Introduction: Technique and Style in Fiction with Special Reference to William Golding
Chapter I

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Style and technique in fiction have undergone great creativity and phenomenal stylistic prolixity, as such they are considered to be most elusive and often ambiguous. It is difficult, therefore, to highlight the overall stylistic and technical postulates in a precise and exact manner. This is specially because each writer has his or her own personal style and technique of writing adopted either consciously or unconsciously, resulting in variations of fictional style. The main objective of this chapter is to discuss the different aspects of style and technique in fiction with special reference to William Golding.

By style we mean diverse ways of expression both in prose or poetry. In style are embodied the author's individuality, his thoughts, innermost feelings and convictions. We are concerned here with style through linguistic expression which may be in the shape of diction, phraseology, rhetoric, figurative, dialectic and other literary methods. Language is thus a very significant part of style through which the author communicates his basic imaginative vision to the reader. The quality of language is what is called style. Middleton Murry aptly comments: "Style is a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts, or a system of emotions or thoughts, peculiar to the author." Style is considered to be impeccable when exact
communication or exposition of thoughts and ideas presented in a logical sequence is achieved. The novelist uses various tools like theme, plot, narrative, characterization, background, dialogue, imagery, metaphor and the like through which his artistic intention finds expression. The execution of these various forms of writing is called technique. Technique is considered to be the difference between art and experience, and style their correct presentation. Thus they are both interrelated and are nothing but modes of artistic expression. The right uses of style and technique not only confer meaning to a particular piece of work but also make it a reader's delight. That style is a technique of expression is best understood through the words of Aristotle who comments, "It is not enough to know what to say; we must also say it in the right way."  

Skilful handling of style gives a novel its organic unity and coherence.

Style in fiction is the expression of an individual mode of feeling. Middleton Murry calls it a "personal idiosyncrasy of expression" through which a writer can be recognized. This brings to our mind Buffon's famous saying, "the style is the man." Yet there are some writers like Gustave Flaubert and Maupassant who are of the opinion that personal thoughts or emotions should not intrude into one's writings. But this is far from a correct concept since a writer's artistic expression is more or less coloured by his personal thoughts and emotions. Murry aptly remarks, "Style is organic — not the clothes a man wears, but the flesh, bone, and blood of his body." Through the idiosyncratic and emotional element, the writer conveys his innermost feelings stimulating in the reader sentiments and ardour similar to his own.

A good fictional writer should master the range and flexibility of style although it does not mean that to be a good novelist it is necessary to be an
accurate stylist. He should be careful in his technique of presentation and should avoid monotony. Most of the modern novelists are preoccupied with style and technique. For instance, Henry James is tireless in his search for the exact word, the perfect image and rhythm and a faultless handling of language, so much so that he is called a superb stylist. Sometimes James uses an uncertain method of exposition consisting of far-fetched hints and allusions. On the other hand, R. L. Stevenson's style is simple and pure and his writings, witty and learned. E. M. Forster's style is dexterous yet graceful. Although Lawrence is not meticulous in his detail of syntax, yet he possesses a rare kind of spontaneity and vividness in his writings. In comparison, we find Golding emerging as a novelist with a vivid and imaginative style, who is not "afraid to experiment with form or to attempt daring themes." In fact, Golding is like Conrad, a "tireless experimenter, for whom the novel is a plastic form to be constantly reshaped in accordance with his everchanging intention and design."

In a novel we find different techniques employed for the presentation of a story and the techniques which are relevant to Golding will be discussed in this chapter.

