Being to Becoming: A Journey in William Golding’s Free Fall

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Abstract: William Golding, in all his novels, seems pre-occupied with the condition of man in the contemporary set-up. He repeatedly emphasises, in novel after novel, the journey of his characters from the state of Being to Becoming, or Innocence to Experience. Free Fall is one such novel which showcases this inevitable journey in the life of Sammy Mountjoy, the protagonist. Sammy is constantly seeking to discover how he became what he is. He wonders how the colour and meaning in his life is, so suddenly, lost. He desperately looks for the beginning of responsibility, the beginning of darkness. Pondering over the lost sense of his life he slides into the labyrinths of his own being and realises that a wrong choice on his part, at some point in his adolescence, has brought him to the present state - the state of Becoming. Recapitulating his adolescence, Sammy, thus, presents to the readers the story of his journey from Being to Becoming.

Keywords – Being, Becoming, Existentialism, Experience, Free Fall, Innocence, William Golding.

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern writers, in their art, depict the constantly changing contemporary world and man’s response to such a change. Golding’s Free Fall is singular and original and a condensed version of human experience. It dives deep into the psyche of the protagonist, Sammy Mountjoy, projects his hidden parasitic selves and, thus, portrays the ‘mysterious’ in the human experience. All these insights it fabricates into the inevitable journey of Being to Becoming which Sammy goes through.

William Golding, an eminent post-modern novelist who grew up in the years before World War II, remarked that the basic point his generation discovered about man was that there was more evil in him than could be accounted for simply by social pressures. At the age of twelve, Golding decided to be a writer. His love of reading, and his early attempts at writing, helped him to become a successful novelist. When the World War II began, in 1939, Golding joined the Royal Navy. He said that the war was unlike any other fought in Europe. It taught them not fighting, politics or the follies of nationalism, but about the given nature of man.

Thus, William Golding, in all his novels, seems pre-occupied with the condition of man in the contemporary set-up, a social situation beset with the enigma of struggle and survival. Golding was sunk, as deep as his fellows, in the morass of the uncertainty and panic of the fifties. A complementary aspect of the human predicament on which he lays great stress is the lack of stability and permanence in the human personality. If we discard the garbs of hypocrisy, we will realise that what Golding says is true – that we begin life playfully, and end it anxiously – a theme well-explored in most of his novels.

However, William Golding got literary recognition for his work very late in life, though that is not a comment on the essential value and quality of what he has written. No doubt, Golding’s work has such a universal and profound human appeal that it is difficult to see him as part of a group or a generation. Despite this, no complete understanding of a writer like Golding can be possible without some pertinent reference to the temper of the times. As James Gindin writes, Golding seemed an anomaly among the novelists of the 1950s. His singularity was confirmed by his isolation from the literary world of London. It is no wonder then that Golding grew up in the years before World War II, remarked that the basic point his generation discovered about man was that there was more evil in him than could be accounted for simply by social pressures. At the age of twelve, Golding decided to be a writer. His love of reading, and his early attempts at writing, helped him to become a successful novelist. When the World War II began, in 1939, Golding joined the Royal Navy. He said that the war was unlike any other fought in Europe. It taught them not fighting, politics or the follies of nationalism, but about the given nature of man.

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Golding saw himself as a writer constantly changing and responding to his universe. According to him, there is no point in writing the same novel twice. Thus, each of his novels is singular and original and a condensed version of human experience. The polarity in Golding’s works is between the rational and the imaginative. This is because Golding’s belief was that there is a constant opposition of the ‘rationally
understandable,’ and the ‘mysterious’ in the human experience. He deduced this idea from his own life, but he saw the polarity as universal or as a permanent quality, so that one finds its compressed elaboration in the novels. Golding saw the two sides of experience as identifiably separate. He felt that varieties of polarities pull the human being in different directions and, thus, become a constant source of human pain. As he remarked in an interview, we live constantly in ‘two worlds,’ one physical and other spiritual. The experience of these ‘two worlds’ is basically emblematic of our nature. Often, the rational view of experience denies the irrational, mysterious or the spiritual. Yet, the spiritual is always there. From Golding’s point of view, this polarity leads to dissociation of thought and feeling. Though Golding has often said that he has no ready solution to this dissociation, and that he can find no bridge between the world of thought and the world of feeling, he has repeatedly expressed his faith that some sort of bridge between these two worlds does exist.

