CHAPTER V

PLOTS AND PLOT-SITUATIONS
R.S. Crane's influential essay 'The Concept of Plot' does not see plot merely as a sequence of events. His view is that "the plot of any novel or drama is the particular temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character and thought that constitute the matter of his invention."(1) Robert Liddel also holds almost the same view when he asserts that "character and plot are only artificially separable."(2) But they need to be separated for an analytical study and while recognizing the manner in which they are interfused, and realizing the limitations of such divisions. Chief among the ways in which a writer expresses his theme is that of placing characters of a certain sort in situations of certain kinds and showing their actions and reactions. Things happen and things are done, and they illustrate character or contribute to the externalization of the theme. It is, therefore, interesting to see how a novelist or dramatist manipulates events and situations.

It has been rightly remarked that part of the success

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of *Lord of the Flies* rests on its "combination of narrative momentum and thematic clarity." (3) Critics unanimously accept Golding's statement that the book is a fable. It is the 'deliberate translation' of an initial proposition into dramatic terms. Golding's purpose is to strip human beings of the cloak of civilization and to show how they really behave away from the restraints of society. The setting is a deserted coral island somewhere in the South seas. The island is perhaps meant only to be a microcosm of the world and the boys, though young, behave like adults. From this basic plot-situation, the story proceeds to unfold a series of incidents and events. The story deals with their regression to savagery from the initial intention of establishing a civilization modelled on the English society. In fact the change is from the Coral Island glamour to a blood-thirsty primitivism. The boys boastfully resolved at first:

"After all, we're not savages. We're English; and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things." (4)

But they had to come face to face with irrational fears, irresponsibility and blood-lust underlying their skin-deep

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4 *Lord of the Flies*, p. 47.
civilization. The story has an organic plot, which is well-knit and dynamic. The incidents follow one another naturally. Action emanates from character, and character emerges from action. The whole narrative is well-integrated and convincing. Given such a situation, which is not improbable, the events are possible as well as plausible.

Two of the boys, going out for having a bath, discover a conch and blow on it. The sound invites other boys and an assembly is formed. True to British democratic tradition, they elect a leader. The conch becomes the symbol of order and beauty. But the instincts of the boys make it impossible for the leader to control the society effectively. Jack, Ralph's rival for leadership, is easily overwhelmed by his instinct for violence. He sets himself after pigs and impulsively knows that painting his face would make himself more accessible to the primitive job. The boys who are engaged in shelter building slip away to play and swim. The fire-keepers neglect the fire and go hunting. Everything else follows naturally.

The only incident that looks like an intentional manipulation is that of Simon meeting the Lord of the Flies. The scene is vital to the meaning of the novel. On second thoughts one learns that the scene is well planned and it
fits well into the total scheme of the work. Ever from his first appearance Simon behaves strangely. At the first assembly he faints and later he frightens the boys by walking about at night alone. With a 'high seriousness' he faces everything on the island. And it is he who understands "mankind's essential illness", who tells the boys frankly, though hesitantly:

"May be there is a beast."

\[\]"What I mean is....... may be it's only us.\]"(5)

It is not incredible that such a visionary should go alone into the forest or faint in front of the sow's head on a pointed stick. It is totally convincing in the context when the Lord of the Flies tells him in his epileptic fit:

"I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?"(6)

That the boy could have had such an experience, obviously a hallucination, is well within the bounds of possibility. It is another thing that, while fully plausible the scene has an air of contrivance and that the words seem to be too explicit a statement of the theme of the story.

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5 Lord of the Flies, p.97.
6 Ibid., p.158.
Simon's ritual murder occurs in the novel as the direct outcome of his queer nature and the other boys' fear of the unknown. The background is ideal for such a frenzied act. The sky was heavily overcast and thunders shook the earth. Under "the threat of the sky\(^{(7)}\) the terror-stricken boys perform a ritual dance chanting:

"Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!\(^{(8)}\)

and Simon comes into the circle after having discovered the mystery of the beast on the mountain. He is easily taken for the beast and they instantly decide to 'do him in'.

Briefly, we can say that the plot of \textit{Lord of the Flies} is an Aristotelian whole with a beginning, a middle and an end. Aristotle would have been pleased with the Reversal of the Situation. The Victorian attitude with which they started is shattered and the protagonist, Ralph, who screamed with delight at the prospect of a world without grownups at the beginning is initiated into the cruel world. Ralph "wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy.\(^{(9)}\)

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Lord of the Flies}, p.167\(^{(7)}\)
\item Ibid.\(^{(8)}\)
\item Ibid., p.223.\(^{(9)}\)
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Though James Gindin suspects that the last scene undermines the force of the novel through the final rescue, it is not perhaps as bad as that. Where are the boys taken away? The naval officer with his "trim cruiser and sub-machine gun" is certainly taking the boys into a bigger world of war, destruction and cruelty. It is a rescue only in a technical and limited sense.