An important aspect to consider while studying style and technique in fiction is the narrative technique which has become a dominant concern with modern theorists of the novelist's art. When the novelist selects the "angle of vision" from which the story is to be told and recounts a series of events or facts, it may rightly be called a narration. Herbert Read specifies by saying that:

The object of narrative is to transmit to the reader an exact visual account of the object or action represented. What is seen must be
translated into symbols by the writer, and these symbols must in turn convey to the reader the impression of the things seen.\(^7\)

A novel, as we see it, is not something static; it is constantly in motion — the theme and the characters keep on unfolding. Narrative, therefore, as Pelham Edgar rightly sums up:

\[
\ldots \text{has to deal not only with the large ordering of the action, — its motion in time and thought — but with an infinity of small detail that has no particular reference to the main action, and may indicate nothing more than the mannerisms or gestures of people in conversation.}^8
\]

Among the earlier writers Chaucer, Dryden, Defoe, Scott and William Morris were excellent exponents of the narrative technique. As regards the later novelists, we cannot help admire the free and vigorous movement of the narrative technique of Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Dumas, Emily Brontë, Henry James and William Golding.

Through a narrative, the plot is slowly unfolded and sometimes it is interspersed with dialogue. The pattern of the narrative includes the design and the organic structure, the structure being the plot in a narrative work. Through a narrative or point of view established by an author, the reader is introduced to the characters, actions, setting and events which form the narrative in a work of fiction.

There are several ways of presenting a story. The most popular way is the third-person narrative. Here "The author," according to Pelham Edgar, is "responsible for the narration, the description, and the reflection, and loses his identity only in the dialogue."\(^9\) Golding makes the utmost use of this
narrative as can be seen in his novels, *The Lord of the Flies*, *The Inheritors*, *The Spire* and *Darkness Visible* and these will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. This method is convenient because it is assumed here that the author is fully aware of each and every feeling and mood of his characters and the assumed omniscience of the novelist provides great flexibility of characterization and situations. According to Miriam Allott: "The 'pure' novelist and the aesthetic writer value the method because it helps them to safeguard artistic detachment while depicting highly subjective personal impressions. It also tends to cut out the distracting side-winds of imaginative inspiration."

In Henry James' *The Ambassadors*, the author assumes "artistic detachment" or "substituted vision", which implies "the dramatization of a consciousness" or almost complete detachment of the author with the characters.

Another way of a narrative is that of memoirs where the subject relates his own story. This is known as narrative in the first-person. It has an advantage over the third-person narrative because here the true feelings of the subject may find expression. It has a greater air of truth as it seems to account for the uninhibited communication of the subject to the reader. This form has its disadvantages because the point of view is limited to the experience of a single first-person narrator or the "Persona". Regarding its limitations, Percy Lubbock comments: "... fiction must look true, and there is no look of truth in inconsequence, and there is no authority at the back of a novel, independent of it, to vouch for the truth of its apparent wilfulness." Some novelists like Anthony Trollope and Henry James also see many disadvantages in this method because writing from the point of "I" may result in "self-glorification or pretentious humility." Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens is a fitting example of this form of narrative. Again, first-person narrative is used in *Free*
Fall by William Golding where the point of view is limited to the experience of a single person, that of Sammy Mountjoy. To control the egotism in this method the use of story-within-story device is sometimes used in order to confine the story within the framework of an outer third-person narrative albeit allowing the "I" self-expression. This method is used by serious craftsmen like Emily Brontë in The Wuthering Heights. Writers like Scott, Dickens and Conrad also use this method. Golding does not make use of this technique. On the other hand, he uses the epistolary method of narration which is evident in Rites of Passage. James Colley is the epistolary narrator in it.

