a will that is valiant but whose conduct is cowardly is seen in Jim and Sammy. But Golding’s credo is neither wholly secular like Conrad’s nor religious in Greene’s sense of the word. Greene finds that evil has a spiritual glamour and spiritual goodness is often linked to moral weakness in his novels.

According to him, man has gone blind to the real truth of life by taking the path of greed, selfishness and cruelty. In his madness, generated by self-centeredness, man has forgotten that the true salvation is through love, compassion and sympathy for others. Man is cushioned in smugness; he has become his own God. Golding breaks down these illusions. To him, the only hope for humanity is self-knowledge.
NOTES


8. William Golding, *Free Fall* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 103. Subsequent references in the chapter will be cited as FF.


10. William Golding, *Pincher Martin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p. 163. Subsequent references in the chapter will be cited as PM.