Golding’s early novels have been described as fables, and he has sometimes accepted the definition because in his view the ‘fabulist is a moralist,’ who propounds a lesson or instruction about the human condition. Golding is, indeed, a unique writer who does not hesitate to look at the divisions and complexities of man in the face. The polarities of experience are evidence of the presence of triviality and pettiness in man. Golding is not a systematic theologian or preacher. He is a seeker searching for meaning and purpose in novel after novel. That search itself is meaningful in a world in which man has lost a sense of purpose and stopped searching for meaning. The final answers are not to be found in Golding’s novels, but the fact that he puts the insights of his search into a form is itself significant and valuable in comprehending the universe.

A study of some of the implied metaphors of Golding’s fiction would be necessary to comprehend Golding’s attempts to suggest a plausible bridge between the different worlds that exist within man. The presence of polarity in Golding’s novels has been interpreted as a ‘religious’ perspective. But, by limiting the meaning to such an interpretation, we distort the complexity of experience that Golding presents in his novels. Golding’s polarities do not illustrate any particular doctrine. They reflect the complicated nature of the human being.

Thus, in novel after novel, he tries to look at life anew. He asserts that all his novels attempt to deal with the essential human condition, with man at an extremity, who is tested like a building material, taken into the laboratory and used to destruction; man isolated, man obsessed, man drowning in a literal sea or in the sea of his own ignorance.

Golding’s protagonists are real-life characters placed in realistic situations. Their journey of life progresses through several temptations and pitfalls; while some characters succumb to the temptations, others resist the snares. After erroneous decisions and purgatorial sufferings, some realise their mistakes and make earnest efforts to pull themselves out of the mire.

Free Fall is one such sorry tale of Sammy Mountjoy, an artist by profession. Sammy, pre-occupied with the deeper questions of life and existence, disturbed by the dilemmas of morals and ethics, frantically searches ‘for a coherent picture of life and the world.’ He becomes despondent about his futile attempts to find meaning in life, and turns into a writer in his desperation to share and communicate. However, he confesses that he is ‘translating incoherence into incoherence.’ Nevertheless, recalling his past, he narrates the story through a series of flashbacks. As a child, he lives in the slums of Rotten Row, on Paradise Hill, ‘ten minutes from the station.’ Sammy has a very ordinary childhood as a bastard son of a feckless mother. As an infant, he excitedly listened to the tales of fantasy narrated by Evie, whom he now calls, a ‘congenital liar.’ Nevertheless, he declares that Ma and Evie were his ‘twin towers.’ Also, his acquaintance with Philip Arnold and Johnny Spragg makes his childhood lively with adventures. Recalling his childhood, Sammy says, “I crawled and tumbled in the narrow world of Rotten Row, empty as a soap bubble but with a rainbow of colour and excitement round me” (Golding 17).

Together, the little ones enjoyed the dirt, poverty, breakouts, fights, hardships, robbery, trespass, bullying and blasphemy. They left no place unexplored and no time unengaged. Their world was lit with fun, beauty and excitement. In fact, Sammy says, “We were a world inside a world…” (Golding 22). Truly, they belonged to a place untouched by the cruelties and complexities of the adulterated adult world – which talks of civilisation but behaves like a savage, which talks of religion but hates its fellow beings, which talks of love but fails to share it, which talks of peace but engages in war. In fact, referring to wars, Sammy satirically comments, “Why bother to murder in a private capacity when you can shoot men publicly and be congratulated publicly for it?” (Golding 132). Far from these brutalities is the stage of childhood, full of colour and joy. Growth certainly marks the loss of this joy. Sammy’s school life compels him to abandon his life as a happy slum child. Sammy declares, “There is a sense in which when we emerged from our small slum and were washed, the happiness and security of life was washed away also” (Golding 17-18).

At school, under Philip’s influence, Sammy gets involved in gang warfare, in bullying and stealing of fagcards. Misguided, he even spits over the altar, thus defiling it. Caught once for stealing fagcards, Sammy is taken to the head teacher and punished. Strangely enough, Sammy is abashed by the kindness of the head teacher who encourages him to draw the pictures instead of stealing them. Further, the teacher presents him with
a few cards. Thus, “He let the cane stay in the corner and my guilt stay on my back” (Golding 52), says Sammy. This incident, perhaps, induces in Sammy an interest in art.

