The Present Phase

INFINITY AND TRIVIALITY

Darkness Visible (1979)
Rites of Passage (1980)
Close Quarters (1987)
Fire Down Below (1989)
INFINITY AND TRIVIALITY

Three decades of insistent and intense staring into "the unnameable, unfathomable, and invisible" darkness that describes the human existence has secured for Golding a central place in the contemporary novel. In his powerful analysis of the human malignancy, his exploration of the unchartered areas of human darkness, and his concern with the metaphysical presence of evil in the world, he has matched Dostoevsky and Greene. If it has become increasingly difficult, Golding has discovered for us, to remain human under the present conditions of life, the cause is not to be found in the present conditions, but in the human consciousness which is the seed bed of evil and violence. No one escapes Golding's fury. He spares none; he excludes none from his attack. He castigates man for his failing to imagine that he it is who has devastated the world.

An interesting feature of the novels studied so far is that in his first three novels, Lord of the Flies, The Inheritors and Pincher Martin, Golding had selected remote and mythic countries of the mind but concentrated more on the social aspects of evil behaviour: power of domination, abuse of sex, indifference, callousness towards human beings. In his next three novels -- Free Fall, The Spire and The Pyramid -- located in more modern, known and familiar places, he dealt chiefly with abstract and metaphysical concepts like damnation, grace and engagement. The novels of his early phase, I have tried to show, chiefly explored the "why" of evil. But, in Free Fall, he had started another strain also -- the confession of a man broken by his malignancy, his acceptance of his fallenness, of his part in ushering the world into, what Golding has
said "the age of the fragment and wreckage." In the "huge stones" of
Sunny and Jocelin we can see, along with Golding, the "image of a
humanity indomitable but contrite."¹

One thing soured this acceptance, one thing remained absent in the
"convulsion of the understanding." And this made the vision look incomplete
and hazy. The thesis of these novels may be described as this: "Man knows
but does not change." Jocelin, Sammy and Oliver experience "meaninglessness"
of their existence; Jocelin even succeeds in breaking the vortex of the sin
he is the author of. But in the process he dies. And this death is the
problem. Obviously, the problems of life need to be encountered and
resolved by living life. Neither nihilism nor non-existence is the answer, so
Golding would seem to suggest. With *Darkness Visible*, though not necessarily
in it, he takes another direction,² finds the missing piece to complete the
jigsaw of the vision of health and love.

John Stinson had suggested as far back as in 1971 that "Golding's
art, in order to move, will have to make its choice of direction: down into
Nothingness and pure Absurdity, or off into Grace and Redemption."³ The
taking of either of these directions will, however, have made Golding a
single track artist he has so cleverly been trying to avoid. Now without
giving up his obsessions — duality, multiplicity of opinion, even confusion
regarding the "why" of things — he further widens his vision so that now,
in the novels of the "present phase," both the English "social" and the
Continental "metaphysical" elements "go together."

There is a return in them of the sense of evil as being the more
dominant feature of human life, the sense which the novels of the early
phase had shown. It seems that having been unable to see the good side
of man win over his evil one, Golding has surrendered himself to the
ferocity of violence. The memories of the fires of Hiroshima and Belsen have re-emerged with even more sharpness crying that there is "no go."
The outrage of Darkness Visible, the stupidity of Rites of Passage, the meanness of The Paper Men, and the confusion of Close Quarters vouchsafe Golding's vision of the diseased human condition. The tentative hopefulness of Free Fall and the assurance of a grace of The Spire are abandoned, though not without pain, in the novels of the 80s. In the "Godless vessel" (Rites of Passage, p.227) man is in, "no man of God" (Rites of Passage, p.228) can survive, why talk of changing the fate of the world. In Fire Down Below, however, Golding re-views these black prophecies and assures us of the victory of "infinity" of man over his "triviality." He is not a good diagnostician of the human condition only; he feels the need to protect the humanity also and knows also how this can be done.

II

DARKNESS VISIBLE

Darkness Visible gripped the literary world as a unique phenomenon when it was published in 1979. Ian Gregor hailed it as Golding's "most ambitious" novel. Donald Crompton commented that "in terms of sheer scope and endeavour [it] must surely rank with any produced this century." Tom Paulin thought that it was one of Golding's "finest achievements." To Arnold Johnston, it came as a "rare creation." But if the critics have gone ecstatic over this novel, Golding has taken the opposite road, refusing to speak a word about it. "It's not," he tells a questioner, "that I don't want to talk about Darkness Visible, it is that I cannot talk about Darkness Visible." Undoubtedly, this silence has made the task of interpretation a little bit more difficult because Golding has been providing
helpful cues to read his novels, though, at the same time, he has discouraged direct questions on his novels, asking readers to read them to understand them. "Interrogate the books," he says, prefacing this advice with a humble remark that he seldom knows what he says; "even if I knew -- I seldom do -- they would be irrelevant." At the same time it must be pointed out that the writer's "lifelines" have also often distracted readers away from a legitimate interpretation of the novels, sending them (readers) on a wild goose chase. As a matter of fact, The Paper Men refers to one such writer and one such critic who live more by such extraliterary considerations as take them away from involving themselves sincerely in their respective occupations.

The beginning of Darkness Visible is as intense and helpful to set the action as any created by Lawrence and Greene. It takes us to the London of the Second World War and makes us sit with the hope that now at last we shall get a Golding war-novel. Soon we discover that it is not the war-torn London that forms the background really and that the whole thing looks like from the Apocalypse. A group of amateur fire-fighters watch a "too much shameful, inhuman light" turn into "the infernal city" (p.11, emphasis added). From this fire, "out of control" (p.9), emerges "A figure . . . condensed out of the shuddering backdrop of the glare" (p.13). The child that hobbled toward them "was not an impossibility but a scrap of their own human flesh" (p.14). Since the children were the first to be evacuated from that area this child had no business to be there, a Piggy might say. So questions like "Where did he come from?", "Who was he?", "What was he?" seem natural queries. He was, the text says, "born from the sheer agony of a burning city" (p.20) and "had no background but the fire" (p.17). All at once, a memory flickers on the edge of our mind.
We remember that a fire was the first invention of the human civilization, and also that it was fire that had threatened the survival of Ralph in *Lord of the Flies*. The *Darkness Visible* fire-child takes, as it were, the direction Ralph would have taken had he got fire-purified.

This child, later named Matty, is first given a number — seven — which is the mystical number of the Book of Revelations. His two names — Matthew and Septimus — are again Christian names. While the way his name is chosen reminds one of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, another intriguing thing about his last name is that it keeps on changing; from the initial Windy, he is misnamed Windgrave, Windgrove, Windrap, Windwort, Wildwave, Windrave, ending up at Windrove. All this suggests that he has no history; for does the surname of a person not put him in the tradition and history of the family? The whole game also highlights this child’s anonymity, his uniqueness, and his "all-ness" too.

His ugly face, wearing "a natural pessimism" (p. 24) and threatening hope, makes him an obvious outcast. Whether it is the hospital, the Foundlings School at Greenfield, the Franklay's or Australia, he fails to read the various jokes and pranks played on him. His "literal-mindedness," his Simonesque inability to understand "the code" hinders him in every conceivable way. Of particular significance is his relationship with Mr Pedigree, the school teacher at the Foundlings. "His [Matty's] world was so small and the man [Mr Pedigree] was so large. He could not conceive of a whole relationship being based on a joke" (p. 29). *Ignorant* of the ways of the world, he is befooled by the teacher as much as the boys.

Pedigree, the pederast teacher, feels thoroughly repulsed at Matty's horrible face. But Matty, unmindful of this, and for being called "treasure," (p. 28) thinks that he really is precious wealth to his teacher. Particularly
when Pedigree calls Henderson "Ghastly" (p.31), Matty feels convinced that Henderson is evil and a cause of great agony to his teacher. This creates a series of complications, all of them ending in the death of Henderson whose body is later found over Matty's gym shoe. While the cause of this accident is not clear, Pedigree blames Matty. His own uttering of the word "Evil" (p.36) is misheard by the headmaster as "Eden." Moreover, he regards himself responsible for Henderson's death (as later, an entry in his diary indicates). Both he and Pedigree are made to leave school. But the episode leaves Matty crushed by feelings of guilt and betrayal.

His next halt at Franklay's, an ironmonger's shop, causes him no less agony. It never strikes him that the reason why he is always busy is that the people at the shop give him jobs to keep him out of their sight. In this world, "this image in little of the society at large" (p.42), Matty's naiveté prevents him from bending circumstances to his advantage. He tries to be friendly with Mr. Parish, a driver and tells him about his attraction for a girl there: "'They're pretty. Artificials I mean. And that girl, that young lady —'" (p.46), but is sternly rebuffed. Golding's authorial comment comes with a telling effect. "This may well have been the last time Matty ever tried to confide in anyone" (p.46), he says.

Adding to his agony are the feelings of lust he develops for a girl there. Reminiscent in some ways of Jocelin's lust for Goody, Matty too is consumed by a fall of hair. Aware that it would bring only shame and farce, he decides to go away from "The daughters of men" (p.49). He is bewildered and sorrowful. It brings to him an understanding of Pedigree's unquenchable thirst. He understands also "the impossibility of healing Pedigree" (p.50).
It is here that he chooses his "being." A moment of "pure, white-hot anguish" decides his migration to Australia. In a passage unparalleled for its emotive strength, he comes to know what he is:

The white-hot anguish continued to burn. In it was consumed a whole rising future that centered on the artificials and the hirim, it had sunk away from the still-possible to the might-have-been. Because he had become aware he saw too how his unattractive appearance would have made an approach to the girl into a farce and humiliation; and thought, as he saw, that it would be so with any woman. He began to weep adult tears, wounded right in the centre of his nature, wept for a vanished prospect as he might have wept for a dead friend. He wept until he could weep no more and never knew what things had drained away from him with the tears (pp.49-50).

Is he really, we might ask, not a later-day Lok weeping the end of innocence and the dawn of experience? The school had taken the men's world away from him; the shop denuded him of a woman's affection. It marked the beginning of a spiritual life that he "must endure like a man holding up a heavy weight" (p.99).

Matty's Australia experience is a tough nut to crack so far as the understanding of its meaning is concerned. It is significant like a myth is, however curious and impenetrable its meaning. His bewilderment and downright astonishment sharpen into a single question of "Who am I?" (p.51) but some more events, some more relationships change it first into "What am I" (p.56), and then "What am I for?" (p.68). These questions indicate the quest of a pilgrim for a spiritual being. From a knowledge of his identity as a pure being, he moves towards creating an identity that would effect a spiritual awakening. In a later day diary entry, Matty records that he feels that he was "near the centre of things" (p.91), and that he would restore life into, the "broken business of living" (p.11). That he is on the verge of entering a new era of spiritual birth is apparent in his picking up a Bible in wooden covers. With the Bible as a talisman, he hopes to
stave off all the lustful thoughts he might have had. Really he was employed by Mr Hannrahan to teach his seven daughters a lesson for lusting for a man.

Matty runs away again, reciting from the Old Testament, and reaches Gladstone to work as a grave digger. That he could keep away from all physical desires is clear when he thinks, "Some have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God" (p. 61).

This prepares us for the incident where Matty is castrated by an Aboriginal. The Abo was, in fact, a local character, named Harry Brummer, who had lost touch with reality because he had been featured in a film and had for some reasons begun to hate all white preachers.