*The Inheritoms* is a novelistic presentation of the theme of conflict between the innocent and the self-conscious, where the innocent give way before the intelligent. The characters in the novel are two groups of people — the pre-rational, innocent Neanderthal men and the rational, self-conscious post-adamite men, who are our true ancestors. It has an unusual situation of the pre-rational man, at the point of extinction, meeting the inheritors, the evolutionally more advanced post-adamite men. The novel has a two-layer plot to drive home the theme. At one level it is the story of the extermination of the Neanderthal men. At the other, it is the story of a guilty, self-conscious and fleeing tribe. If the second plot is largely episodical, the first one is fairly organic. Incidents reveal character as well as directly lead to other incidents. The incident of the missing log leads to Mal's death which leaves the innocent without a proper leader to guide them. And this situation gives rise to other situations which follow logically. These
incidents leads to the rescue attempt of the abducted infant by Lok and Fa, the last couple of the race. This makes Fa wounded and desperate and she sits brooding on the bank of the river heedless of the danger caused by the changing seasons. When an uprooted tree propelled by the huge flood carries her away over the fall, making her one with the fallen, Lok is left alone. The misery of being left alone is unbearable to him and when he discovers the most horrid act of the new man, that is, their cannibalism, he is too shocked to wish to survive. One does not wonder why he does not attempt to save himself from the falling avalanche. The incidents follow naturally, directly as the consequence of earlier incidents. Through these closely linked incidents the narrator reveals character and explores the theme.

The new men's activities are vaguely focused since we see them through the uncomprehending eyes of the Neanderthal Lok. In one of the most obscure chapters of the book, Lok and Fa observe the magic religion of the people. It is an episode primarily meant to portray their character. It shows the nature of their religion — totemic and sacrificial; their nature — violent and antagonistic. Apart from these revelations the scene does not serve the purpose of advancing the plot.
Even the last scene of their fleeing from the island is not integrated to the previous incidents. Tuami's sharpening an ivory to dagger point, treated in detail is another episode. When he abandons the idea of usurping Marlan's position, saying,

"What was the use of sharpening it against a man? Who would sharpen a point against the darkness of the world?" (10),

we feel that the scene is deliberately there to make the novelist's point.

Connecting these two different stories we can say that the action of the story is the inheriting of the earth by the new men who can just as well be described as usurpers, and the book dramatizes a significant landmark in the history of mankind, a period of transition during which the "old" has yielded place to a not very attractive "new".

*Pincher Martin, Free Fall and The Pyramid* are largely episodical. In the first of these, Martin's struggle for survival on a barren rock establishes the story at the realistic level. Along with his actual actions, at the time, we have a number of flashbacks. The novel is obviously designed to illustrate character rather than to tell a story of actions and events. As Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor note the

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10 *The Inheritors*, p.231.
novel's growth is "not of action but of consciousness." (11)
 Though his actual struggle on the rock has, ostensibly, the appearance of a tale of Man against the Elements, his actions there clearly indicate the nature of the man. The flashbacks perform the same function of character revelation. It is not difficult to observe that in Pincher Martin there is no change of character or fortune in the traditional manner. From the beginning to the end Martin is the same — a proud, unyielding, God-defying sensualist whose excessive egoism converts him into a greedy monster. Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor see Pincher Martin as "a maze in which all paths lead back to the centre, and the centre is a single, simple image of a Being reacting to Non-Being." (12)

The flashbacks are a series of stills which focus on the nature of Martin. They are slightly different from the cinematic technique which explains how the present has evolved from the past. The flashback scenes in Pincher Martin are not meant to explain how Martin happened to be on the rock. Instead they all concentrate on his greedy, selfish and proud nature. Martin's behaviour on the rock, again, is primarily illustrative of his nature. His careful planning, relentless

12 Ibid., p.159.
will to survive and unyielding attempts to tame the rock—all reveal his unwillingness to submit to the pattern of the world, because he is a pattern-maker who wishes to impose his will on the world.