The death of his mother marks a slight change in the course of his life. He is, then, adopted by Father Watts Watt, supposedly a religious priest, who sends Sammy to the convent school for his further studies. Here, Sammy is influenced by two teachers whom he refers to as his parents not in the flesh. Rowena Pringle and Nick Shales represent the ‘two worlds’ of religion and science, respectively. Ms. Rowena is a religious, dogmatic, unsympathetic and frustrated spinster who tells children legendary stories of creation. Rowena, due to her unfurnished desires, is disgusted with life, and turns into a monster that curbs others’ joy. The episode of a lecture on Moses is a singular example of her cruelty. Merely for a doubt that Sammy raises in her class, she embarrasses him, admonishes him, and, finally, expels him from the classroom. Sammy says,

I understand how I must have taxed her, first with my presence, then with my innocence and finally with my talent. But how could she crucify a small boy, tell him that he sat out away from the others because he was not fit to be with them and then tell the story of that other crucifixion with every evidence in her voice of sorrow for human cruelty and wickedness? I can understand how she hated, but not how she kept on such apparent terms of intimacy with heaven. (Golding 210)

Nick, on the other hand, is a kind scientist and a rationalist who denies the existence of God, and refuses to believe what cannot be demonstrated in physical terms. However, Nick is equally hated by Rowena for he finds it so easy to be good. He treats children as individuals, and respects them as humans. While attending the two different classes, the children travel between two different worlds. The classroom of life presents to Sammy two different philosophies, from which he must choose one that determines his future. Sammy realises that “People are the walls of our room, not philosophies” (Golding 226). Therefore, despite his interest and faith in the Bible, Sammy discards religion, thus hanging “all systems on the wall like a row of useless hats” (Golding 6). This decision is central, not merely to Sammy’s life but to everyman’s. Modern man is, most often, pulled between these two polarities of life. He believes, however, in the supremacy of science, hails it for its accomplishments, acknowledges its power driving the world, and calls it the base of life. Deluded by its short-lived splendour, he demeans the primordial values and morals that religion stands for. He calls the soul, a fiction; and God, a mere imagination. Peter Green makes a similar comment when he says, “Reason could stick new labels on the emotions; but it could neither argue nor legislate them out of existence. It would rationalise God by discussing religion in terms of personal psychology; but God (under whatever name) remained” (Page 78).

It is, perhaps, for this reason that Golding shows the conflict between two worlds without any resolution or revelation. To him, religion and reason coexist, as do good and evil. It is upon the realisation of this fact that Sammy, towards the end, declares, “…both worlds are real. There is no bridge” (Golding 253).

The amalgamation of all these episodes defines Sammy Mountjoy’s state of ‘being’ - a state of selflessness, happiness, purity and freedom. In fact, Sammy’s life on Paradise Hill can be compared to the life of Adam in Paradise.

The most remarkable feature of the novel is the narrator’s repeated question: “When did I lose my freedom?” (Golding 5). The question of freedom is at the heart of Sammy’s predicament. In an attempt to find an answer to this query, Sammy recalls his childhood misdeeds – stealing, bullying and defiling the altar. But, what he is looking for is the beginning of responsibility, the beginning of darkness. The existence of darkness is impossible because his childhood is illumined by innocence – innocence unaware of ego, selfishness, cruelty, craftiness, calculation, or choice. Moreover, his childhood misdeeds, done unconsciously, do not spell out guilt. There is no point in looking for responsibility in the absence of guilt and evil. Recollecting his childhood, Sammy says that those were days of terrible and irresponsible innocence. At this stage, as Golding says, Sammy and his friends ‘were eyes’ that could see but not understand. This purity of vision is possible because of the total absence of self-consciousness, when perception has not yet given way to reflection.

This, in short, describes the state of Being, whereas Sammy’s life is his soul’s journey from the state of Being to Becoming, and Innocence to Experience. Sammy, the narrator, is constantly seeking to discover how he became what he is. He wonders how the colour and meaning in his life is, so suddenly, lost. Pondering over the lost sense of his life, he realises that a wrong choice on his part, at some point in his adolescence, has brought him to the present state - the state of ‘Becoming.’ Recapitulating his adolescence, Sammy presents to the readers the story of his first love. The teenage artist once draws the portrait of a girl in whom he sees a mysterious and beautiful thing in the universe (Golding 84). The artist develops a deep longing to discover the secret of the girl’s inner being, to recreate the metaphorical light that he once so casually portrayed in his first masterpiece. Sammy’s inclination for Beatrice, at this juncture, can be compared to an artist’s love and adoration for an object of beauty.