A later incident, more baffling than perhaps any other scene as to its meaning, has Matty immersing himself, bound in chain, in muddy water and holding a lump upright. The meaning of this is certainly incomprehensible; it is "inscrutable except inside of the man's head where his purpose was" (p. 74). But it suggests some kind of initiation rite, some baptism into a new mode of spiritual awakening, a "twice born" state.11

After this, Matty leaves Australia to return to England. He starts keeping a journal; "for a most extraordinary reason" (p. 85) Golding informs. He records in it how he was visited by two angels — one blue and the other red — who bring him "before us" (p. 60) and tell him that he is "near the centre of things" (p. 91). The spirits also show him his scarred spiritual face, disfigured for "the terrible wrong I did my dear friend" (p. 93). His fate, the angels tell him, is linked with a child born on 6.6.66. They allow him to talk ("But let no living person hear") to alleviate his pain which, being a spiritual pain, is "three times worse than an earthly pain" (p. 95).

The second section of Darkness Visible takes us into the contemporary England. This part — "Sophy" — introduces the two other central
character of the novel — Toni and Sophy, the twin daughters of Mr Stanhope who is getting increasingly busy in his chess. Their mother, unable to live with her husband, leaves them at the mercy of various "aunties." Though both Toni and Sophy are equally attractive and have "phenomenal intelligence" (p.129), they are poles apart in reacting to same situations. Toni has oriented herself to external action to escape from boredom; and Sophy "echoes with all the vacuities and self centeredness of the seventies."12 Unlike Matty who could not approach anything by any "conceptual artifice" (p.18), conceptualization was Sophy's forte. A particular incident brings this controlling nature of hers out. While watching dabehieks, she, like Roger in Lord of the Flies, feels an intense urge to exert control over them. A remarkable conjunction of place and time helps her kill one of them. This teaches her an "of course" way of the organization of things:  

   This was the first time Sophy noticed the "Of course" way things sometimes behaved. She could throw a bit but not much. Now — and this was where the "Of course" thing came in — now there was a large pebble lying to hand among the grasses and the drying mud, where no pebble had any business to be unless "Of course" was operating. It seemed to her she did not have to look for the pebble. She just moved her throwing arm and the palm of her hand fitted nicely over the smooth, oval shape. How could a smooth, oval stone be lying there, not under the mud or even under the grass but on top where your throwing arm can find it without looking? (p.108).

Doesn't this echo Pincher Martin's "If I ate them who gave me a mouth?" — an argument, a reasoning, not easy to beat so far as the argument goes.

   To Sophy comes the vision that things are lying about to be controlled by will and mind. Accordingly, she sets about using her will to impose her power on not only the animal but the human world also.

   Toni, given to "external causes," leaves for places like Kabul and Cuba but Sophy stays confined to herself: "how could the creature called Sophy who sat there at the mouth of the tunnel behind her belong to
anyone but herself?" (p. 123). This narcissism surely shows her as a male Pincher; Pincher-like, she (ab)uses sex to create her identity. She has something of Jack in her also. Her urge to stamp her will on the dabchicks matches Jack's blind impulse to subjugate the pigs on the island. With both of them power and control are the dominant elements of survival. Jack derives a lust as "fierce" as is Sophy's "deep fierce, hurting need, desire, to hurt Winnie and Daddy up there in the bedroom" (p. 127). It is this belief of her -- that by choosing "what was real and what you knew was real -- your own self sitting inside with its own wishes and rules at the mouth of the tunnel" (p. 123) -- that leads her to "hunger and thirst after weirdness" (p. 132), and to resolve how she, lying in the "private segment of infinite depth" can start "impossibilities of darkness . . . to disrupt the placid normalities of the daylight world" (p. 134).

Given the moment of choice, Matty devoted himself to the bringing of a new world, to the preservation of people who, he hoped, "shall bring the spiritual language into the world and nation shall speak it unto nation" (p. 239). Given the chance, Pedigree abuses children. And given the freedom, Sophy kills people. To affirm her will, her existence, she chooses to control the world, to use sex, in an "of course" (p. 108) way. The whole thing (the use of sex) may be a "triviality" (p. 139), but it helps her to contain, to castrate the "infinity". Her "centre" keeps on crying "I hate, I hate, I hate" (p. 138), much like Pincher's "I am, I am, I am." This hating, we find, has no object as such, is a complete activity in itself. Whereas Matty loves all, Sophy hates all. The irony in the novel lies in this deep consonance of the fates of these characters. Unhappy childhood makes one sacrifice himself to save one child; unhappy childhood makes the other kill the same child.
III

The world, Golding's thesis runs, is so constituted that both love and hate converge on the same point. In *Darkness Visible*, this point is the boy born on 6.6.66, the boy who, Matty had been told by the spirits, "was born sound in mind and limb and with an I.Q. of a hundred and twenty," and incidentally "120 was the I.Q. of Jesus of Nazareth" (p.101). We may also ask whether the Arab boy Sophy gangs up to kidnap with her fellow anarchists, Gerry and Fido is the boy for whom Matty sacrifices himself as a "burnt offering" (p.239). Golding does not provide any answer but it is quite likely that he is.

The contrasting attitudes of Matty and Sophy towards the same object again lend credence to Golding's belief that there is a duality which defines the human world. In the novels we have studied so far we could find the same character both experiencing and feeling torn by opposing forces of looking at the world. But now, in *Darkness Visible*, Matty, Toni and Sophy move on single tracks. And it is this that lit fires in the new world. Matty no doubt, feels torn by sexual desires; in fact he once defiles himself during sleep. But he succeeds in pushing such thoughts away and becoming a spirit like the spirits that visited him. Toni, too world-oriented to care for her private urges and fears, leaves it to Sophy to stand as a foil to Matty and to baffle and challenge him. The ring incident particularly frightens Matty. Prepared to become a eunuch for the sake of the world, he faces Sophy bent upon "destroying the world" (p.141). Matty would do whatever he is asked to, and Sophy wouldn't do whatever she is asked to. She resolves to seek her destiny in violence, decides that the secret of the "triumph of the will" (p.173), lies in "Outrage." In violating all the accepted norms of behaviour,
Sophy seeks to fulfill herself. Temporary or partial failures do not hinder her from being weird.

At last she lay without either thought or feeling, and with a sentience that neither commented nor criticized but was a naked and unemotional "I am" or perhaps "It is". Then the interior, nameless thing was there again, the thing that had sat from everlasting to everlasting, staring out. Now, for an aeon at the mouth of its tunnel it stared out and was aware, too, of that black angle, direction behind that stretched, widening, as far as there was no stretch. The thing examined the failure to outrage, noted it; was aware that there would be some other occasions for outrage; even said (but silently) a word.

Presently (p.188).

Eric Fromm has dwelt upon this method of dealing with the ennui one feels when living a life devoid of productive orientation. A "bored" person, he argues, tends to escape from entrophy through violence and aggression:

The bored person often is the organizer of a 'mini-Colosseum' in which he produces his small-scale equivalents of the large-scale cruelty staged in the Colosseum. Such persons have no interest in anything, nor do they have any contact with anybody except of the most superficial kind. Everybody and everything leaves them cold. They are affectively frozen, feel no joy -- but also no sorrow or pain. They feel nothing.13

Fromm follows this with an observation important in the present context. "... among such persons [he says] we found extreme forms of destructiveness." What is more of a problem is, Fromm says, "They can adapt themselves to their environment and often seem to be happy; Some are apparently so well adapted that parents, teachers, ministers praise them as models. It takes a concerned and skilled observer to discover the sickness hidden behind the smooth, cynical surface."14

Whether or not it is Sophy's loveless environment which has made her hate the world is not the only point in Darkness Visible; for that matter, Matty's was worse, more cruel. The truth is that Sophy has failed to connect herself with society in a productive manner and so stands in a condition of sin. Nothing touches her, neither her father's helplessness nor
her neighbours' affection. She moves alone, sure of her hold on the world. All her actions are planned, carefully mapped out, to extinguish her Scintillan Dei, the "Spark of God" that lies unattended and untended. The only thing that interests her is how to make her inner darkness visible to the day-light world. "Sophy is a figure of evil," Crompton says, "whose progression from childhood to maturity is as clearly charted as Matty's, and whose understanding of the process of darkness is as long maturing as Matty's understanding of fire and light."  

The last part of the novel — "One is One" — in bringing the characters of the first two sections together shows the impenetrability of the "bone boxes" they are shut in. Sim Goodechild and Edwin Bell, the two humanists, fail to effect any wholesome influence on Pedigree. Besides, the fact that they are deceived by the beauty of Sophy and Toni indicates the failure of humanism to come to grips with the evil in man. Goodechild himself is "in love" with the twins, particularly the brunette Sophy. But this is not a "Paternal instinct" (p.224) though he would have it believed so. He knows:

... how the mind can rise from its bed, go forth, down the stairs, past doors, down the path to the stables that are bright and rosy by the light of two small girls. But they were asleep and remained asleep even if their images performed the silly dance, the witless Arabian thing (p.225).

Manju Jaidka rightly suggests that Sim's attitude towards Sophy parallels Jocelin's lust for Goody. 16 What escapes her notice is that for Golding sex is not an experience only perverted or mystics feel, and that it is a "normal" fact of life and that blinking it (Jocelin) or using it (Pincher, Sophy) for an end it is not meant to be used for makes it a problem.

Matty, now regarded a guru by both Goodechild and Bell, restarts his diary where he records how the spirits show him his destiny. It is
paradoxical, but in tune with Golding's vision, that the place -- Sophy's house -- they choose to hold their secret meetings at is the hide-out of a terrorist. Crime and punishment "go together" in this world.

The main focus in this section is the proposed kidnapping of the Arab boy. Forces of good and evil meet again for the soul of a boy. Whether by coincidence, or by the design of the metaphysical powers, Matty prevents, perhaps inadvertently, the execution of the kidnapping. He had earlier interrupted his diary-writing to meet Bell and Goodchild but a flat tyre stopped him near the kidnapping site. A bomb explodes and he is caught in flames again. This time, instead of being himself carried out, he whisks away the Arab boy from amidst the flames. One of the kidnappers, Bill, is stopped by the burning Matty:

In the chaos a strange man dressed as a soldier was able to carry a burden out of the school. It was wrapped in a blanket from the end of which small feet protruded and kicked. This man stumbled on the gravel but ran as fast as he could towards the darkness of the trees. But the flaming tide made him take a curving run and as he did so, a strange thing happened in the fire. It seemed to organize itself into a shape of flame that rushed out of the garage doors and whirled round and round. It made as if on purpose for the man and his burden. It whirled round still and the only noise from it was that of burning. It came so close to the man and it was so monstrous he dropped the bundle and a boy leapt out of it and ran away, ran screaming to where the others were being marshalled. The man dressed as a soldier struck out wildly at the fire-monster, then ran, ran shouting away into the cover of the trees. The fire-monster jigged and whirled. After a time it fell down; and after some more time it lay still (p.248).

III

Golding believes that there is a connection between man's diseased nature and the "mess things are" (p.166). His intellect is the criminal man should first catch and correct. This, which could have been the glory of man, has become his shame. The fire that had engulfed the child Matty burnt the man Matty. And if the first fire had been started by a German
bomber, the second fire which made "the whole world . . . weak and melting like the top of a candle" (pp. 250-251), was started by some Britishers who were feeling ecstatic at this "fierceness, [and] a wild joy at the violation" (p. 250) of the normal. Man himself is the victim and the enemy, the crown and the curse of civilization. He himself has made the world an "open stove" (p. 12) and the people un-persons. The first fire had produced "A figure . . . condensed out of the shuddering backdrop of the glare" (p. 13). The second fire made Matty a monster which "jigged and whirled. After a time it fell down; and after some more time it lay still" (p. 248). Man doesn't need an enemy to destroy him; he himself will do it. As a poet says:

O wretched generation of enlightened men,
Betrayed by the maze of your ingenuities. 17

If a reading of the consequences of two fires is made, it can be seen that whereas the war-fire had created Matty the Sophy-fire destroyed him. The conclusion can be drawn that more than the macrocosmic holocausts it is the internal fires which are cataclysmic.

