CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
For many persons and for a number of purposes, contemporary history begins with the Second World War. The incidents at Belsen and Hiroshima have so changed our ways of thinking that the world after 1945 looks new and different. But when we come to literature, the word 'contemporary' is to be understood somewhat more broadly. Flaubert, Proust and Henry James opened the doors of modern fiction. Their modernity, as Anthony Burgess rightly points out, lies in their "refined subtlety of sensibility, the eagerness to probe character and motive, and over-scrupulous prose-style."(1)

Though Henry James's dates declare him a Victorian, in approach he is a modern. Along with Conrad, Joyce and D.H.Lawrence, he contributed greatly to modern fiction in technique and subject-matter. In their hands, fiction attained the status of art. It is strange that the two World Wars did not produce any great war-novelist in England, in spite of their powerful influence on ways of thought and behaviour.

The First World War accelerated the changes that had begun in the Victorian era. Darwinism had already established

scientifically the kinship between man and the brute, while Freud's analysis of the human mind revealed the primacy of the instincts. Karl Marx was successfully advocating the cause of the proletariat. These discoveries, assisted by the experience of the two wars, have shaken modern man out of complacency, and the stunning revelations have made him more and more confused, critical, anxious, angry or plainly unhappy. Established beliefs were given up, and the so-called higher values — aristocracy and reason — which had been the guiding force of liberal humanism, were declared to be false and even dangerous. They must be swept away so that the masses, politically, and the instincts, psychologically, could have free play. The novel in the twentieth century reflects these fundamental changes and the novelist began to exercise considerable influence on society.

Joseph Conrad and Henry James, at the end of the nineteenth century, were inventing certain fictional devices which some later novelists adopted whole-heartedly. Both understood the wide possibilities of narration from a 'point of view', and they gave a new dimension to the art of storytelling. Conrad demonstrated how a point of view could be skilfully used for indirect moral judgements. Moreover, Conrad presented to the world of fiction a new type of hero, rather, an anti-hero, through *Lord Jim*. These influences, along with
their concern for deeper character analysis, are clearly discernible in the post-Second World War fiction.

Even in the experimental era of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, thousands of straightforward novels with a simple narrative, a well-knit plot and recognisable characters continued to appear. Between 1918 and 1930 significant developments took place in the English novel. *Ulysses* appeared in 1922; *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1925. Moreover, significant writers introduced new ideas about the novel affecting both form and subject-matter.

The greatest contribution to the stream of fiction is Joyce's *Ulysses*. It adds something to the international store of literary technique. As Walten Allen aptly remarks, "Joyce has been one of the great fertilizers of art, one of the great shapers of the form art has taken in our time, comparable to Eliot in poetry, Picasso in painting and Stravinsky in music."\(^2\) *Finnegans Wake*, "the most experimental and most original novel ever written"\(^3\) has become almost wholly a scholar's book. It did not influence contemporary fiction as *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway* did.


Virginia Woolf's dissatisfaction with the traditional form forced her to look for new forms, and she found refuge in the "stream-of-consciousness" technique that had been employed earlier by Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce. Her approach, however, is limited in scope and her range of characters is small — the educated middle-class intelligentsia of a certain temperament. But she has, certainly, an unusual depth within her limited range. She is often regarded as a poet who used the medium of prose. Her fame rests on the three novels — *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

Another giant of the 'twenties is D.H. Lawrence. His contribution to the technical development of fiction is not very significant. His skill lies in the fact that "without recourse to anything like stream-of-consciousness he takes us right inside his characters; we apprehend them instantaneously through the force of his intuition."(4) He was a genius who did not care to experiment with the form. He was an anti-intellectual to whom life was a mystery. He believed that trying to apprehend or explain it through reason and logic is futile. It can be experienced, if it can be experienced at all, through intuition. His three novels — *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* are great works of art from a

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literary moralist. His anti-intellectualism and his idea of the power of intuition are great influences on the novelists of the 'forties and the 'fifties. More and more writers began to discount reason and logic as unhelpful in character analysis.

We see hundreds of writers in the 'thirties — some serious and significant, the majority writing cheap, popular fiction. Novels of sex and violence appeared in enormous numbers and they soon became popular among the masses. The significant writers of fiction include Ivy Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, Henry Green and Evelyn Waugh.

Among these, we may specially remember in this context Graham Greene who shot into fame with his apparent crime-thrillers. He is a masterly story-teller who has something significant to say about the contemporary state of man. Greene's concern with sin and redemption becomes obvious in *Brighton Rock* (1938). As Anthony Burgess rightly observes, Pinky, the young gang-leader "is dedicated to evil — betrayal, violence, murder — but with a full awareness of the eternal — or eschatological — meaning of his acts."