Desperate to comprehend her heavenly beauty, the artist says,
“I said I loved you. Oh God, don’t you know what that means? I want you, I want all of you, not just cold kisses and walks – I want to be with you and in you and on you and round you - I want fusion and identity - I want to understand and be understood – Oh God, Beatrice, Beatrice, I love you - I want to be you!” (Golding 105).

There is a certain metaphysical dimension to his love. Moreover, he is torn asunder by ontological questions such as – What is your mystery? Where are you? What are you? What is it to be you? and so on. These artistic longings are, undoubtedly, his obsession with discovery and identification.

These moments of desperation, unfortunately, result in restlessness and frustration. Sammy, incapable of any further endurance, resolves to pursue Beatrice and ‘possess her white body.’ Thus, Sammy’s love turns to lust, his adoration to possession, and attraction to exploitation. He endeavours to trap her but is trapped in the “unnameable, unfathomable and invisible darkness that sits at the centre of him...” (Golding 8).

Tragedy befalls him because he confuses that being with the body that manifests it. The novel is, thus, an evolving portrait of this artist as a man.

Sammy kills time waiting on the road to see and meet Beatrice. He writes to her, making pleas to her to love him. He dreams of his future with her, though unsure of her intentions. He is delighted at her sight, and depressed in her absence. Once, after a meeting with Beatrice, Sammy says, “I rode home, my heart molten with delight, goodness and gratitude. For it was good. She was nineteen and I was nineteen; we were male and female, we would marry though she did not know that yet...” (Golding 84).

Commenting on Golding’s style in these lines, Ian Gregor says, “Golding was clearly determined to get the peculiar tang of adolescence across at whatever cost in grace and power; so the language veers from the flat to the melodramatic, the humour can be excruciating, the experience is absurd, irritating, embarrassing, as well as pathetic, in the ways that adolescence itself can be” (175).

Truly, Golding depicts the modern youth - their aimless age, shallow thoughts, worthless words, harmful acquaintances, fruitless endeavours, destructive dreams – and, in short, their meaningless life. In fact, Sammy, the narrator, confesses, “… what can I say who have no knowledge, no certainty, no will? I could point out to you the men like myself rather who are to be ignored, the grey and hapless helpless over whom time rolls bringing them nothing but devaluation and dust” (Golding 172).

Adolescence is the time for strategic planning, sustained efforts, beneficial acts, and worthwhile dreams that determine one’s future. Yet, it is at such a time that Sammy allows ego and lust to rule the kingdom of his life.

The headmaster who traces the current state of Sammy - but also recognises his talent as an artist - calls him on the graduation day to warn him of his ways. He even attempts to gently inspire Sammy to consider art as a guiding and ruling aim of life. As a last piece of advice, he says, “I’ll tell you something which may be of value. I believe it to be true and powerful – therefore dangerous. If you want something enough, you can always get it provided you are willing to make the appropriate sacrifice. Something, anything. But what you get is never quite what you thought; and sooner or later the sacrifice is always regretted” (Golding 235).

Sammy conveniently derives an ironic interpretation of this advice, and decides to win Beatrice at whatever cost:

What is important to you?
“Beatrice Ifor.”
She thinks you depraved already. She dislikes you.
“If I want something enough I can always get it provided I am willing to make appropriate sacrifice.”
What will you sacrifice?
“Everything.” (Golding 236)

It is ‘Here,’ the narrator confesses, that Sammy loses his freedom. By this single decision, a freely made one, Sammy places himself in an irretrievable position. This decision turns him into a kind of Satan defying his own urges saying “musk, shameful and heady, be thou my good!” (Gregor188), and, with this, he begins to move into the world of lust. He turns indifferent to her doctrines and impatient at her approval. He strives in vain to gain her love. Beatrice Ifor, for Sammy, remains a mystery. She never utters the thoughts that reveal her intentions. She seems to be unsure of her own intentions. The following conversation reveals her uncertainty:

“What are you thinking of?”
“This and that.”
“About us?”
“May be.”…
“Don’t you feel anything?”
“I don’t know. May be.”…
“Aren’t you human, then? Aren’t you a person at all?”...
“May be.” (Golding 112,119,121)

Through the words ‘May be,’ Golding depicts the existential anguish of Beatrice. She is unsure of what she feels and uncertain of what she wants. She is not happy with her present, but she has no plan for the future. She puzzles the readers with her uncanny character. She seldom thinks for herself. Even when she thinks, she is unaware of her thoughts. Her love is ambiguous and her life precarious. This uncertainty is the hallmark of not just Beatrice but also the twentieth-century man in general. Sammy himself declares, “For maybe was sign of all our times. We were certain of nothing. I should have said “May be” not Beatrice. The louder I cried out in the wake of the party the more an inner voice told me not to be silly, that no one could be certain of anything” (Golding, 108).