The plot of *Free Fall* is a series of episodes cleverly strung together. The narrator-protagonist, now a middle-aged and very successful painter, travels up and down through the past to find a pattern to which his experiences can be fitted. The incidents are not logically integrated and even the chronology is violated. The incidents narrated in the novel can be conveniently grouped into three periods—the innocent childhood, the highly disturbed adolescence and the guilty, self-examining adulthood. The flashback technique together with the stream-of-consciousness device, makes it possible for the narrator to shuffle the incidents so as to present them in the order of their significance to him. The childhood scenes, disconnected as they are, present the child as innocent, in spite of his trespasses. But the incidents of adolescence are linked, and they form a single unity even if the order of narration is altered. But in the existing order the incidents are scattered and the novelist's manipulation of the order of arrangement is meant to bring about the desired effect. For example, Chapter Four is concerned with the Sammy-Beatrice relationship and the
subsequent fall. Five chapters later, the narration veers round to their relationship again. In between we see the Sammy-Taffy affair, Dr. Halde, the rectory, the cell, the release and the new vision episodes. This timeshift is skilfully contrived to begin from the fallen man to the nature of his fall and his reactions to such a situation. The hero is twice put in an unusual situation of having to face himself, first in the rectory and then in the dark cell of Dr. Halde. Dr. Halde's locking him up in a dark cell is a natural outcome of Sammy's refusal to reveal the information regarding the largescale escape. But the scene of Sammy's interrogation has nothing to do with any of his past deeds or his character.

The novel, in spite of its flashback and the stream-of-consciousness technique, is in the picaresque tradition. True to the tradition, the hero is a bastard. From Rotten Row, a slum, he has climbed the steps to the Paradise Hill. But on his way he has fallen, and the memory of it torments him in Paradise Hill. Delbaere-Garant rightly believes that the bridge links the different episodes in the novel. He observes,

"In the middle there is the real bridge in South London linking together the concrete and the figurative and giving coherence to the various
threads of meaning scattered throughout the novel."(13)

The scene at Dr. Halde's room reverses Sammy's earlier situation. Sammy had tortured Beatrice through his questionings and he was irritated by her answer "May be."(14) Here, under the psychiatrist's interrogation, the torturer is tortured, the questioner is questioned. There is a complete reversal of the situation when Sammy answers "I do not know."(15) The all-too-certain rationalist is reduced to the not-so-certain prisoner. Later he cries instinctively for help like an animal. The rationalist who had denied the spirit behind creation becomes aware of a mysterious power outside himself. The scene at the mental institution, another detached episode, shows a deepening of Sammy's newly resurrected faith in the unknown. Dr. Enticott's remarks seem to convey the author's attitude rather too obviously. One suspects that the scene has been contrived solely for providing an occasion for these remarks. But Garant sees a unifying element in this scene. He comments:

"Beatrice urinates on her shoes as did Minnie in the

14 Free Fall, p. 88.
15 Ibid., p. 150.
infants' school, thereby linking the end with the beginning."(16)

Whether the narrator connects things through this scene or through the bridge imagery, the episodes appear unlinked and this may be one of the reasons for the book's failure.

Golding's last novel, The Pyramid, is not written in the vein of "high seriousness" which characterizes the other books. The plot, if it can be called a plot at all, is rather simple — three separate and disconnected incidents in the life of the protagonist. This episodic plot in the picaresque tradition is linked through the narrator-protagonist. About the unity of the events, Leighton Hodson rightly comments:

"There are three separate parts which are on the level of events, only temuably connected. There are several themes, however, that bind them more closely together and also a narrator — Oliver."(17)

The first episode is perhaps the most important. Eighteen-year-old Oliver discovers sex with the socially inferior Evie. Oliver is, certainly, not in love with her. The series of incidents within this affair reveal to the protagonist the dirt and squalor associated with sex.

About the nature of this human relationship, he comes to the conclusion that it is "life's lavatory."(18) After this discovery, Oliver goes to Oxford and Evie to London. Their coming together again paves the way for a mysterious ending to the episode. When Oliver insults her with the toast, "bottoms up"(19) she announces loudly to the people present in the bar that Oliver had raped her when she was fifteen. Stupefied, Oliver beats a hasty retreat with Evie shouting:

"So you can go on telling an' laughing, see? Telling an' laughing — Me'n' Dad."(20)

Oliver broods in vain "on this undiscovered person and her curious slip of the tongue."(21) The protagonist, through his experience with Evie, makes at least two discoveries — his own guilt and his inability to love and Evie's "masochistic dependence on sex".