This concern is one of the important issues of Greene's

later work. He goes, in his later novels — in The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter, A Burnt-out Case and The End of the Affair — deeper than right and wrong, which are relative, to Good and Evil which are absolute. Greene is a religious novelist who stresses the primacy of the spirit, a Catholic, but definitely an unconventional Catholic. To him, Evil is often nearer to God than Good. He explores the possibilities of divine grace in one novel after another. Greene is an excellent story-teller with a definite thematic concern.

Evelyn Waugh is another great writer of the 'thirties who may be relevantly recalled here. He began as a satirist with Decline and Fall (1928). In all his novels "the hero is an innocent caught up in and done down by the machinations of a wicked world."(6) His trilogy — Men at Arms, Officers and Gentlemen and Unconditional Surrender — presents something of a problem. His characters have finally to accept the truth about man in the temporal world.

In fact, the elder writers continued to dominate literature in the 'forties. Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, C.P. Snow, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, Anthony Powell and L.P. Hartley are the prominent figures of the

period. However, none of these was an experimenter in form. The great European writers — Jean Paul-Sartre, Albert Camus, Romain Gary and Alain Robbe-Grillet — went unheeded in England. Their deep philosophic concern of life did not influence writers of England, then. The majority of the novelists of the 'thirties, 'forties and 'fifties are traditional in their approach and as Frederick R. Karl says:

"The contemporary novel is clearly no longer 'modern'."(7)

In the 'fifties the major writers seemed to abandon the "inner-reality" for the sake of social realism. We can say with Diana Neill that "in the middle of the nineteen fifties a new generation of writers appeared, exponents of a social realism that reflected all that seemed characteristic of the post-war world."(8) The new names included Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Nigel Dennis, John Braine, Thomas Hinde, Angus Wilson and Iris Murdoch.

John Wain, Kingsley Amis, and John Braine revived the comic tradition in English fiction and did for the 'fifties


what Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley had done in the 'twenties and the 'thirties. These new writers exhibited the attitude of being "anti-authority" and "anti-tradition". Diana Neill observes:

"Good manners, respect for the past and conventional behaviour were looked down upon by them."(9)

Consequently, the 'fifties saw a host of anti-heroes, picaresque figures "without status or desire for it, who would shift with equal delight from university teaching to window-cleaning."(10)

Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* is a representative novel of this period. The book was an immediate success and thirteen editions of the books were sold in a year. Its success can justly be attributed to the qualities of the hero. Diana Neill aptly remarks:

"Jim was more than just a character in fiction. He was an embodiment of the *zeitgeist* in England, the new generation in Embryo.......... Life has neither pattern nor purpose. What a man becomes depends largely on accident."(11)

William Golding's immediate predecessors include these

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social realists. Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* appeared the same year. Angus Wilson's novels — *Hemlock and After* (1952), *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956) and *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* (1958) appeared almost simultaneously with Golding's novels. Wilson's approach is that of a moralist and in him we have a modern Dickens who is capable of exposing the "shams", "vulgarity", "meanness" and above all, the "cruelty" of modern society. C.P. Snow was also writing social novels at the same time. His novels are an important contribution to the social history of their time. Anthony Powell's *The Music of Time* also records social history. These writers, in spite of their apparent semblance to the social novelists of the nineteenth century, are "modern" in their philosophical and moral concern. The new philosophical concern is displayed in many ways. The characters of Kingsley Amis, Angus Wilson, John Wain and John Braine exhibit this in their protest against traditional attitudes, beliefs and the Establishment. C.P. Snow's characters detest the hollowness of the Victorian values. This is something that Golding shares with his contemporaries.

Excepting Samuel Beckett and Lawrence Durrell, none of Golding's contemporaries was an experimenter in form or style. Beckett was the only novelist of England of the 'fifties who was clearly associated with the European movement
in fiction. The Irish-born novelist allied himself with a continental literary and philosophical point of view. His novels have a marked similarity with the novels of Albert Camus. Durrell was a great stylist and it can be justly said about him that he wrote in the tradition of the grand style.

Golding shares something or the other with his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. Frederick R. Karl sees fine qualities in him:

"William Golding, who is best known in this country for *Lord of the Flies* combines the moral intensity of Snow, the verbal gifts of Henry Green and Lawrence Durrell, the narrative drive of Graham Greene, Beckett's ability to probe and the technical skill of his major predecessors." (12)

However, strangely enough, his final comment on Golding, cited later, constitutes only a left-handed compliment.