Sophy, her partners -- Gerry and Fido -- Goodechild, Bell, Pedigree, all are apprehended. Since nothing could be proved against them they are released. But the meaning of Darkness Visible is clear. Bell and Goodechild's -- Goodechild? -- innocence is incapable of dealing with the evil of Pedigree and Sophy. They are all enclosed in their "self," are unable to view the "otherness" of their nature, unable also to imagine that evil is "them." They are shut in partitions. "One is one and all alone and even more shall be so" (p. 225) the novel warns.

For the first time in a Golding novel, we see saintliness overpowering the beast. Matty comes back as a "golden immediacy" and enwraps Pedigree to take away from him the multicoloured ball he used as a ploy to attract children. Matty
... clutched the ball closer, drew it in to avoid the great hands that were reaching towards him. He drew the ball closer than the gold on the skin, he could feel how it beat between his hands with terror and he clutched it and screamed again and again. But the hands came in through his. They took the ball as it beat and drew it away so that the strings that bound it to him tore as he screamed. Then it was gone (p.265).

This may well be lapped up as Golding's recovery of faith. It must not, however, be forgotten that though Matty here calls to mind Pincher's God and though he does succeed in loosening Pedigree's grip on the ball, the ambiguity remains regarding Pedigree's full conversion. In the gatekeeper's "talking at him bitterly" (p.265), with which the novel ends, lies the novel's perfect illustration of ambiguity. William Nelson sums up the dominant strain of the novel when he says that the "reader cannot decide whether he [Matty] has made possible a new spiritual language in the world or is the victim of delusions." 18

To equate Pedigree with evil and to leave Sophy out of account here would be a mistake of analysis. Pedigree, as we have noted, is not as starkly evil as Sophy; he is "bad but not as bad," he says about himself, as the other characters in this dark world. "I never hurt anybody" (p.265). His vice is such as "in many countries would not have landed him into trouble." Otherwise "he was without vice" (p.79). He is a wall creeper and not a white ant like Sophy. We should be more concerned with Matty's struggle with Sophy, and in this struggle, the first round has been won by Matty. But Sophy has survived and Matty has died. Matty, Lok-like, has perished and, as, in The Inheritors, where darkness had no ending, in Darkness Visible too, what is visible is "nothing... but darkness" (p.253).
IV

RITES OF PASSAGE

Rites of Passage brought Golding back into the popular lime-light he had lost after Lord of the Flies, and that was as far back as 1954. Golding had, however, continued to excite committed readers with his fables of the human situation in spite of having lost foothold in the estimate of the general public. And even though he "abuses" his readers, they have always looked forward to a new Golding novel. Rites of Passage must have affirmed their faith in him besides winning him many new readers.

Golding's naval experience had made his readers expect a 'sea yarn' from him just as they had anticipated a 'war novel' in Darkness Visible. This time, they are not disappointed. Rites of Passage, located in an unnamed ship bound from England to Australia has elements of a social comedy mixed with those of a black comedy. The result: a novel as "deadly as a loaded gun" aimed at the manners and callousness of human beings towards one another. It brings us, the text says, "man's knowledge of Man" (p.278).

Both the sea and the ship provide Golding the venues to see the forces of good and bad playing against each other. The ship's world, "the shape of the little society in which we must live together for I know not how many months" (p.188), as Colley wrote in the novel, pits man against himself as also against the ship's society, tests him hard and cruelly and leaves him to his own resources to face the bitterness of existence, the "broken business of living."

In Rites of Passage, it is Edmund Talbot and Robert Colley who are put into the laboratory conditions the ship offers so as to make them look into themselves and see how from their own limitations of understanding, their utter lack of knowledge of people, a world "monstrous under the sun
and moon" (p. 278) is produced. It is this world, this truth about the condition of man sub specie aeternitatis that Golding has aspired to show. He invents circumstances here to investigate, Tiger says, "such subjects as justice, moral responsibility, social class, and the uses and abuses of authority."19

V

The novel, set in 1812 or 1813, is in the form of a journal an aristocratic priggish young man, out to take up a place for himself in the social pyramid as if by right, keeps to offer entertainment to himself and to please an indulgent god-father "whose kindly hand first helped me upwards" (p. 10). Talbot's journal, however, has nothing of the usual sea stuff in it; it is "a sea-story with never a tempest, no shipwreck, no sinking, no rescue at sea, no sight nor sound of an enemy, no thundering broadsides, heroism, prizes, gallant defences and heroic attacks!" (p. 277-78). And yet there is drama enough in this "wooden world" (p. 27) to fill 278 pages here, and perhaps, as Golding told Baker, "another couple of volumes [more] about that voyage."20

The drama in the ship begins once Parson Colley occupies the central stage. For it is in reference to him that most themes in the novel start developing. Crompton rightly says that "Colley's extremism, his romantic follies, his agonies and ecstasies provide a fuller and deeper record of the human condition."21 There is some kind of curse on him for he has a knack of making enemies. Undeniably, it is not his nature but his cloth that earns the spite of all, except Lieutenant Summers. The ship carries on it, as already hinted, the bigger on-shore world. All its conflicts of "birth, death, procreation, betrothals, marriages" can be seen "in this extraordinary ship" (p. 263). The passengers carry with them their social
and class consciousness, their prejudices and egos, their crassness and moneymindedness. This floating society is anything but happy. There are questions galore concerning this voyage of discovery with most of them getting answered in part or in toto. But the central question concerning Colley's death of shame is what occupies us most. The provenance of this story of death of shame, Golding says, can be traced to Wilfred Seawon Blunt's journal where Blunt recounts, how, in 1970 en route to India, Duke Wellington was asked to cheer up a man on an adjacent ship. The man did not respond to it and died. All this ignited Golding's interest. He expressed it to Haffendon:

When you read nineteenth-century life and literature, it seems quite remarkable how many people suddenly died; Arthur Hallam, for instance, lay down on a couch and just died. I don't understand it, but it's something that deeply interested me...22

Rites of Passage is this attempt on the part of Golding to understand such deaths. In his letter to her sister, and Talbot attaches this letter to his journal, Colley had given vent to his anguish: "I had not harmed them. They had had their sport, their will with me... [I]t is crueler than death, it must be — it must be so, nothing, nothing that men can do to each other can be compared with that snarling, lustful, storming appetite —" (p.238). What made these seamen in the underbelly of the ship treat Colley as a stone they could kick about? What was that which made him, "a man of God," get humiliated as "a bare headed Clown"? (p.228) — these are the questions which catch Golding's attention.

All the answers point to the rigid social monolith that allows no movement up and down the social ladder. "Lord" Talbot basks in the respect Captain Anderson shows to his person. At the same time there is in Talbot some resentment when he congratulates Summers for "imitating to perfection the manners and speech of a somewhat higher station in life than the one you was[sic] born to" (p.51). It is, for one thing, this social snobbery that was
instrumental in the heaping of abuse on Colley. A parson has no place in a materialistic world. But this sad truth has escaped Colley. Another thing that leads to his getting scraped at the hands of the sailors is their superstitious nature; for them "a parson in a ship was like a woman in a fishing boat — a kind of natural bringer of bad luck" (p.193). This explains why the immediate reaction of the officer Colley first met was: "'Oh G --, a parson! That will send old Rumble-guts flying into the foretop!'" (p.186). This adds another dimension to the impending harassment of Colley. For when the Captain himself does not hide his aversion to the parson (he may have his reasons to hate them) why should the sailors not enjoy themselves at the cost of the parson? Colley's unintended subversion of Anderson's orders to the passengers not to "speak to the officers who are executing some duty about the ship" (p.203) -- a general order, applicable as much to Colley as to Talbot -- ignites Anderson beyond all limits. The following dialogue between the two of them should clearly bring out the helplessness of Colley's position:

"Mr Colley! Do you wish to subvert all my officers?"
"Subvert, sir?"
"It was my word, sir!"
"There is some mistake—"
"It is yours then, sir. Are you aware of the powers of a captain in his own ship?"
"They are rightly extensive. But as an ordained minister—"
"You are a passenger, sir, neither more nor less. What is more, you are not behaving as decent as the rest—" (p.201).

It is not a matter of Colley's denying Captain's authority. He admits that the Captain is "the king of emperor of our floating society with prerogatives of justice and mercy" (p.144). The truth of the matter is that it is Anderson who threatens to subvert Colley's profession which, as far as Colley is concerned, is his life too. Coupled with this animosity is a necessity on his part to be hard lest the ship should sink. So, once again
we find ourselves in the familiar Golding's realm of confusion and perplexities. The opposing impulses operate again: religious v secular; responsibility v superficialness; guilt v forgiveness.

Moreover, in demanding that proper respect be shown to his cloth, Colley has, from one point of view, subverted the "customes of our society or indeed, the laws of nature" (p.129) prevailing on the ship. But then so had Talbot. When confronted with Summers's frank assessment of his creeper like rise he tried to ward him off with a veiled threat: "That was a notable impertinence, Mr Summers!" But he had to confess that "in everything the man had said, he was right" (p.129). Talbot takes it as an affront when Anderson delays in accepting "my position as your lordship's godson" (p.137). But, they could, "Like dogs cautious of each other's strength" step "high and round each other" (p.137-38). Unfortunately, Colley had nothing "social" to fall back upon and so came to grief.

Even then, this only partly explains Colley's miserable experience on the ship. For a fuller view, explanation of the outrage committed on him we must go into the "bowels" (p.218) of the ship. Once there, we shall find this explanation "too neat, [and] too slick." The whole answer is confounded by a tangle of "strangeness of this life in this strange part of the world" (p.223). During one of his visits to the bilge of the ship, Talbot had seen an "extraordinary object. . . . It was, . . . a plant, some kind of creeper, its roots buried in a pot and the stem roped to the bulkhead for a few feet" (p.78). Colley was able at first to feel secure with "the long, green weed that wavers under the water from our wooden sides" (p.247). But immediately after it, he uses the adjective "unruly" to describe the sailors. It makes us sit alert. This ship, made from English oak, will have, as Tiger rightly surmises, "a rich range of implications."
While in *Rites of Passage*, Golding does not dwell upon the symbolic significance of oak, he elaborates upon it in *Close Quarters*. A ship needs seasoned wood. So when it is made from a mix of seasoned and unseasoned wood, problems start brewing. Gibbs tells Talbot that sailors must take notice that the wood is fully seasoned: "When I was only that high I came across a bud sticking out of a knee — must have been dead, of course, but how was I to know that?" (*Close Quarters*, p.151). The twig was, of course, green and soon put out a leaf. The fate of the ship can be imagined.

The implication of this in the *Rites of Passage* ship is that in a dead, deadly structured society, any attempt to show life (green leaf) would be dealt with a wooden smile, to extend the metaphor. The ship is in the equatorial doldrums and needs some sacrifice so that the winds may release it and it may continue its southward journey. Colley is that albatross that the sailors must kill to propitiate the winds; he has that greenness that must be pinched so that the ship remains intact.