The second section of the novel is about Oliver's participation in a crude drama staged by the Stilbourne Operatic Society. A series of incidents as well as his talks with Evelyn De Tracy, the professional director from London,

18 The Pyramid, p.91.
19 Ibid., p.109.
20 Ibid., p.110.
21 Ibid., p.111.
only help to aggravate his already evident dislike for the Society's mediocrity and meanness. Golding's excessive thematic concern, at the expense of plot and character, is discernible from the fact that no effort has been made to unify the different parts.

The final unit, again, displays the same themes. Golding in his new tragi-comic tone develops the character at the cost of plot. Oliver witnesses some of the incidents, some are reported to him by Henry, yet others by his mother. He learns things about Miss Bounce from the local chronicler also. These incidents, mostly disconnected, focus on her loveless life. The influence of a possessive father and her subsequent immersion in music turn her graceless and mannish. Oliver returns from her grave asserting:

"I never liked you! Never!"

(22)

The plot in The Pyramid is a sequence of disconnected events such as we might see in a 'stream-of-consciousness' novel. But The Spire is entirely different in the matter of plot. It has a Serooelean plot turning on reversal of the situation and recognition. The plot consists of a series of discoveries with the background of the building of the spire assisting him to

22 The Pyramid, p.213.
dig into his own subconscious and unconscious. The discoveries ultimately show him his own true self.

When the novel opens, Jocelin is wild with joy. It is a long-awaited day, a day when the construction of the spire has begun. The protagonist's state of ecstatic joy is presented through the beauty of the day. Soon the conflict in him between Faith and Reason surfaces. The external conflicts are meant to represent Jocelin's internal struggle. Externally an atmosphere of tension mounts up.

The action of the book, in spite of the details of the progress in the construction of the spire, really concerns Jocelin's progress from ignorance to enlightenment. He discovers the "tragic hiatus between heavenly vision and earthly actualization." (23) He learns of the true cost of the materialization of his vision. Yet the Vision is more important to him than the cost. In his monomaniac passion, he destroys, or rather tacitly becomes a party to the destruction of Pangall and Goody Pangall. Roger goes to pieces because of him. A worker falls from the scaffolding and dies. The final recognition is:

"I traded four people for a stone hammer." (24)

24 *The Spire*, p.205.
The all-powerful Jocelin is indicted at the Visitor's enquiry and he is deprived of the deanship. At the end Jocelin goes to seek forgiveness from Roger who pushes him away, crying, "You stinking corpse!" Jocelin goes back, in memory, to the days before the construction began, and discovers the most horrid things about himself: He had arranged Goody's marriage with Pangall knowing that the latter was impotent. The main action of the novel is this emergence of what he knew subconsciously to the level of the conscious. Together with this, Jocelin learns a lesson from the actual work on the spire, that is, that no human actions are simple, and that, in his folly, man cannot foresee the consequences of his actions.

As Samuel Hynes aptly describes it, the movement of the plot is from "Jocelin's first joyous confidence in God's imperative to his final complex comprehension." (25)

He continues:

"There are few strong scenes and those that are potentially powerful — the tormenting and murder of the verger in the fourth chapter, for example, and the death of his wife in the seventh — are treated sketchily." (26)

26 Ibid.
Hynes rightly remarks that "it is a novel without strong characterization and effective scenes of interacting personalities." (27) Though it lacks these two valuable fictional elements, he concludes that it has other compensations in its magnificent symbol.

Perhaps there is no need to be so grudging in one's approval of the novel. There may not be many 'strong scenes' of the kind mentioned, but there wouldn't have been much point in having more of them, for the effect would rather have been one of sensationalism. As for characterization, the story really belongs to one man, Jocelin, like Dr. Faustus in Marlowe's play. The absence of a number of strong characters really does not matter in such a case. The experience of reading this story of a dominating and blindly obstinate person, with its clash between the virtuous intention outside and the wicked weakness within, should be its defence against such charges. We get absorbed in watching the struggles of this tortured and cruel man who is very much like his own spire rising shakily above a stinking cellar.

Summing up, one can note how Golding's plot-structure varies from novel to novel, according to the needs of the

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27 Samuel Hynes, op.cit., p. 45.
theme. The episodic variety predominates since that is most convenient for illustration of character and, often, for the presentation of an idea. It is difficult to say that he is a great master of plot-construction, but there is no denying the fact that he generally exhibits considerable skill in this art. Well-chosen, well-devised incidents are integrated in a narrative which holds our interest.