William Gerald Golding was born in 1911, his parents Mildred and Alex Golding being typical of the poor but educated lower middle class. He received his secondary education at Marlborough Grammar School where his father was Senior Assistant Master. Later, he won a scholarship and entered Brasenose College, Oxford. After reading science for some time, he gave it up and graduated in English literature in 1935. Following the publication of a book of verses in 1934, he was,

for a while, writer, actor and producer in a provincial theatre company. He married Ann Brookfield, daughter of E.W. Brookfield in 1939, and became a school teacher at Bishop Wordsworth's School, Salisbury.

Soon he joined the Royal Navy to fight in the Second World War. More than anything else, it is his wartime and post-war experience that contributed to his making as an artist. In World War II, he saw active service at sea as lieutenant on a rocket-launching craft, and participated in the sinking of the *Bismark* and landings in Normandy on D-day. Once, coming close to the experience of one of his fictional creations, he was adrift for three days in the English Channel.

After the war, he returned to his school, with new insights, and taught English and Philosophy there until 1961. He remained unknown to the public until the publication in 1954 of *Lord of the Flies*, which soon brought him wide reputation. He was a frequent contributor of essays and reviews to the B.B.C., *The Spectator* and *Holiday Magazine*. He spent a year (1962) as writer-in-residence at Hollins College, Virginia, and gave a number of lectures that year at American universities. Since then Golding has devoted himself solely to writing and to his many hobbies: classical Greek, archaeology, Egyptology, music and sailing. In 1955 he was

Listed below are his important works, in the order of their publication:


Golding describes himself as a fabulist. And, "the fabulist is a moralist. He cannot make a story without a (13) human lesson tucked in it." But critics seem to be divided about the proper description of the form of a Golding novel — whether it is a fable, a parable, an allegory or a symbolical

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novel. Frank Kermode, in *Puzzles and Epiphanies*, quotes him as saying:

"What I would regard as a tremendous compliment to myself would be if someone would substitute the word 'myth' for 'fable'........ I do feel fable as being an invented thing on the surface whereas myth is something which comes out from the root of the ancient sense of being the key to existence, the whole meaning of life, and experience as a whole."(14)

Fabulists like Bunyan, Swift and Orwell are obviously moralists. They start with an apparent moral comment to make and this initial proposition is translated into the dramatic terms of art. Fabulists, often, do not care for verisimilitude. *Aesop's* and Orwell's animals do not behave like animals at all. Animals are falsified for the sake of the idea. Fable and allegory are closely allied since we look in an outer world for parallels. They easily yield to analysis.

Golding is a serious novelist who is moved by modern man's problems. He considers himself an artist who is a humanist as well. About his purpose in his novels, he has written:

"In all the books I have suggested a shape in the universe that may, as it were, account for things. The greatest pleasure is not — say — sex or geometry. It is just understanding. And if you

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can get people to understand their own humanity — well that's the job of the writer." (15)

Golding's admirers praise his "high seriousness", "the brutal intransigence" and "the structural harmony" of his work. His detractors dislike him for the pronounced didactic, moralistic and mythical character of his fiction.

Like Graham Greene and Angus Wilson, two of his contemporaries, Golding is obsessed with the power of evil and, like James Joyce, he believes that man cannot escape Original Sin. Golding's concern is religious. He believes that even in the scientific world of rationalism man is irrational. There is a "darker dark" to the centre of his being which is mysterious and inexplicable. Golding's religiousness consists in his recognition of this mysterious power and in the acceptance of the existence of some outside agency. Many of his critics have labelled him a Christian novelist, though that would be a disputable description.

To Golding, as to many of his contemporaries, life is a riddle. He has tried to analyse experience with a view to defining life. But it seems that he has reached only tentative, inconclusive conclusions which seldom attain the status of a philosophy. At best, to use his own words, quoted

earlier, his work suggests "a shape in the universe that may, as it were, account for things". Many modern writers have unsuccessfully tried to fish out a pattern out of life and experience. But the pattern-making artist is almost always greeted by the patternlessness of life. There are no clear philosophies, no simple solutions to the problems of life.

Golding started to write fiction in such a philosophical situation. He is a serious artist who has something significant to say. That is why the interpretation of his books becomes important. But his thematic concern does not lead him to a neglect of form. For each novel he has invented an appropriate setting and a form.

Since his concern is not simply the response of certain persons to certain situations, most of his novels have an exotic setting, partly, at least, in order, to abstract them from the familiar scenes with their demands on verisimilitude. He is obviously taking man out of society to show his essential nature. In his protagonists' behaviour, wider cosmic meanings are to be seen. Golding's effort has been to define experience. So his plots are not organic or well-knit, but tend often to be episodic. But, they do not have the diffuseness and near plotlessness of the stream-of-consciousness novel, though the technique is used at places
as in *Pincher Martin*, to give a vivid picture of the inner landscape.

We may now proceed to consider the themes of the major novels of Golding, for our first identification must be of what they are about, before we proceed to discuss or evaluate the technique.