Conclusion

NEARER GOD, NEARER MAN
"We who live on the outer crust of a planet rotating its way through endless space, belong to the most tragical and critical of all its eras. That is why we must begin to search for its meaning for us. To discover what that is and to reorient our lives accordingly could make the impending era the most blessed of all, but not to do so could easily make it the worst."1

William Golding's concern with human suffering and his commitment to humanity have lent his novels of the human condition a vitality, a complexity and a universality not many among the contemporary novelists have achieved in their novels. The novel in his hands is a weapon he uses to excavate the dead crust of habits, to scrape the labels of things and to blast man out of a callous indifference towards his condition. The job of the writer, he insists, is to "get people to understand their own humanity."2 Or their inhumanity(?).

This job is an awful one. Making people shed that very thing that guarantees their survival is no easy task. Golding's own created "characters" resist him with all sorts of tricks and reasonings. Faced with the evil his skill and intelligence has spun, Tuami argues, seemingly innocent of the irreparable damage he has caused, "'What else could we have done?'" and "'if we had not we should have died.'" Pincher too denies any "willed" role in his destroying of the world: "'if I ate them, who gave me a mouth?''' They, and they appear in different guises in different novels as Jack, Sammy, Jocelin, Oliver, Sophy, Talbot and others, employ their intellectual acumen to continue their prideful hold on life to the "ends of the world" and against God's mercy and compassion. So much assured are they of their Promethean invincibility that they forget that they are "created"
beings only. The extinction of all that they held dear should have made them realize the truth about their finiteness. But it is ironically a reflection of their finiteness that they ignore all such hints as declare their vincibility and promise their salvation. Since a Golding character normally does not understand his humanity, since this man-god does not let the consciousness of his situation become an awareness of the truth of his condition, we turn pale with despair and sorrow. In his meanness and ignorance of his true situation, man has built his life on the exclusion of the reality and sanctity of other people. Not only this he insists that his life is secure only if he has mastered and dehumanized them. The universality of Jack's and Pincher's scheming nature ropes in us also and we see no light beyond the darkness of evil and meanness.

Man is god-like somewhere. Like gods, he, too, is capable of creation. The invention of light, the raising of stones, the floating of logs to cover large distances—all these facts of human capacity should normally make us proud of man. But Golding is not. He looks at the hidden secrets of man's mind and is aghast at what he looks. This creator of creation, so much brave and so hugely patient, employs all his mind to ruin the very world he wants as his own. The creator has become the destroyer.

If then man comes as some kind of shock to all concerned with his condition, it is not to be wondered at. Jung thus was completely shaken when he saw man, "this lord of the elements, this universal arbiter, hugging to his bosom notions which stump his dignity as worthless and turn his autonomy into an absurdity." Staggered to see that "All his [man's] achievements and possessions do not make him bigger; on the contrary, they diminish him, . . ." he was forced to pronounce man as a "quantité négligeable."
Golding views this ignoble, worthless quantity from close distances and under the aspect of heaven, he digs into the sands of time and also imagines a future time. All this he does to see, to know, to understand what man is, why he is, how he is. He brings himself to view this "marvel of creation" and the earth, "set like a jewel in space." But the sight baffles him as it did Jung. He is unable to understand why man must always use his knowledge and skill to "diminish" the world of God and man in a universe ablaze with all the glories that contradict that "diminution."

For the truth is that beyond the darkness of evil and sin, passions and desires, stands a world which gives man hope and life if only he would leave the procession of sinners and take the road to reach the God out there and in his own soul also. Some do. Simon has always been doing it. Nathanial suggests how this can be performed, Jocelin's and Matty's performances are no mean achievements. Talbot too is led to a point where he feels the opposing forces of the hell and heaven and makes his choice.

Choice, Golding asserts, is necessary. Unless the patient wills, how or what can be doctor cure? Accordingly, man must choose, must discard the older, primeval self and wear the newer, God-given "original" self, whole and pure. "What else is there to do? Simon asks us. When man does it, when, through suffering and pain, he reaches the point where he, unlike Pincher Martin, understands that he is made of "temporary structures patched up and unable to stand alone" without the protective covering of God and man he attains a "twice-born" status. This "re-borning" is no simple process. Man does not want to know the truth about himself, much less change his lineaments. The feelings of security and physical preservation
dissuade him from sounding the solidness or otherwise of the planks he is standing on.

But there is no alternative if man wants to prolong his stay on the earth. And Golding knows that man must will it. Thus, while the conditions of life make him a natural pessimist, while, to borrow Matthew Arnold's words, "this strange disease of modern life" puts him in utter distress, the creative instinct in him, the rock of "belief" and "faith" make him hopeful that man will realize that "beyond the transient horrors and beauties of our hell there is a Good which is ultimate and absolute" (emphasis added). He understands that unless man is told, at the risk of displeasing him, the secrets of his heart, he will continue repeating himself, his errors and his sins, his stupidities and his iniquities, his spires and his pyramids.

Golding tells and shows that all is not lost, that there is much more to man than sheer malignancy, violence and cunningness. His religious sensitiveness, his belief in man and commitment to God is too strong to be clouded by the darknesses of Belsen and Hiroshima. The deep anguish he feels at the way man has come through the ages provokes him into loving man rather than discarding him. It is writers like Golding whom Joseph Conrad must be having in mind when he said: "The creative work of a writer may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness."7

Golding's rescue work concerns salvaging a consciousness. Not only this, he wishes to start a "newness" in the consciousness by which man learns how to think and what to think. The world can be changed. But first man needs to change himself. He must work upon himself, must risk everything so as to build everything anew. There is light beyond darkness. And the distance has to be travelled by man himself. It is man's world all right. But he has not got it as a right or under an obligation. He must
win it and continue winning it. What Xenophanes says is relevant here.

Says he:

The gods did not reveal from the beginning.
All things to us, but in the course of time
Through seeking we may learn and know things better.

The quest novels of Golding ask questions few have dared to address themselves to. At the same time he, not just a critic of the human condition, helps us answer them. In the essay "Belief and Creativity," Golding quotes St. Augustine as saying "Woe unto me if I speak of the things of God, but woe unto me if I do not speak of the things of God." Golding too has spoken of God and his thing, the man and his condition. And woe unto man if he does not listen to Golding.
CONCLUSION — NOTES


2. Quoted in Owen Webster, "Living with Chaos," Books and Art, March 1958, p. 16.


5. A Moving Target, p. 192.