To come back to the "events" on the ship, what are those "rites of passage" that Colley undergoes, must undergo to be born anew, born "twice"? The poor parson, we see, unwittingly invites the wrath of one and all. With the Captain looking big on him, Talbot avoiding him, the gentry on the ship not acknowledging his salutation, he is falling into a "melancholy leading on to madness" (p.210). The incident where he is pitted against Deverel and Cumbershum sends him into a great trepidation. The loneliness and the lostness he experiences in the "Godless vessel" brings to him the truth of his condition:

> I began to understand. I began to tremble. I was alone! Yes, in that vast ship with her numberless souls I was alone in a place where on a sudden I feared the justice of God unmitigated by HIS Mercy! (p.233-34).
The unruly sailors have their own sport with Colley. In the name of celebrating the rites of passage across the equator, they pour all kinds of ignominies upon him. Having filled a huge tarpulin with water, urine and dung, the sailors, encouraged by Deverel and Cumbershum, throw him into it to, they convince themselves, baptise him into the rites of the sea-life.

In this falling of Colley into the hands of rogues, it looks as if Simon has come back, come back into the similar ring of tormentors which had killed him earlier also. Like Simon too, Colley is driven by a "what-else-is-there-to-do?" impulse. Moreover, both fail to communicate with others. Philips tries to save Colley from this humiliation but is checkmated by the two officers who force open the door of his bunk. Colley records:

Two huge figures with heads of nightmare, great eyes and mouths, black mouths full of a mess of fangs drove down at me. . . . Yet as I opened my mouth to protest, it was at once filled with such nauseous stuff I gag and am like to vomit remembering it. For some time, I cannot tell how long, this operation was repeated; and when I would not open my mouth the stuff was smeared over my face. The questions, one after another, were of such a nature that I cannot write any of them down. Nor could they have been contrived by any but the most depraved of souls. Yet each was greeted with a storm of cheering and that terrible British sound which has ever daunted the foe; and then it came to me, was roared upon my soul the awful truth — I was the foe! . . . Yet now as I struggled each time to get out of the wallowing, slippery paunch, I heard what the poor victims of the French Terror must have heard in their last moments and oh! — it is crueler than death, it must be — it must be so, nothing, nothing that men can do to each other can be compared with that snarling, lustful, storming appetite — (pp. 236-38).

At this moment, Summers fires from Prettiman's blunderbuss to scatter the unruly mob from inflicting further humiliation upon Colley. Colley returns to his bunk, broods over his own part in "what happened" (p. 239), and decides to seek an apology from all concerned. He takes it as an affront less to his person than to his cloth, and "through it to the Great Army of which I am the last and littlest soldier. MY MASTER HIMSELF has been insulted. . . ." (p. 240). This, he is convinced, deserves a rebuking. Accordingly he decides to face Anderson boldly. "I defend MY MASTER'S
Honour as you would defend the King's!” (p.243), he says. At this point, he even tells Anderson to his face that it was "by force of your example" (p.243) that the sailors, including officers, had their sport with him. When the officers confess their fault and seek his forgiveness he is emboldened to visit the "ignorant people" (p.244) — that is, the common seamen -- to forgive them also. Summers implores him to reconsider his desire but is unable to move him away from going into the chaos and confusion, the unknown part of the ship.

A meaner round of ignominy is played this time on him. "What happened" in the belly of the ship we gather from bits because Colley does not write about it in the letter, being too terrified and ashamed to even think about it. But Golding's sparks of irony crackle here more brightly and surely. They reveal to the readers, who is being guided by Talbot on this voyage to the darkness of man's heart, and Talbot's imperviousness in reducing people to this state. Talbot, in particular, of all present on the ship, remains most ignorant of "What happened." As a matter of fact, when Summers had fired the weapon, Talbot was in his bunk forcing Zenobia to surrender herself to him, to render "up all the tender spoils of war" (p.86). The gun shot spoiled this mock-war as surely as it had brought to an end the serious war outside his room. "Was there ever anything more mistimed and ridiculous"? (p.87) Talbot remarks; but this sounds more like Golding on Talbot's stupidity, on his failure of the understanding.

Colley, having readied himself in the armour of his spiritual reiments, makes an attempt to join the common sailors in a spirit of forget and forgive. He descends into the bowels of the ship and there is made to drink. The poor person, unaccustomed to these jovialities, gives himself away. He had earlier developed some attraction for Billy Roger whom he had called,
in his letter, "my young hero" (p. 217). Now in a state of drunkenness he committed the fellatio on Rogers. Talbot, in his usual misunderstanding way, "concluded at once" that Colley had been teased by the seamen, who, "like schoolboys" (p. 109), amused themselves at Colley's misdemeanour. At the striking of the "all's well" bell on the ship Colley emerged from the bowels of the ship:

His ecclesiastical garment had gone and the marks of his degree. His wig had gone -- his very breeches, stockings and shoes had been taken from him... Then his face became thoughtful. He turned to his right, walked slowly and carefully to the bulwark and pissed against it (pp. 116-17).

Singing "Where have you been all the day, Billy Boy?" (p. 115) and mixing it with an ecstatic "Joy! Joy! Joy!" (p. 117) he retreated to his cabin, never to come out again. Not fully knowing what he was doing he bursts out signing "Where have you been all the day, Billy Boy?" (p. 115), mixes it with an ecstatic "Joy! Joy! Joy!" (p. 117), retreats to his cabin, never to come out again.

This then is "what happened" to Colley on the "happy ship." A public court of enquiry with Talbot conducting it is held but is hurriedly called off because Rogers threatens to implicate even the officers in the farce that had caused Colley's death. Summers tries to bring Colly out of his "willing himself to death" (p. 153). In this he seeks Talbot's help. However, Talbot's failure to understand as to what had happened to Colley even though he had seen Colley making an ass of himself surprises, even embarrasses, him greatly. To Summers's insistence that there was more to Colley's death than met the eye, Talbot, as snug and blind as ever, replies:

"Man, we saw what happened!"
"I mean in the fo'castle or below it, rather than on deck."
"He was made beastly drunk."
I found that Summers was peering at me closely.
"And that was all?"
"All?"
"I see, Well, sir, I shall report back to the captain."
"Tell him I shall continue to consider how we may devise
some method of bringing the wretched fellow to his senses."
"I will do so; and must thank you for your assistance" (p.155).

Does that "peering at" not recall Ralph, in Lord of the Flies, being examined
by the twins curiously, "as though they were seeing him for the first time"
(p.192)? Talbot is "the man most responsible" (p.133) for Colley's death. And
not only for this but also for Wheeler's disappearance. For was it not an
unknowing and stupid remark of his that had made Anderson realize that
Wheeler "must have ears and eyes all over him" (p.258)? The closeness of
Talbot's cabin "became a positive fetor" (p.119); it closed his understanding also.
Not unlike Tuami, he too fails to see beyond the darkness of his meanness.

But is this analysis, again, not "too neat, too slick"? If Talbot and
Anderson and others fail to consider Colley's need for the partitions to break
so that he can converse with people, does Colley himself not fail to see that
the strict rules that govern the ship (society?) do not permit this intercourse,
this translation of "a person wholly out of one class into another" (p.125)?
The officers may be biased but Colley's way is no less wrong. His sad end
can, moreover, be traced to the tussle between the powers of religion and
the powers of secularism to dominate each other. In insisting to make a
foray into the bowels of the society, to rebuke the ignorant, Colley repeats
Simon's entry into the beastly circle of the school-boys (School boys? Talbot,
we should remember, had described the cruel seamen as school boys. And
our Lord of the Flies encounter tells us what school boys are capable of
doing.) The message is that society does not welcome those who attempt to
break its hard shells of prejudices and changelessness. Those who attempt it,
attempt a passage from one stratum to the other are ritualistically killed.
These are the "rites of passage" that one trying to perform them must first
consider.
All this does not fully give us the "convulsion of the understanding (p. 251) about the "hideous situation" (p. 204) Colley was in. At one time, he had given expression to his fascination for the material world:

What impediment to the vision can colourlessness and transparency spread before us? Do we not see clear through glass or diamond or crystal? Do we not see the sun and moon and those fainter luminaries (I mean the stars) through unmeasured heights of pendant atmosphere? (pp. 196-97).

But he continues:

Why should I, a cleric, a man of GOD, one acquainted with the robust if mistaken intellects of this and the preceding century and able to see them for what they are -- why, I say, should the material nature of the globe so interest, so trouble and excite me? They that go down to the sea in ships! (p. 197).

Almost appended, we may say, to it is: "must behave as the shipmates do."

This then is "what happens." Colley's suppressed desire -- homosexuality -- comes to the surface, once his consciousness is dulled by rum, and he passes into the passage of sexual debauchery. It is this enemy inside, the devil that comes up and grips him "inescapably." "[T]he strangeness of this life in this strange part of the world" (p. 223) is what undermines him, what "sets him on" (p. 151). Colley in his perilous condition exclaims: "What a man does defile him, not what is done by others" (p. 235). If he fell, we realise, he "stumbled over in himself" (p. 278).

But Colley's death, like Simon's, has failed to touch anybody in the ship. Summers remains his gentle self. Anderson and other officers also turn their eyes away from their responsibility in his fall. Talbot continues with his uncomprehending, fumbling movement up the social ladder. It was he, indeed, who had set Anderson on Colley. For having failed to show Talbot his place, the Captain had washed his spleen on Colley. Talbot it is who, because he listens only to his ego, had paved Colley's way to death. Golding
himself says, "... it seemed natural that, in a subtle way, Colley should be killed by Talbot. That, of course, is a subtlety beyond a subtlety, since it's a series of levers from Talbot that kills Colley."27

The world is a sad and dark place to live in. Not only does it play with its Colleys unfairly but it has no sense of noblesse oblige also.

VII

Structurally, Rites of Passage looks back to Golding's early novels. The shift of focus and switchover to a new way of reading old facts creates a medley of opinions and emotions. Structurally thus Rites of Passage advances the "meaning" of the novel, which is that life cannot be held into straitjackets. "Life is a formless business. ... Literature is much amiss in forcing a form on it" (p.265), Talbot, in a rare moment of insight, tells Summers. Any attempt to foist one's limited finite conclusions on life, the "varied fabrics of the human tapestry" (p.258), would take the ship of life into doldrums, where unlike in S.T.Coleridge, Golding says, no albatross is at hand to make man aware of his guilt. The "seriousness of Mr Colley's condition" (p.129) represents, we recognize, the human condition no less effectively. Man has always been unable to love the "otherness" in him. More sadly, there is no sense of guilt in him when he kills the "not-1."

Colley dies an ignominious death; ignominious also in the sense that there is no dawn of realization on his part of his own role in his death. He lacks "imagination in evil." Talbot, the other major persona of this drama, is only slightly, very slightly aware of the catastrophe he could have prevented. There is in him an understanding of Colley's part in his own fall "from the heights of complacent austerity to what his sobering mind must have felt as the lowest hell of self-degradation." But what about
he himself? "With lack of sleep and too much understanding I [he says] grow a little crazy, . . ." (p.278). Satyanarain Singh would believe that Talbot has changed. "From a callous and priggish feudal that he was he matures into a man with a sense of justice and moral responsibility." But there is nothing in the text to corroborate this confidence in Talbot's rise. He grows, but only as much as Ralph does. There is no assurance that he will undertake a second voyage more mellowed and less snobbish. It is to say that if he has not become more priggish, he has not become less also.