Thus, Beatrice is another example of listlessness sketched by the author in Free Fall. However, Golding also portrays another side of Beatrice. She is vague but not vile, indecisive but unintentionally so, unfathomable but innocent, unapproachable but understanding. She, undoubtedly, belongs to the state of Being, regardless of the stage of adolescence that she belongs to. She is unaware of what she is or what she does. She, thus, unconsciously becomes a sacrificial offering to satiate Sammy’s hungry lust.

Sammy’s desperation to know her leads to frustration and frustration turns to exploitation. Had Sammy true love for Beatrice, he wouldn’t have used her innocence to meet his selfish ends. He later repents, “What had been love on my part, passionate and reverent, what was to be a triumphant sharing, a fusion, the penetration of a secret, raising of my life to the enigmatic and holy level of hers became a desperately shoddy and cruel attempt to force a response from her somehow” (Golding 122-123).

Initially, Sammy resolves to make any sacrifice to gain her. But, later, he makes her sacrifice for his benefit. This is because he has confused infatuation for love, selfishness for marriage, and exploitation for sacrifice. Finally, disillusion turns to desertion. Sammy deserts Beatrice for her ‘nun–like innocence.’ He later confesses, “I see now that her nun-like innocence was an obedient avoidance of the deep and muddy pool where others lived. Where I lived” (Golding 112).

Sammy, eventually, marries Taffy for a more satisfying love, marriage, and children. Poor Beatrice, unaware of his infidelity, waits for him out of sheer trust. Despondent, she writes to him, pleading dynamically, to a choice, thus failing to exercise his free will. This proves that Sammy, the man, is different from Sammy, the child: “One is innocent, the other guilty. On another’s life. Sammy himself alleviates the readers’ confusion as he says, “he is not I. He is another person.” (Golding 46). There is, he asserts, no connection between the two. The little boy is clear as spring water and the adult Sammy is like a stagnant pool. This proves that Sammy, the man, is different from Sammy, the child: “One is innocent, the other guilty. One is unconscious, the other conscious. One cannot find forgiveness, the other does not need and cannot give it, because it cannot understand. One has lost the power of moral choice, the other has not yet acquired it. Yet both are states, unchangeable, ‘islanded in pictures,’ with a sheer gulf between” (Gregor 173).

Sammy’s cruelty puzzles the readers who admire the picture of his innocent childhood. Even the tortures that Ms. Pringle causes him have not made him despise her. He says, “I was still innocent of the major good and evil; I thought no evil, I believed when she made me suffer that the fault was mine. I condemn her out of my adult stature” (Golding 195). It is inconceivable that a boy so ignorant of evil or hatred should injure another’s life. Sammy himself alleviates the readers’ confusion as he says, “he is not I. He is another person.” (Golding 46). There is, he asserts, no connection between the two. The little boy is clear as spring water and the adult Sammy is like a stagnant pool. This proves that Sammy, the man, is different from Sammy, the child: “One is innocent, the other guilty. One is unconscious, the other conscious. One cannot find forgiveness, the other does not need and cannot give it, because it cannot understand. One has lost the power of moral choice, the other has not yet acquired it. Yet both are states, unchangeable, ‘islanded in pictures,’ with a sheer gulf between” (Gregor 173).

Sammy is neither innocent, nor wicked. He is guilty. He faces the worst tragedy because he is aware of his deliberate misdeeds and irretrievable past. Helpless, he declares, “Man is not an instantaneous creature, nothing but a physical body and the reaction of the moment. He is an incredible bundle of miscellaneous memories and feelings, of fossils and coral growths. I am not a man who was a boy looking at a tree. I am a man who remembers being a boy looking at a tree” (Golding 46).