Again, there are some novelists who defy all the narrative methods and work out their own indirect and oblique method. This method captures the beauty and vividness of a certain experience and its dramatized consciousness has been modified by the experimental writers of the 1920s and 1930s into what is known as the "stream-of-consciousness" technique. It is a modern attempt to analyse mental and spiritual experience and hence the characters are presented in a most realistic manner. William James had coined the term "stream-of-consciousness" in Principles of Psychology (1890). Henry James is a precursor of this technique; his novels portray psychological elements in which a single point of view is present and the entire novel is presented through the consciousness of a single character. Robert Humphrey aptly defines the stream of consciousness fiction as "a type of fiction in which the basic emphasis is placed on exploration of the prespeech levels of consciousness for the purpose, primarily of revealing the psychic being of the characters." True pioneers of this technique are Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. The basic techniques used in presenting the
stream-of-consciousness method is interior monologue which is divided into
direct and indirect interior monologue and soliloquy. In Golding's third novel,
*Pincher Martin*, the stream-of-consciousness technique is effectively used with
direct interior monologue. In this method there is very little interference from
the author. Regarding the technique in *Pincher Martin*, V.V.Subbarao thus
comments: "The interior monologue or stream of consciousness technique
employed for the major part of the book effectively communicates the traumas of the flickering consciousness..." It rightly focuses a mind in flux.

Sometimes cinematic devices are used for controlling the movement of
stream of consciousness fiction. These devices are borrowed from the motion pictures in order to allow "for numerous innovations in focusing upon reality." The principal function of all the cinematic devices particularly the basic techniques of cut-back, dissolve and montage in fiction is to express movement and entity. Montage in particular serves the purpose of arranging discrete frames to create a single rhythmic vision. Frederick R. Karl and Marvin Magalaner opines most judiciously that in the use of montage, "...one finds the basic ingredient of the interior monologue: that past and present time can be telescoped into one image that is all present at once." The fundamental purpose of this technique, in the words of Robert Humphrey, is "to represent the dual aspect of human life — the inner life simultaneously with the outer life." Golding skilfully uses this device of freely shifting back and forth incidents and experiences and of intermingling the past, the present and the imagined future. We can see Golding's use of this device in *Pincher Martin* and *The Pyramid*. Similarly, in Conrad's *Lord Jim*, we find time used in a psychoanalytical way to utilize memories and experiences from the past as indications of present actions.
The use of rhetorical figures is quite explicit in the stream-of-consciousness writing in order to reproduce the broken incoherent processes which are deliberately obliterated for direct communication. Through it the artist can achieve the effect he wants to have on the reader. Knox C. Hill tells us about our normal expectation in fiction in a most succinct way:

The story is the main thing, and it is only when we reflect upon it, on a comparatively sophisticated level, that we consider how the author is telling the story, and how his telling is oriented toward the kind of readers he expects or wants. 19

Mention must be made here of dialogue and how it is interrelated with narrative at every level of fiction. Through dialogue something of the "dramatist's discipline and objectivity" can be achieved. 20 That dialogue is an important aid to characterization cannot be denied as lively and natural dialogue are contrived by most of the modern fiction writers. Graham Greene in Heart of the Matter contrives a dialogue which is both natural and functional. Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels contain very little narrative and are basically dialogue-oriented as in A Family and a Fortune. With the exclusion of The Inheritors where there is very sparse dialogue, Golding's profuse and dexterous use of it with its rhythmic speech patterns is quite remarkable. Mention may be made here of Lord of the Flies, Free Fall, The Pyramid and the sea trilogy: To the Ends of the Earth.

In fictional style, pattern and a disciplined word order is also necessary for clarity and proper interpretation. The plot, therefore, is the pattern through which the story is arranged and as it is a narrative of events, emphasis falls on causality. There are various plot forms which may be represented in the form of narrative or of drama, and in prose or in verse. Within a typical plot
may be found rising action, climax and falling action, dénouement, reversal
or peripety. The structure of a novel encompasses the work's total organiza-
tion as a work of art and gives it an overall sense of unity; it thus involves
plot, form and thematics. Critics look upon a work of narrative literature as a
mode of speech and hence tone and voice are given due emphasis. Through
various nuances of attitude and relationship, the tone of a speech is achieved;
similarly, the voice or ethos in fiction lends a distinctive authorial presence.