Virginia Tiger and Subbarao eagerly accept Talbot's decision to keep back Colley's letter from his sister as a moral act. But is this not what Golding mourns? Is this "lie" not the "truth" about the human condition, the truth that man indulges into lies and deceptions and remains glued to his false positions. Rather than face his evil Talbot evades it. He adds "stupidity to iniquity" when he decides to write a letter to Colley's sister:

> I shall write a letter to Miss Colley. It will be lies from beginning to end. I shall describe my growing friendship with her brother. I shall describe my admiration for him. I shall recount all the days of his low fever and my grief at his death.

> A letter that contains everything but a shred of truth! How is that for a start to a career in the service of my King and Country?

And not only this:

> I believe I may contrive to increase the small store of money that will be returned to her (p.277).

There is no self-abnegation here; neither any seasoning. What the whole tone betrays is his laughing in his sleeve, a sense of victory at the realization that he will succeed in having the cake and eating it too. He will ultimately pass the "whole" diary to his patron, and if any part of it leaks it will be his patron's doing. Colley's letter is part of Talbot's diary, but Talbot's
letter to Miss Collet is both a part and not.

Once again, we are back in the world of *Lord of the Flies*, The *Inheritors* and *Pincher Martin*, a world, neither starkly nihilistic nor purely joyful, but dangling between the two, containing the two simultaneously. There is an ambiguity here which resists conclusion. And so the journey continues as Golding takes us to view it in the next two parts of the trilogy, but after a break in *The Paper Men*.

**VIII**

**THE PAPER MAN**

William Golding's lack of hesitation to abuse the reader takes him into a new landscape in *The Paper Men* where a novelist deflates not only the reader but himself also, a novelist, a paper man, thin and fragile and mortal like anybody else but priding himself for being a creator, creating characters and critics and having them at his mercy. In the process, the novelist forgets that "the natural blasphemy of . . . [his] condition" (p. 125), his puniness, his triviality are the realities he should really be concerned with rather than playing hide and seek with God and playing also a Devil with his own creatures, abusing, punishing, teasing them out of thought if only to display his hold over them.

The early reception of *The Paper Men* threatened that like *The Pyramid* it would go down in the general estimate and be ignored as a minor novel. It is quite likely, however, that, as in the case of some of Golding's other novels, readers will adopt a more tolerant view towards it at a future date because, with all its shocks and varieties of experience, it does strike one as a rewarding voyage. 31 Golding's own words have boomeranged upon him in a spirit of farce perhaps. Writing about the art of the novelist, the novelist/narrator of *The Paper Men* had expressed the novelist's dread of
getting lost in the "marvellous view" (p.38) of the details and getting engaged to "a landscape suggested by the surface" (p.39). The impression The Paper Men leaves initially is of a spirit of farce operating as a nemesis for having created a farcical account of a novelist chasing a critic chasing the novelist chasing the critic . . . Like in Marlowe's Dr Faustus, where the mid-play comic scenes look at odds with the serious occupation of Marlowe as also of Faustus, but perform the right function — they show that Faustus has wasted himself in vain pleasures of twenty four years — Golding's intention might also be to show how man has trivialized his condition, occupation, life at the behest of the Devil — Halliday in the novel — who operates mysteriously. What is important, however, is that Golding continues showing that the endless battle between infinity and triviality is the condition of life.

IX

In The Paper Men, this battle has become farcical in nature for the reason that it describes the whole life of a man "as a movement from one moment of farce to another, farce on one plane or another, nature's comic, her clown with a red nose, ginger hair and trousers always falling down at precisely the wrong moment" (p.49). The novel is structured around two paper men. One is Wilfred Townsend Barclay, a novelist of some reputation and bearing a deceptively close resemblance to its creator, William Golding. (Both are bearded, fond of travel, avoid critical lime light — though for different reasons perhaps — and started their writing career rather late in life.) He is in constant attrition with an American academe, Richard Linbergh Tucker. The latter cajoles, and tricks Barclay into making him his literary executor and biographer. But both the biographer
and the biographee are blind to their own faults; rather they are afraid of their limitations. Their past catches them up as their trousers fall down and their spiritual hollowness stands exposed. As Barclay says: "... there was not a single absurd, humiliating or quasi-criminal act in my life that did not come back to sting and burn me" (pp. 111-12). But instead of opening themselves to grace, these closed, burnt out men run away from and into each other, attracting and repelling and destroying each other.

The novel starts with a humorous account of Tucker probing a dustbin in the hope of finding some piece of useful paper, some fan mail etc. but getting caught in the act by Barclay, who, thinking that it was some badger sifting the dustbin, shoots at him and slightly injures him. He asks Tucker to take off his dressing robe. In the process, his own trousers fall down. All at once, as if on a cue, his wife enters the scene, and catches hold of the scrap of paper, a love letter he had received long ago from one Lucinda. But this small torn piece of paper tears apart his already crumbling marital life. What makes the whole situation even more farcical is that at that time Barclay was involved with some other girl and had successfully concealed the affair. So he gets caught and punished for the act he had not really committed then.

Man, being a product of his past, cannot avoid being scalded by his past sins. His arrogance that he can control, like a god, his physical and mental environment lands man into false, mistaken, disease situations of life. In these situations the world becomes paper-like "sticky by nature so that whether it was lard or marmalade" man could never rid himself of the stuff, once he was "committed to it." The world is "flypaper" and man "the fly" (p. 16). The various bits of paper containing the record of the various times the trousers of the clown fall down are man's reality, however, thin and sticky it might be.
and however hard he may try to run away from it.

Barclay's marriage runs into loose sand; he and Elizabeth fight fierce rows like sophisticated but uncivilized persons, at the end of which Barclay leaves home "Moving, always moving" (p.41) from one place to the other, harrowed and harassed, without even knowing whether he has been to a particular place or not. All this while, Tucker pursues and pestered him, puts one bait after the other, lays one trap or another to commit Barclay to let him become his Boswell. In this, he has "access to more mechanisms than Boswell, not just paper, not just tapes, videos, discs, crystals with their hideous, merciless memories, but others, sniffers, squinters, reconstitutors..." (p.56) — a whole lot of modern gadgetry indeed. The story reads like a modern day version of Faust's falling to the temptations of Mephistopheles and mortgaging his soul for knowledge and power. Like his Renaissance prototype, Barclay also fritters away his energies, his spiritual grasp over things, his election as the receiver of light from heaven. There was a time when Barclay did suffer "mantic moments, certainties, if you like, whole episodes that had blazed, hurt, been suffered for..." (pp.24-25). But persecuted by critics and abetted by his own cultivated "universal indifference" (p.27), he is reduced to a state where he would least think or feel. He, Barclay says about himself,

did not need to invent, to dive, suffer, endure that obscurely necessary anguish in the pursuit of the — unreadable. There, hanging in the fringes of the Apennines, my exchum's family history rendered invention irrelevant. So I wrote The Birds of Prey in next to no time, with no more than five per cent of myself — not the top five per cent either — sent it to my agent, together with some poste restante addresses, and drove off in a hire car (p.25).

The novel, the one bright book of life, is what the novelist lives by and in. Once he starts demeaning it — the novel — he starts abusing himself; life also. This is what Barclay does. When his novel, his creation ceases
to become a labour of love, a declaration of freedom and becomes rather a mask, a camouflage, a deception, a trick, he lets in death in his life. This is his sin. Hard that he may try to escape from the clutches of Tucker, and his billionaire unseen sponsor, Halliday, he can never put them off his scent who, dog-like, follows him wherever he goes. But it is like running away from one's own shadow.

While on one level, The Paper Men is about one novelist being hounded by one dog/critic, it is also about the critic being preyed upon by the creator. It may be said that a critic lives in a parasitical relationship with the novelist. Well, some if not all. And perhaps not even some. For if a critic/reader has no life without the novelist, has a novelist any existence outside his readers/critics? And so it becomes impossible to determine as to who lives by whom. But man's insistence, his belief in his pride that he is the creator of the other produces no-win situations. And if both of them are ultimately hollow inside it leads to farcical situations.

Some such situations comprise the structure of The Paper Men which contains perhaps the most humorous scenes in the whole of Golding's oeuvre. Here Golding is at his most relaxed and hilarious mood. Take the opening scene itself where Barclay mistakes the prying Tucker for a badger and shoots at him with an airgun:

The situation was not simple and was further complicated by the absurd. I was wearing an old pair of pyjamas and the cord of my dressing-gown was gripping me a little above where the pyjamas should have been gripping me but were too ancient for their elasticated top to do so. They were performing as they always did, even in contrary conditions. If I was losing weight, they slipped down. If I was gaining weight, they slipped down. I had the loaded gun in one hand, my torch in the other and no third hand for my trousers which now fell suddenly under my dressing-gown so that I only just caught them by clapping my knees together. It was, perhaps, no situation from which to face a charging badger. I recognized uneasily the hand of what I sometimes thought to be my personal nemesis, the spirit of farce (p.11).
And if we are able to suppress our enjoyment at the plight of a critic, we cannot fail to control our laughter when shortly afterwards we find both the author and the critic being caught naked and red-handed, literally speaking, by the author's wife. Another comic episode is the one when, three years later, Barclay discovers Tucker, at a conference at Saville, Spain, lecturing on Barclay's relative clauses and founding his scholarship on an intimacy with the writer himself.

Aware that his life hangs by a nod from Barclay, Tucker tries to entrap him by offering him his girl friend. Mary Lou, much like Mephistopheles had thrown in Helen. In fact, Barclay does confuse the two names, calling Mary by the name of Helen quite frequently, and even uses this name and character in his next novel. We, then, witness another round of games these academies play to outwit each other. They sit together on a bench, and Barclay, having declared his freedom to "make a pass at any girl in sight with no one to say me nay" (p. 32), slides his arm "along the back of the seat" (p. 33), and towards Mary. Later he finds out, to his utter horror, that Tucker had set this "five feet a few inches of a child, . . . nothing but a young body that supported a mind about as interesting as a piece of string" (p. 67) only to lime him into surrendering his past, his history, his soul to Tucker. What hurts him even more is the discovery that at the back of all this is one Mr Halliday who is interested in him because he (Barclay) is one author whom he (Halliday) had never read. The message clearly being that Barclay was either unreadable or unknown.

Tucker himself is no scholar. His interest in Barclay is ignited not by the merits of his fiction or the spark of a saintliness, which is the essential driving force of a great novelist, but because "no one else was doing you as of his moment in time" (p. 64). Such plane statements are
bound to wound a weak man. "To know myself accepted, endured not even as in honest whoredom, for money, but for paper!" (p.75), Barclay exclaims in fury which has traces of despair. Tucker lacks the sincerity and honesty of a purpose and scholarship; his only aim in foisting himself on Barclay is of advancing himself and winning the favour of Halliday. Towards this, he adopts all questionable and demeaning ways. To acquire the sole rights on Barclay, he allows the use of his girl-friend by both Barclay and Halliday, "saves" Barclay from a fall that was just not there, drinks wine from a saucer placed on the floor, conceding, in essence, to all the humiliating demands to please the "marvellous me" (p.14), that is, Barclay.

The major theme of the novel suggests that there is a sort of inevitability in life, that everything is accounted for in this very life. There is a kind of gravitational pull that brings people back to their origins. While the imagery of fly and flypaper describes it well, there is one more metaphor in the novel which shows Barclay the reality of his condition:

Oh God, oh God, oh God, the process, link by link, we don't know what will come from this seed, what ghastly foliage and flowers, yet come it does, presenting us with more and more seeds, millions, until the whole of now, the universal Now, is nothing but irremediable result (p.57).