What caused his present state? It was, perhaps, the exercise of his freewill or, rather, misuse of his freewill at the cost of others’ freedom. Bergson’s theory of freewill demands the participation of the concrete self in exercising the choice of freewill. Freewill gets stifled and, ultimately, destroyed when the concrete self, the character, is prohibited from contacting a present choice. Habit is probably the most common intruder. Man responds automatically, rather than dynamically, to a choice, thus failing to exercise his freewill. This intervention assumes moral dimensions when a parasitic self is purposely affixed to the concrete self – that is, when a false and acquired aspect of one’s personality is allowed to deny and negate the instructional and analogical powers of the memory. A ruthless pursuit of a goal for its own sake, and to the exclusion of all else, would be a dominant example of this. John K Crane remarks that the story of Sammy Mountjoy, then, becomes a battle of his concrete self for survival against a series of shadowy parasitic selves which Sammy allows to attack it.
Sammy is well aware that Beatrice is unhappy in his company, yet exploits her. He understands the headmaster’s advice but deliberately misinterprets it to suit his needs. He adopts Nick’s rationalism only because his soulless universe fits like a glove. As Frederick R. Karl observes, “In an amoral world, Sammy has behaved rationally, unaware that rationality can be a kind of evil, especially when attached to a voracious ego...” (qtd. in. Subbarao 60). Sammy is certainly guilty. Ironically, to give vent to this guilt, he becomes cruel. He declares, “Guilty am I; therefore wicked I will be ... Guilt comes before the crime and can cause it” (Golding 232). Sammy’s life, as some critics certify, is an adolescent tragedy. It is, in fact, the tragedy of every man as is obvious in Sammy’s question, “Is my sickness mine, or do we all suffer?” (Golding 36). Sammy, referring to his adolescence, says,

> They are memories of my own failure, my own degradation, not hers. Those fantasies of adolescence now brought to half realization on my side were sad, dreary and angry. They reinforced the reality of physical life and they destroyed the possibility of anything else; and they made physical life not only three times real but contemptible. And under everything else, deep, was an anguish of helplessness and loss. (Golding 123)

Thus, Sammy, despite his efforts to fulfil his desires, remains frustrated and unhappy. He is unable to identify the purpose of his life and the meaning in his actions. He is haunted by his past and taunted by his guilt. He seeks, in vain, to find the cause for his sorry state. The reason is obvious. In the words of James Gindin: “The imposition of the ego, the sacrifice of everything to itself, the deliberate human appropriation of experience to itself and its satisfactions, its body, is evil, for it violates a sense of human community and connection, a sense of the world larger than the individual” (48).

Sammy, dissatisfied with life, attempts to realise his quest for self-identity by joining the Communist Party. He serves as a war-artist during the Second World War. Unfortunately, the Nazis make him a prisoner of war, place him in solitary confinement, and torture him to extort secrets. Sammy’s life in the dark cell is the most significant episode in the novel. It is, here, in the blinding darkness, that Sammy’s guilt comes to the surface. The torture is of a different kind. Halde locks up Sammy in a mop closet to endure himself. Due to the darkness inside, Sammy crouches in this limited space and gets crushed under his self-made terrors. He imagines the ceiling approaching him with some things hanging from it ‘that stank as cold scrap.’ Physical darkness in the cell leads to a sense of psychic terror: “He is not tortured, but allowed to torture himself... The fictions of his horrified imagination define the shape of what he is, stands for, believes in at the heart of his Being” (Gregor 184).

Halde sends Sammy sliding into the labyrinths of his own being and reveals his parasitic selves to him through conversations and darkness. Halde remarks that there is a mystery in Sammy which is opaque to them both. This defines the nature and function of Sammy’s journey into the darkest interior. When Halde compels Sammy to reveal the secret about the escape organisation, Sammy declares, “I don’t know whether I know anything or not” (Golding 175). Halde, recognising Sammy’s uncertain and aimless life, describes his character. However, while describing the character of Sammy, he portrays the nature of modern man. Halde says,

> There is no health in you, Mr. Mountjoy. You do not believe in anything enough to suffer for it or be glad. There is no point at which something has knocked on your door and taken possession of you. You possess yourself. Intellectual ideas, even the idea of loyalty to your country sit on you loosely. You wait in a dusty waiting-room on no particular line for no particular train. And between the poles of belief, I mean the belief in material things and the belief in a world made and supported by a supreme being, you oscillate jerkily from day to day, from hour to hour. Only the things you cannot avoid, the sear of sex or pain, avoidance of the one suffering repetition and prolongation of the other, this constitutes what your daily consciousness would not admit, but experiences as life. Oh, you are capable of a certain degree of friendship and a certain degree of love, but nothing to mark you out from the ants or the sparrows. (Golding 144-145)