Equally important is the background and atmosphere in any fictional genre
and they serve as an integral design to the plot. Background is useful in the
dramatized interplay of character and setting, and the novelist takes pleasure
in the imaginative reconstruction of what the real world offers. The atmos-
phere and mood establish a kind of expectation in the reader as to the course
of events. Thomas Hardy's novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd* has the ex-
quisite atmosphere of pastoral and farm life. J. W. Beach says that "Hardy
has a constant realization, both esthetic[sic] and philosophical, of the insepa-
rableness of people from the natural setting in which they appear." Similar-
ly, Golding presents his characters against a wide variety of backgrounds
which appeal to our sense of reality. His settings range from the prehistoric
times (*The Inheritors*), to the Middle ages (*The Spire*), to the contemporary
times (*Free Fall, The Pyramid, Darkness Visible* and *The Paper Men*). In the
sea trilogy, he portrays a realistic background of life aboard a ship.

An important aspect of style and technique in fiction is the use of sym-
bolism, imagery, metaphor and simile. These techniques are obvious in the
writings of Golding and they help to enhance the poetic nuances. These tech-
nical tools are indispensable to him on account of his compressed form of
writing. Remy de Gourmont comments on the aesthetics of symbolism in the
following way: "It can mean: individualism in literature, freedom in art, abandonment of learned formulas, a tendency towards the new, the strange, and even the bizarre." Golding's use of symbolism has given him the necessary tool to carry out his investigations regarding the theme common to all his novels, that is, man's tendency to do evil rather than to do good. Nichola C. Dicken-Fuller maintains that it is because of Golding's use of symbolism that "his tone never becomes oppressive, and although one often is left at the end of a novel with the question unanswered, even though the theme has been fully explored, one never feels that there is no hope for mankind." Golding's penchant for symbolism may be observed in his first novel Lord of the Flies where the pig's head on a stick symbolises the fear and potential for evil in every individual. On the other hand, Simon symbolises a prophet or a Christ-like figure. Thus it can be assumed that if the importance of symbols is well understood, it helps develop the characters in a novel, as is very much evident in the works of Golding. Similar to Golding, D. H. Lawrence too, in his novels, makes prolific use of symbols as in The Rainbow, where darkness and light are the major symbols. In The Spire, too, the most important symbol is that of light. Although light is usually connected with joy and enlightenment, it is not always so in The Spire; light here is connected with pain and danger.

Imagery as a form of literary art is exercised to signify figurative language, especially metaphors and similes. It also includes image-clusters and image motifs. The term metaphor may be defined as a kind of figurative language that departs from literal meaning to achieve special meaning or effect through implication of comparison and analogy. Simile, in the same way, is a comparison between two different things, and it is indicated through the
use of "like" or "as". In Golding's works, the use of metaphor is abundantly found which lend meaning and beauty to his writings. It would be wrong to say that metaphor is pertinent to poetry rather than to prose. Herbert Read believes that metaphor is "perhaps a more necessary mode of expression" for poetry and of no relevance to prose. However, Golding has proved Read's assumption wrong by showing that metaphor is a powerful weapon which can be effectively used in prose as well. He has proved that metaphor is not mere decoration or illustration but essential statement as it helps shape our attitudes, interpreting our experience, and giving us kinds of truth which we can get in no other way. Most of Golding's novels work on sheer metaphorical level. Lord of the Flies, Pincher Martin and The Spire are remarkable examples of his metaphorical art. Towards the end of the novel, Lord of the Flies, Golding writes metaphorically about the fall of man: "...Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy" [248]. Golding, therefore, utilizes this method to add sharpness of detail and concreteness of expression.