All man's actions, all his thoughts, his whole existence, in fact, are interwined with one another in a complex sequence of cause and effect. Everything is the cause and the effect also of one's actions. Even when one attempts to avoid "human contact" (p.66) — as both Halliday and Barclay do — one cannot. There is a nemesis that operates in the world and one can't escape it. Barclay had scoffed at the idea of stigmata when offered by his Italian girl friend as pure hypnosis, but later he himself suffers this; he leaves his home but is drawn back to it; Barclay is pursued by Tucker who in turns get pursued by Barclay; Tucker wants to write his biography.
but Barclay would rather write Tucker's; he catches Tucker in the middle of rummaging through the destroyed bits of paper and is shot at but Tucker catches him in the middle of destroying the paper he had spent his whole life to possess and kills him, kills him rather in mid-word. The paper men are duly paid. These paper men who thought that they were supermen ultimately prove to be even less than their worth in paper. For "The Paper Men" that Barclay thinks is his novel is really Golding's. In order to show Tucker his true size, Barclay had decided to so put him in one of his novels as to make even Mary blush for him and Halliday forget him, but it is Golding who sets something "theologically witty" (p.135) by making Barclay a character in his own novel.

All this explodes the creature's grandiose ideas about his being "Indestructible" (p.168), and exposes his limitedness as both a scholar and a man. In his insistence to become "his own eyes" (p.39) while looking at himself, man (Barclay) gets separated from his spirituality, gets withdrawn into impenetrable shells and becomes to himself the whole universe of which, he thinks, he is both God and Devil. This solipsism, paranoia, Pincher Martin-like "I am, I am, I am," -- Elizabeth does give Barclay a dressing down for blubtering "I, I, my my --" (p.20) -- is what perhaps drives Barclay to write his own "biography"; not autobiography, but biography. He would later gift it to Tucker so that the world views him as he would want to be looked at without the charge that what we view is his viewpoint. Such megalomania, but expected in a Golding character, is what destroys the peace and laughter of the world, sends Tucker, in the present situation, into an insanity, Mary into deserting her lover, and Barclay's own wife to a premature death of cancer.
In fact, similarities between The Paper Men and Pincher Martin are quite striking: it is really as if Pincher has got a new lease of life in Barclay. Both manoeuvre things to suit their ego but both are overtaken by nemesis; both run away from their creators; both abuse the lovers of their friends. They are also described in crustacean imagery. Barclay's fellow author Johnny tells him:

"You see, you are what biologists used to call exoskeletal. Most people are what they called endoskeletal, have their bones inside. But you, my dear, for some reason known only to God, as they say of anonymous bodies, have spent your life inventing a skeleton on the outside. Like crabs and lobsters. That's terrible, you see, because the worms get inside and, oh my aunt Jemima, they have the place to themselves. So my advice, seeing you're going to make me a loan and noblesse oblige et cetera, is to get rid of the armour, the exoskeleton, the carapace, before it's too late" (p.114).

Pincher had locked himself into lobster shells of immunity from human touch; likewise, Barclay, afraid of becoming Tucker's "raw material, the ore in his mine, his farm, his lobsterpots" (p.36), runs in a rush of "Fury, hatred, fear," from one place to the other to escape searches into his scandalous past which contains a shameful tale of deceits, thefts, murders.

Barclay's close encounter with God takes place on an island in Italy. This Christ resembles, he thinks, Pluto, the God of the underworld. An intensely poetic description by Barclay himself follows. He stood there, he says

with my mouth open and the flesh crawling over my body.
I knew in one destroying instant that all my adult life I had believed in God and this knowledge was a vision of God. Fright entered the very marrow of my bones. Surrounded, swamped, confounded, all but destroyed, adrift in the universal intolerance, mouth open, screaming, bepissed and beshitten, I knew my maker and I fell down (p.123).

The encounter reveals to him his "place in things: teaches him a new language to speak which brings to him the knowledge that "I. am. sin"
(p.127). The periods between the words indicate perhaps that he is learning
new words, a new world, one by one, "inch by inch" (p. 58).

What follows this is a nightmarish experience, wedged precariously between reality and hallucination and where we see him developing stigmata. This ends in his seeing Halliday on the top of stairs. In what mode of consciousness he saw it, even he does not know, but all this fuses into a shot of brilliant luminosity where he has a glimpse of a harmonious world, a world ablaze with radiance and the people dancing. "For the singing and the song I have no words at all" (p. 161).

We might tend to see Sammy here once again, but Golding does not. Unlike Sammy, who burns himself out of his shames, comes to terms with himself, Barclay never realizes the enormity of his triviality, of trivializing with the human material; and so he is never transformed by the glory of the world. He is untouched by the pain of the others. Right in the opening scene he is concerned more with his nervousness than with Tucker's injury: "... the water spilled into my palms the way the blood had trickled out of Tucker," he recalls. But not only this. "In the trees," outside, he finds, "the dawn chorus was in full, joyous swing" (p. 15), though inside his own heart, there is frustration and helplessness and isolation. Nature and man are moving apart on their separate ways, as in Lord of the Flies.

Barclay rushes back home to his wife in a spirit of repentance and forgiveness. But this skin-thin regret collapses under Elizabeth's scrutiny and irreverance until he himself realizes that he was describing the indescribable and proving his wife's point that when he broke a silence "it may not be significant or profound" (p. 172). The interview with Douglas, a local vicar, pricks all his illusions about being elect. "After all. There were three crosses," (p. 188) Douglas says, alluding to the crucifixion, and freeing him from a borrowed sense of responsibility of love and tolerance. He returns to his
usual tantalizing ways, teases Tucker further by making a bonfire of all the paper Tucker had wasted his life to possess. But in the process he pays with his life.

The pattern of universal indifference, universal farce is complete and horrifying. For what returns does a man lose his soul? we may ask. Like the medieval archetypal scholar, the modern scholars make a pact with the Devil to bring about one another's ruin.

X

Power and pride are the central concerns in The Paper Men as they are in Golding's other novels. Man, in his enormous pride, decides to wield power over his world, over life unaware that life cannot be patterned. Golding's display here that biographies by their nature falsify life, that they cannot be written, illustrates the hidden theme, the "deep, meditative hum" (p.83) of the novel. In the essay "The Moving Target," — Golding had described how he had once short-circuited the attempt on the part of a woman student to reduce him to a death-in-life state.

She was not going to write a thesis on anything as dull as a dead man. She wanted fresh blood. . . . She proposed I should bare my soul, answer all her questions, do all the work, and she would write the thesis on me. . . . I wrote back at once, saying that -- I agreed whole heartedly with her professor -- I was alive and changing as live things do.34

Writing of a biography would mean that life has ended, has been contained and controlled. Life resists this patterning. Both Barclay and Tucker lay traps to catch and outwit each other. Tucker, having been initially frustrated, renews his efforts to have Barclay under an obligation. One foggy day he leads him to the edge of a cliff. Barclay slips but holds the edge precariously, and is "rescued" by Tucker, who knew that the ground was only a yard below Barclay's dangling feet. He is plainly mortified at
being handed back his own life by Tucker — "It seems I owe you my life" (p.92), he is forced to concede. It is only some time later, when he revisits the place, that he discovers the trick played on him. This sets him on to unman Tucker in every conceivable way.

But Tucker has the last laugh. He kills Barclay in "midword," destroys him in the very process of writing. And can there be anything more horrible for a creator than a death in the very act of creation, being murdered by his own protege, his own parasite, his own creature?

Tucker himself gets nothing out of it. Life recoils upon him. In Golding's world, there is, Crompton says, "divine justice without mercy." If "The Paper Men" is Barclay's book, Tucker has no way of controlling its contents. The moral we can draw is that man destroys himself in the process of destroying the other, the "not-I," for he forgets that he himself is the "not-I." Both Barclay and Tucker are mirror-images of each other. Each can destroy the other but only when he destroys himself first. It must also be mentioned here that if there are similarities between Barclay and Tucker, Barclay and Halliday also have close resemblances. If Barclay "avoids everything," Halliday too "avoids human contact" (p.66).

Life is elusive. It is like nothing else because it is everything. Man is only a part of the process called living, is a speck in the time, in the Everlasting Now. But his desire, the insistence to take the whole world into his pair of hands is what breaks the world apart. To Barclay's poor defence of his misactions, Liz had replied, "'You're not part of it, you sod! You're the whole bloody lot!'" (p.173).

Will suffering take man out of sin, out of his "broken down criminality"? This is the question that Golding raises again in The Paper Men. The vicar told Barclay that "suffering doesn't always improve people" (p.180).
Barclay had insisted upon a passionate desire "for there not to be a miracle" (p.20). But now at the end of the novel, there is a promise of change. He sets on fire "the paperweight of a whole life" though not before deciding to give Tucker what he had spent his whole life to get. "It will be a kind of dying" (p.190). A kind of dying that, perhaps, Nathaniel had offered to Pincher. The burning of the papers, a record of old shames, would "not only be a symbolic act of self purgation, it will be the very last rite of passage of all, the rite of passage that carries its subject across the boundaires of life itself."\[37\]

Like Sammy also, Barclay finds himself blessed with the possibility of a vision of mercy that he had persistently evaded. What was the life that he so carefully, so jealously, so violently hoarded against prying eyes? "My life, that life, that long and lengthening trail of -- of what?" (p.47). He cannot complete the sentence simply because his life was nothing, signified nothing. And yet he would not allow it to be vivified. Slowly, over the years, he has mellowed a bit knowing that he had "invent"[ed] (p.125) himself. And so the last page epiphany is not something out of the blue; the events were leading to the change. He says: "I am happy, quietly happy. How can I be happy?... I am happy. That's not reasonable, it's a fact" (p.190).

It is at this moment precisely that Tucker kills him in mid-word, all of which necessitates giving a new look at what had happened. Barclay's "who knows" echoes Jocelin's "Now -- I know nothing at all." But unlike The Spire, The Paper Men does not show any real transformation. There is no recovery of faith in the case of Barclay. While Jocelin's faith had changed Father Adam, Barclay's faith does nothing of the sort. His belief has been "too late for that" (p.190).
The novel ends abruptly. There can be no end, no finality when farce is the very condition of life. There is no recovery from a situation of grotesquerie, from sinfulness, if nothing connects nothing. The ironic/comic/mocking/self-deflating tone that Golding creates is both the product and the cause of the life which avoids everything.

XI

CLOSE QUARTERS

The disappointment Golding's readers had with The Paper Men had made them wonder whether he had reached a Nobel laureate's writing block. More often than not such fame as a Nobel Prize brings tends to make the writer repeat himself. In the case of Golding, whose obsession with the basic human condition necessarily meant writing about the same themes, there was even a greater danger that the Nobel Prize would be a beginning of the end. Happily it has not been so. The Paper Men had faintly suggested it, but Close Quarters and Fire Down Below have confirmed it. Peter Ackroyd has thus rightly affirmed that Golding's "present condition is healthy, and the prognosis is excellent." Close Quarters fascinated Bernard Levin so much that in a mood of half-jest and half-seriousness he wondered if a law could be enacted to make it obligatory for Golding to publish a novel in alternate years.