Sammy later accepts Halde’s words by confessing to the readers, “My enunciation was slurred and hurried, voice of a man who had never stilled his brain, never thought, never been certain of anything” (Golding 135). While in the cell, Sammy sees the dream of a cat mangled by a motorcar, and a nightmare in which Beatrice runs crying for him, through rising water that he has escaped. These visions depict his guilt and an impossibility of forgiveness or atonement. Helpless, he says, “I could not kill the cat to stop it suffering” (Golding 131).

In the darkness, Sammy gains an insight into “the nature of the new world outside and… the nature of the dead thing inside” (Golding 189). He realises the suffering that he has caused to others. He associates the inhumanity at the hands of the Nazis with the inhumanity Beatrice experienced at his. Desperate, he moves restlessly to find the centre of the cell symbolic of his search to find the central cause for his fall. Through a spurt of memory-images that are too complex to investigate, he realises that it is the spiritual dimension of other
humans rather than the bodily satisfaction of oneself that is most important. Darkness terrorises him, his reminiscences haunt him and his guilt stabs him. In terror, he cries out for help. His cry for help represents the total surrender of his self to the other. He discards his ego when he says that he was dead anyway himself. He emerges from the cell as a man resurrected. B.S. Oldsey and S. Weintraub claim that Sammy emerges from the cell with some portion of victory because he has finally made use of man’s last resource, prayer.

A little later, when he is released by the commander (a kind gentleman), Sammy sees the entire universe clothed in celestial light. Mountjoy turns Samuel. Paradoxically enough, the physical darkness leads him to light, but the light shows up the darkness within.

Regretting his past deeds, he rushes to England to meet Beatrice, only to find her in a sanatorium. She stares at Sammy but doesn’t recognise him. Moreover, anxious and excited for reasons unknown, she urinates on the floor. The doctor tells Sammy that she became insane a year after Sammy deserted her, and that her disease is incurable. These words act upon Sammy as a death knell. He is stabbed by guilt. He feels helpless at her wretched condition and finds himself nowhere near the solution. Frantic, he declares, ‘I exist.’ Golding proves that one ‘exists’ if one strives merely to achieve one’s own goals. One can ‘live’ only by living for others. James Gindin says, “For Golding, that single-mindedness, relentless insistence on self, and exclusion of the rest of the universe in order to satisfy the imposing demands of the ego, is the definition of original sin” (47).

Now the question is: Is Sammy’s sin pardonable?

Partly, it is. This is because his childhood acquaintances and adolescent interactions presented him with no right track to tread. His mother, a prostitute; Evie, a liar; Philip, a brat; Nick, a rationalist; Pringle, a sadist; and Beatrice, an absurdist—all lead a purposeless life. Of course, he was warned by his principal. But, as Bergson says, Sammy deliberately chooses his parasitic self to overpower his concrete one, and conveniently declares, “What men believe is a function of what they are; and what they are is in part what has happened to them.” (Golding 212).

However, Evil is not explicable simply as a response to evil received from others.

Throughout the novel, Golding discusses Sammy’s dilemmas but permits no resolution to take place. In an interview, he says, “I am very serious. I believe that man suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own nature. I produce my own view, in the belief that it may be something like the truth. I am fully engaged to the human dilemma but see it as far more fundamental than a complex of taxes and astronomy” (qtd. in. Page 97).

These words were written by Golding in reply to a literary magazine’s questionnaire, ‘The Writer in His Age.’ The questionnaire raised the issue of ‘engagement’: should the writer concern himself with the political and social problems of his time? Golding’s answer is unequivocal: “the job of the writer is to show man his image” (qtd. in. Page 97).

II. CONCLUSION

The modern writers, in their art, depict the constantly changing contemporary world and man’s response to such a change. Golding’s Free Fall is, is thus, one such work of art which is singular, original and a condensed version of human experience. It dives deep into the psyche of the protagonist, Sammy Mountjoy, projects his hidden parasitic selves and, subsequently, portrays the ‘mysterious’ in the human experience. All these insights it fabricates into the inevitable journey of ‘Being to Becoming’ which Sammy goes through.

WORKS CITED