The fundamental mode of the English novel since the very beginning of its history has been realism. Realism in literature, according to J. P. Stern "connotes a way of depicting, describing a situation in a faithful, accurate, 'life-like' manner." Reality is evident in almost all the novels of Golding. The term realism denotes "a literary aesthetic truth telling" and Golding fits into the peg of "truth-telling" for he has portrayed all the anguish and anxiety of this trouble-torn world in his works. Barbara Everett opines that, "The sense of reality which we meet in Golding's fictions is more substantial (and not less, as we might expect of myth or fable) than is ordinary existence." To cite an example, in Lord of the Flies, Golding paints a realistic picture of man's struggle for survival against all odds.
Characterization is another aspect of technique through which the reader can identify himself. The novelist's success in characterization depends on his ability to select and focus on significant detail, be it in the direct or analytical way, or in the indirect or dramatic way. Characters are an integral part of the novel since they are seen as "natural inhabitants of the world of culture, just as they are natural citizens of the world of story; we sympathize with them, enter art through them, and use their company to find our sense of the significance of the work we encounter." Golding's characterization is based on a realistic level and he is more concerned about the psychological aspect of human beings and their relationship to the universe.

A reading of the works of Golding shows that his prose is of a highly poetic kind which may stem from his deep desire to be a poet before he became a novelist. In his essay Crosses he reveals that one of the greatest drawbacks of his life was his inability to write poetry. Yet, in all his writings, Golding has distinguished himself as a conscious stylist. His novels become impressive by the sheer quality of his style; he knows well the effect his choice of words has on the reader. His language creates a pictorial sense of movement; where we also find repetitions, juxtaposition of words, onomatopoeia, coinage of words, an eye for detail, the dramatic element (as is evident in Rites of Passage and The Paper Men) and an occasional penchant for elevated vocabulary. His treatment of the ending of a novel is quite important because of his use of "gimmick" where there is sudden change of viewpoint at the end of a novel. As James Gindin has observed, "the final 'gimmick' gives the novel a twist that in one way or another, palliates the force of the original metaphor." But behind the main narrative structure we find moral implications as a result of which Golding's novels take the form of a "fable" or "myth".
Critics like Frank Kermode and Walter Allen have called Golding a writer of fables of which one important characteristic is that they are allegorical expressions of moral ideas. Works like *Lord of the Flies*, *The Inheritors* and *The Spire* may be considered as some of Golding's fables.

The modern concept of the novel as a genre has undergone changes. As Bradbury rightly claims: "Art is a mode of epistemological speculation; that is one reason why styles and forms change."29 This is again because of the deep rooted change taking place in society. Bradbury further adds, "The linear evolution of story, the detailed representation of milieu, the grammatical sureness of narrators, the fixed representation of personages: all these have been thrown into great doubt."30 Nowadays there is much stylistic profusion and it is difficult to identify a certain trend although critics and writers have coined terms like 'nouveau roman' and 'post-modernism.' Alan Friedman comments on modernism thus: "The new flux of experience insisted on a new vision of existence; it stressed an ethical vision of continual expansion and virtually unrelieved openness in the experience of life."31 Golding clearly belongs to the modernist tradition of writers.

In conclusion, it may be rightly said that Golding is "an artist" who is "seriously interested in his craft."32 He projects a unique virtuosity in his works and has a rare combination of imagination and technical vitality. In the words of Oldsey and Weintraub: "He has been able to make fiction awaken conscience. . . . [But] eventually it is the art of Golding we must deal with and not his morals."33

In fact, Golding is regarded as a skilful artist who has total control over his literary technique. His style finds justification in the words of Frank Kermode, "It is a mark of Golding's integrity that in every book he employs
technical devices of remarkable ingenuity but never indulges his skill . . . "34

As will be seen in the following chapters, Golding's artistic genre is a 'tour de force' and his oeuvre will continue to inspire generations of people, making him one of the most powerful and original writers of the post-modern age.

**Notes and References**


3. Same as Note 1, p.4.

4. Ibid., p.122.


11. Same as Note 8, p.20.


13. Same as Note 10, p.187.


17. Ibid.

18. Same as Note 14, p.50.


20. Same as Note 10, p.208.

21. Same as Note 6, p.141.


29. Same as Note 27, p.182.

30. Ibid., pp.184-85.


34. Same as Note 28: In the Chapter "Intellectual Economy" by Frank Kermode, p.63.