Close Quarters, by William Golding's own admission, is a "continuation" (p.3) of the leads taken in Rites of Passage. It is the second part of the trilogy with Rites of Passage being the first and Fire Down Below the third. The drama and excitement on the Rites of Passage ship to Australia was so great that now in Close Quarters it is not just a new venture, it is a necessary one also.
Talbot, the "maddeningly superior" diarist-cum-would-be-civil-officer, is in search of a new hero for the second journal little knowing that the voyage will culminate in the "making" (p.178) of he himself. Assured of the "good work" done by the European countries, especially England (remember Kurtz?) he harangues one and all with speeches favouring the "Rotten boroughs for ever" (p.11) and glorifying "the civilized nations" which "will more and more take over the administration of the backward parts of the world" (p.9). It is this socio-political snob of a creature and his newly-formed love-affair that Golding watches from a close quarter in Close Quarters.

Talbot is far from being clear-sighted. Already priggish, Talbot shows warped responses to one surprising situation after the other that take place on the ship. The blows he receives on the head or elsewhere repeat themselves and make us suspect whether we can rely upon him to know what happens on the ship. The Colley-episode also prejudices us against him. This man, who had once dreamed of controlling the whole planet, now sulks "in a confusion of head and circumstances" (p.187). He realizes, "I needed cleaning! There in a ship which might be the death of me, I felt soiled by real dirt, by paregoric, by my inability to shape circumstances..." (p.186).

The urge, the compulsion to shape circumstances, and pattern them into an order is what describes the problem of the human condition in all the novels of Golding. In each of them, he has taken a small community, or even an individual and tested it/him in a condition of "deadly peril" (p.234). Caught at a point — "the null point," a point "where two tides meet and so produce motionless water where a current might be expected" (p.171) — people show contrary, dual reactions and are involved in problematic relationship. The consequence is that a world constituted of such people moves neither this way nor that but stands still as if in doldrums.
Though in *Close Quarters* Golding observes the human condition as found on a ship, the conclusions he draws are not limited to the ship culture alone. "What a world a ship is! A universe!" (p.185), Talbot exclaims. The ship, in Golding, is often a clear metaphor for baptism and initiation. Both its inevitable touch with water and its nature of voyage show how it is used to engage man in a confrontation with himself and others. It also initiates him, baptises him into the ways of life. The little society of the ship replicates in every detail the conditions of the world it has left and will reach. Whether this ship reaches or not, and/or in what condition, all depends upon whether its inmates bring their own flaws and tensions to break it or feel their "guilt feelings" (as Talbot would do later in *Fire Down Below*) and confess their meannesses and failure. "Men, like cables," Summers tells Talbot, "have each their breaking strain" (p.269). It is the "ghost of a society" breaking under its own strain and in deadly peril that Golding brings to our view in *Close Quarters*. In his review of *Close Quarters*, David Nokes has said:

As with most of Golding's fiction, it is impossible to escape a brooding restless intensity which turns even the most trivial incident or observation into a metaphysical conceit. A deck is never just a deck, a hull never merely a hull. From bowsprit to prop and from bilge pump to crow's-nest, his ship is a tightly rigged analogy for the human condition.\(^40\)

In the "Introduction" of this dissertation, it was argued that the human condition is a product of human relationship. When men act on themselves and others, they condition the human existence. It is an incontrovertible feature of the human condition that when men interact with one another, they create a class system. The politics of the social existence entomb men into pyramids of callousness and mean competition and vitiate the harmony and co-existence that ought to be the condition of life. Golding gives us an appraisal not of the world only but the individuals also and of how the
different social positions of people direct them to take stances which can destroy the ship of life.

The "Ship of Fools" of Close Quarters is in deadly danger as much because of its old age and decomposition as of the regular tug of wars between people of different classes and opinions. When people there develop misguided and warped sense of their own or others' honour or status, when there is a mix of "seasoned and unseasoned" (p. 151) persons on it, nothing will survive. A series of seemingly trivial events besets this ship and its human cargo. The social movement on the "happy ship" is hampered, even nullified, by the callousness and inhumanity with which the passengers treat one another, and which cling just as the weeds below the water-line foul and stop the crawling ship. Talbot discovers to his horror that the ship would not move. Like a tired horse which, howsoever one may beat it, bucks frightened and remains motionless, the ship would heave up a little but then "slide down into the same trough in the same place" (p. 146).

XII

Whatever happens in Close Quarters can be traced to man's nature. If the ship loses its way, its speed, if its masts are broken, if it gathers weeds, and if it is made of unseasoned wood, it is all because certain men have forsaken their responsibility in its smooth sailing and have fanned their own personal or social rivalries and obligations. Summers touches the heart of the whole problem in a conversation with Talbot:

"The sea, Edmund, which earlier peoples, savage peoples and poets such as Mr Benét, have credited with thoughts and feelings does sometimes exhibit characteristics which would still make the mistake understandable. Those who go down to the sea in ships can sometimes find themselves in a combination of circumstances which produce an appearance of malevolence!" (p. 170).
"Confusion" is the keyword to describe and understand the atmosphere and the events in Close Quarters. Repeated a number of times, it recalls the sprawling Petersburg of Crime and Punishment. A great many occurrences on the ship starting with the name of the ship are left unexplained. The indeterminacy reaches its climax in the unexplained suicide of Wheeler and our not knowing of his knowledge from close quarters of what had happened to Rev. Colley at the start of the voyage. What he told Talbot is not further narrated by Talbot who so excuses himself: "The information was of such a nature that I do not propose to commit it to this journal" (p.221). Since what role or responsibility Wheeler's was in Colley's death by shame will never be known, Talbot's observation, "It is a dreadful thing to know too much" (p.78) neatly expresses the confusion on the ship.

The ship continues its onward journey which in the present circumstances meant that it did not move an inch forward. Talbot's fumbling ways, and his lack of respect for the Captain's orders persist. This time they not only bring agony to Deverel and Willis but also cause the ship to lose all its masts. While waiting for the favourable winds, the ship is joined by another ship, Aleyone, and both stand together in the vast sea as "two streets side by side" (p.74). The news of the abdication by Napoleon comes as a dampener to Talbot who is frightened "at the prospect of peace" (p.55). But Marion Chumley brings light back in his life; not really light but "lightning" for Talbot says about himself: "Aleyone had overhauled him and struck him with lightning . . ." (p.188). The power and influence of love changes him, overhauls him. With Marion beside him, he feels "a new thing in life, a new knowledge, means of it, awareness" (p.96).

Marion's sudden coming and equally unwilling departure leave Talbot exhausted and much chastened. From a "self-confident young man" who had
imagined himself capable of shaping the circumstances, he now ends up unable to walk, talk, and even think properly. In the "confusion of head and circumstances," he feels a strange sensation below the deck. It was "a creeping and almost muscular movement!" (p.187). The discovery that the ship might sink because of its own limitations and the negligence of the sailor and passengers brings to his dizzy mind the realization that the fall of the ship, the world in miniature, is related to Original Sin, man's incapacity to live in mutually constructive relationships. He explains to himself: "... the war had ended, the ship had proved to be rotten as an old apple, Deverel and Willis between them had allowed the apple -- the ship -- the coach -- to lose a wheel . . ." (p.188, emphasis added).

The novel moves towards a reconditioning of its chief protagonist, Talbot. There is definitely a change in his vision. Still in a haze about his "actions" in ruining the ship, still persisting with the belief that it was the combined (in)action of Deveral and Willis that destroyed its masts, he does show a glow, however faint, of his admission of his own foolish, incomprehending "market" nature. He regrets his "meanness, ... [his] attempts at manipulation." The superior airs that he had assumed earlier have vanished now. He confesses to Summers: "Measured against you I am a paltry fellow, that is the fact of the matter!" (p.269).

Human nature is a fixed element. Had this been not so, there could not have been any discussion of "human nature." Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that the human nature is amenable to changes, even growth. Talbot's "human" nature also changes, grows also. It is a very small change, too small, it is feared, to make much difference to a future Colley. Still, there is a greater agony, a greater "confusion" in him regarding his early "fixed" opinions. What Golding said of Talbot in the context of Rites of Passage
sounds more appropriate in the present context. In the interview with Haffendon, he had said that Talbot would be "aware of the tragedy and be sorry for it but it's not going to alter him root and branch. It will add a little bit — a sentence no more — to his knowledge of human nature." It is with this additional bit of knowledge that Talbot renews his voyage in Fire Down Below.

XIII
FIRE DOWN BELOW

Fire Down Below, the latest novel to date by Golding, is a prayer of a novel. It marks Golding's peace with the world, the world which had troubled and teased him out of thought for some twenty five intense and questioning years. This is also the first Golding novel to end with a marriage. In all the novels so far, Golding had not been able to bring himself to accept birth and marriage as the parts of the human condition. Children and women had been dying or were being murdered in all the novels prior to Fire Down Below. But now we have not one but two marriages; the first between Prettiman and Miss Granham, and the other between Talbot and Marion. In fact the first marriage paves the way to the other in that it suggests to Talbot that the voyage of life lies in not living for oneself but in being true to others. This truth of life, we remember, had continuously and conveniently been ignored by Pincher, Sammy, Jocelin, Oliver, Sophy and Barclay in different places and times. But in Fire Down Below Golding has moved firmly into the ordinary world, accepts, a la Matthew Arnold, that love erases all guilt, all self, and all evil. Arnold had written:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

XIV

Golding continues to concern himself with the "slow burning" of Talbot an undertaking he had assumed in Rites of Passage and kept up in Close Quarters. The unnamed ship is held intact by ropes. Its belly burning, the wood decomposing, the "cargo of pigs" (Close Quarters, p.66) moving from one uncertainty to the other as it encounters one danger after the other, the ship is a picture of the world it has left and is moving to. Aggressiveness, jealousies, misunderstandings, class hierarchies, loneliness lie close together with nobility, friendliness, co-operation and love in this floating world. The ship is a "country in little" (p.20) and the voyage neatly replicates man's coming through the storms of life. Summers had made the observation, in Close Quarters, that the voyage would be the making of Summers. He was right. Like the ship which flounders in the high seas, or lies still on the windless sea, or meets unexpected favours from Alcyone in the shape of exchange of Benet with Deverel, Talbot too, assisted by Marion, stumbles his way to maturing years. The memory of the humiliation that was heaped upon Colley haunts him like a ghost. His [Colley's] elbow, pen, inkwell, sander — here he had known the extremes of dread and sorrow, of humiliation, mortification — experience of a misery beyond the power of my imagination! If that misery, that whirlpool of human suffering had drained away without trace, as my reason told me, why suddenly was there a winter on my skin? (p.61).

One guilt adds to another; one realization joins another and Talbot "grows."

From running away from his complicity in the death of Colley he, now, in a gesture reminiscent of Sammy, longs to find a human/e contact, "anyone
warm and living who breathed and spoke" (p. 62). But whereas Sammy had attempted this communion by escaping from the cells of ego and sexuality, Talbot effects it by looking into himself:

in that fearful instant I made up my mind and stayed where I was, the fierceness of my clutch making my whole body tremble. Eyes shut, I stayed there, in the very position of the dying man, and was so cold as he.

The change was gradual. The petrifaction of fear diminished into unease, then into a greyness of consent. Thus it had been. Thus it was (p. 62).

And if this "self-knowledge" (p. 64) was not adequate, the incident where in his usual "confusion of thought and feeling" (p. 149) he could have been instrumental in the murder of Prettiman promises to give him the required convulsion of the understanding. That it had not then brought in him the change is another story. However, it did show to him, he realizes, "a few things about myself which I did not much like" (p. 148). He imagined that he was falling "into the darkness of a measureless pit." But this fall had helped him to see himself from the outside and coming to a "shaming self knowledge" (p. 212).

The voyage he had begun with confidence and arrogance has started emptying him of his pretensions. At the same time also, it fills him with a new life, gives him a "twice born" status. The objectivity that he brings now to view himself is not disinterest. It leads to an introspection. He makes a "thing" of his self so as to view it as others would, without the confusing blinkers of intention or stupidity or egotism. Prettiman sums up Talbot's situation rightly: "You started your voyage with the objectivity of ignorance and are finishing it with the subjectivity of knowledge, pain, the hope of indulgence --" (pp. 202-03).

"It'll be worse before it's better, sir" (p. 125), Bowles had warned Talbot of the weather. The same is true of the life on the ship, as elsewhere. An oil layer had impeded the movement of the ship. And now Prettiman's
worsening condition. More is to come. But a process of self-examination has started. Indeed, it can be said that if the dominant theme of *Rites of Passage* was callousness and stupidity and that of *Close Quarters* confusion and colourlessness, what strikes one most in *Fire Down Below* is humility and introspection which self-analysis brings in and leads to the convulsion of the understanding. His clouds of "Pinchbeck glory" (p.151) having been pricked, Talbot sits "crushed by humiliation and grief" (p.151). "[D]efenceless" and standing "naked" to the elements, he is at least "free" (p.209) now. With this newly-won freedom, he evaluates ideas more honestly and competently, juggles with them more carefully and reaches the conclusion that "the only human quality to the depths of which there could be no limit was my personal meanness" (p.252).

His transformation is not spectacular. This lends credence to the belief that good is not as heroic as evil appears to be. It appears to operate silently and slowly and even confusedly. Below the surface, however, its movement is sure and firm. Interviews with Prettiman bring about a change in Talbot, bring to him the knowledge of the mechanics of the "wholly unexpected behaviour of our world" (p.106). Old foes become friends, as understanding grows, and friends become teachers, as friendship strengthens. The democratic and humanitarian Prettiman and his devoted wife try to convince Talbot of the sickness of the established order, a task in which they largely succeed. It needs huge effort on the part of Talbot because he is not a part of the world only but a staunch and blind believer in the inequalities of the social world also. During the course of his many meetings with Prettiman, now convaleseing after having been accidentally hit by him, Talbot begins "the strongest adventure of our long voyage" (p.209). Prettiman, a blend of Nick Shales and Rowena Pringle, because he has succeeded in bridging logic with
passion, opens Talbot's eyes first to his condition on the earth. And then from the "trivial" business of determining man's "position on this globe" he makes him aware of "a contemplation of the universe into which we have been born":

"Oh, look, boy, look! Can the whole be less than good? If it cannot — why, then good is what it must be! Can you not see the gesture, the evidence, the plain statement there, the music... . . .

And from there, Prettiman leads him to view

"... our caravan, we, a fire below here -- sparks of the Absolute -- matching the fire up there -- out there! Moving by cool night through the deserts of this new land towards Eldorado with nothing between our eyes and the Absolute, our ears and that music!" (pp. 218-19).

"It'll be worse before it's better" we recall Bowles's warning when we consider the events on the ship. And so it happens with the ship. It runs into a huge mountain of ice which threatens to sink one and all. Only it does not. The combined effort of all the seamen with Talbot not interfering with the operations for once (though it was he who first saw the berg) some luck, and the indifference of the sea and the ice to what happens to the humans — all adds to the not sinking of the ship. The whole episode, as a matter of fact, all the episodes following it proclaim, celebrate the "allegory of friendship" (p. 12), of which Talbot had earlier spoken.

What matters is survival but what matters most is how it is effected. As this thesis has tried to argue, Golding's belief is that man is a fallen creature and that his fall has occurred because he lives in partitions, and operates from his limited perception insisting that it be taken as the "complete" one. What can save man is not the preference of one behaviour-pattern or the other, one value-system, one way of life to the other, whether spiritual or mental or physical. Since man is spirit plus mind plus body, and since life is patternless, man needs to find and form bridges between various ways
of understanding his position on the planet. In *Fire Down Below*, neither
Summers's use of chronometers, nor Benet's study of the stars, nor Anderson's
seamanship alone tells them of the position of their ship. All methods have
to be seen in a togetherness; "a federation of the methods" has to be forged
to know it. The dominant groups on the ship used different ways to locate
their position and reach the destination but "achieved the same result." All
the parties were favoured by luck. "The land was where they said it was"
(p.200).

**XV**

But the landfall does not solve all the problems; rather, so far as
Talbot is concerned, it gives birth to a few more. We are again reminded of
Bowles's forecast. Towards the end of the voyage, Talbot, having broken the
rigid separations that divided him from the immigrants he had so scornfully
described as "cargo of pigs," had learnt to walk among them. But once on
the land, Talbot once again finds separations. This time he is on the other
side of the fence. The news of the death of his god-father coupled with that
of Summers also in an accident on the ship removes Talbot away from the
human world. His future "lay in ruins" (p.274). He chases his friends, "But
they had vanished" (p. 275).

For a change things start taking a turn; for the better this time. The
death of his god-father, and the consequent absence of privileges force
Talbot to be himself, to be without the epiphnet of "Lord." His attempts
to save Summers from the fire are futile yet the jump into the "fire down
below" chastens him, and makes, we may say, a "Matty" of him, but a
Matty who is of this world, a Matty who has survived the encounter with
fire and come out stronger. Talbot knows that now he has to "Work . . .
[his] passage" (p.277). This is the knowledge, the wisdom that he has shored
against his ruins. What happened on the ship was that happened there.
Prettiman rightly asks him not to "refine upon its nature," and tells him,
"it was not an Odyssey It is no type, emblem, metaphor of the human
condition. It is, or rather it was, what it was. A series of events," (p.275).
If understood rightly, the "events" on the ship would not get repeated. They
do not threaten the end of the world. The events there do not represent
the human condition.

And yet they do. The "voyage" was a voyage for understanding the human
condition. Once Talbot knows "grief feelingly," knows the hard fact of the
death of his wise friend Summers, he, in a manner like Ralph's, mourns "him
and them and the dead ship" (p.282).

However, the bigger Talbot-Ralph is different from his smaller growth.
Whereas Ralph was able to view the darkness of man's heart only, Talbot
sees light, howsoever cruel and blinding, at the end of the voyage:

I woke with tears on my face to endure yet another day
of harsh, intolerable sunlight. It was in the driest and
emptiest of interior illuminations that I saw myself at
last for what I was, and what were my scanty resources.
I got up, as it were, and stood erect on naked feet. The
future was hard and full. Nevertheless I girded myself
and walked towards it (p.282, emphasis added),

In contrast to Ralph's shaky walk towards the officer, Talbot is firm and
sure of his position. The return of Marion Chumley and her subsequent
marriage with Talbot is a fairy-tale ending. But Golding would rather ask
us to suspend our disbelief and to have faith in miracles.

Samuel Mountjoy and Oliver had failed in fully redeeming themselves
because in addition to their own failure to fully understand their sinfulness,
their manipulation of people and coming out of the vortex of evil, they
had no Sonia as Raskolnikov had in Crime and Punishment. Now in
Down Below, Golding gives his English Raskolnikov a Sonia in the form
of Chumley. Rather he goes further than Dostovesky in agreeing to their marriage. Prettiman was fully convinced when he told Talbot that "The considered alliance of two persons dedicated to the betterment of the human condition is not lightly to be compared with —" (p.202). Then he was taken lightly by Talbot. But now Talbot starts a new life with Marion. This is incidentally the second marriage in Golding's world. Marriage implies a union of two persons in love and faith; it is, what Lawrence says in The Rainbow, "the baptism to another life." Montague, a firm believer in "original virtue" avers: "The drive to be together is an expression of the desire to be united with one's kind, to be unified without being related to uniformity." Marriage, nobody would deny, gives an assurance of a creative social world, a world where people are not "food for each other," do not compete with but complete each other.

Golding's heroes must, however, pass through the trauma of facing the horror of their meanness before being promised with a wedlock. This Talbot does. In a dream, which brings to the mind Raskolnikov's falling to the ground in a fully contrite and chastened way, Talbot imagines "seeing them as it were from ground level" (p.312) ("them" in this case being the Prettimans and their followers ). Talbot recalls their invitation to join them in the "great festival of joy" (p.312). It is a different thing that he does not join them. The reason he gives, and it is one we cannot fault, is, "The world must be served" (p.313).

**XVI**

Talbot has not changed dramatically but the change is authentic. The transformations that have occurred will stop him from repeating his errors because he has realized, confessed, his crassness in dealing with the human world. He will not perhaps become a saint, will still embarrass mankind
now and then. But the confusion regarding his guilt does not confound his knowledge. His life has been validated by a complex of methods and there is perhaps no point in tracing it to a single route.

In *Fire Down Below*, Golding has, it looks, reached "The End" of the voyage, he had begun in *Lord of the Flies*, the voyage he had undertaken to know man, his sick condition and the ways to redeem it. For he was confident that it could be redeemed.

William Golding's voyage has ended. If he starts another, he will either repeat himself or run into bad weather. But then he is too great a magician not to do another rope trick. Talking about Golding's novels has been as exciting as waiting for them.
INFINITY AND TRIVIALITY — NOTES


10. William Golding is frequently, and with great justification, credited with having read a large number of writers, both famous and obscure. In nothing else than in the framing of these questions does this become clear. It would interest a reader to know what Hannah Arendt, in n. 2, The Human Condition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 10, says about such questions. She refers to St. Augustine as being the first man to raise, and distinguish between, the two questions — "who am I?" and "What am I?" The second question shows, she believes, man's dependence upon God to know what his nature is, and what he is.

11. Crompton, A View, p. 110, observes that here Matty "may be symbolically crossing from one world into another, and his elaborate ritual might thus be interpreted as some kind of rite of passage, anthropologically speaking."


14. The Anatomy, p. 334. Fromm may not have read Darkness Visible, nor Fromm's book. But it would not be out of place to suggest that what Fromm says here alongwith the "cases" he discusses describe Sophy so well that it may be taken as some kind of gloss on her.


18. "The Grotesque in Darkness Visible and Rites of Passage," Twentieth Century Literature, 28.2 (Summer 1982), p. 188.


   The sense of shame is what guarantees the transformation. For unless there are feelings of emptiness, in him, man will not be able to rearrange his life. This rearrangement, we shall see, must come from within. Hence the necessity of shame. In this context, it will also interest to remember that Marx had written that "shame already is a revolution."


34. A Moving Target, p. 170.

35. A View, p. 177.

36. G.V. Raj ("William Golding's The Paper Men: Dialectics of Desacralization," in An Indian Response, p. 129) suggests that "they are part of each other."

37. Crompton, A View, p. 182.


41. "An Interview," Quarto, p. 9. It would not be out of place to re-read the last two paragraphs of Lord of the Flies here and see how they bring to our mind a picture of Talbot in shorts. In addition, I wish to point out one more marked parallel between Golding's first and the
last heroes. When Talbot reviews "the whole history of that voyage" he has to make "effort to wipe the water away as an attempt to rid myself of the eternal and infernal flies" (pp. 304, 305). Are these "flies," we may well ask, not the same flies which had brought to Simon and Ralph the vision of the diseased nature of man?

42. M.F. Ashley Montague, Anthropology and Human Nature (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1957), p. 34.

43. Indu Saraiya, in a review of the novel in Times of India Sunday Review, 4 Mar. 1990, p. 4, likewise believes that by the end of the novel, Talbot" ... begins to see himself as a human being blind to the dangers and pain to which he exposes the others."