Delphic Oracle in the Novels of William Golding
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Abstract: William Golding in his novels depicts man as a physical being in a physical world, torn between a primitive innocence and the intelligence of an evolving mind. All scientific discoveries, our awareness of our physical world are a necessary part of our evolving consciousness. The paper unravels how Golding’s mythic and allegorical world while moving around binaries attempts to find the root of the disease of evil. His central theme is to find a relationship of man to the universe and through the universe to God. Irrational faith, ignorance and material progress have obscured our vision. The root cause of man’s fall is spiritual blindness which has made man stranger to himself. Delphic Oracle know thyself - is the hope for redemption.

Key Words: Binary, Darkness, Delphic Oracle, Duality, Fall, Good & Evil, Theology.

I. Introduction

The world according to Golding is neither good nor evil. The perception is rooted in the human brain and in human consciousness. Evil in the Lord of the Flies (1954) exists, not as a Beast, but as an external manifestation of what is really inside and an emblematic and conceptual reduction of it are dangerous manifestations of the Fall. The conch’s symbolic meaning depends on the state of the children’s minds, not in the sound of the shell. Once power becomes more real to Jack than the rules, the conch is meaningless. Golding has shown this in the series of his novels: the homo sapiens makes the prehistoric man the image of his own evil; Pincher and Sammy recreate real people into the shapes of their own lust; Jocelin’s phallic ambition destroys four human pillars until at the end he realizes the complex truth.

He strives beyond the ‘mimetic theory of art’, much unlike his predecessors and contemporaries and was concerned with “larger, more fundamental and abstract issues that may be called metaphysical and theological” (Dyson: 11). There has been an underlying consistency of purpose, a sense that all his novels, none of which repeats any one of the others, are part of a single-minded exploration and exposition of the nature of good and evil. He tends to explore the absence of God from the centre of man’s consciousness. The realities of human behavior and consciousness are enacted through the protagonists in terms of theological statements.

The human depravity and his fallen state as shown by Golding are sometimes viewed as dystopian and pessimistic. When both good and evil are exclusive human concepts, Golding has depicted more evil than good for, he believes good can look after itself but evil is the problem. For him, mankind offers at best a sorry sight and he undertakes the grand task to denounce all weaknesses and ignorance to make the world worth living. His pessimistic view of humanity’s imperfection and the resultant Fall is not claimed by Golding that he is saying something original but something which has to be restated by each generation in its own term and viewed in this way, he is far from a pessimist. The knowledge of evil and its validity alone can generate positive possibilities. Not to know evil is, in a sense, to know nothing. Professor Kermoder observes that: Golding is fascinated by the evidence… that human consciousness is a biological asset purchased at a price; the price is the knowledge of evil.

This evil emanates from the human mind, a product of its action upon environment” (Kermode:58). Therefore, the novels investigate how the individual human being is tossed and buffeted about throughout his existence by the ordeal of consciousness. The protagonists undergo myriad experiences of great complexity without any clear guide around which they could organize their experiences. Golding sets the tone of his age by making valid generalization about the whole meaning of life and stands as a moralist in an immoralist age. It is true that evil proceeds from within but it can not be dispersed by another evil or intelligence. Hence he idealized self-knowledge as the only hope for humanity. Golding is a religious mystic, for whom the mankind is fiercely repellent, and in whose eyes, only the saint or the ‘prelapsarian’ Simon, Lok, Nathaniel, Arieka –can justify human existence. Lok, like Simon before him, is a holy fool and a Christ figure who is identified with the meek and takes the sins and sorrows of man upon himself.

Simon’s view of ‘mankind’s essential illness’ proves conclusively that there is evil in all human being, but it does not prove man is evil alone or illness is the essence of man. Simon’s life and death offer hope in the pervasive gloom of the island world. He is one good man capable of imitating Christ’s redemptive example. Nathaniel in Pincher Martin and Matty in Darkness visible are also the prophetic fools. Ralph strives to be fair and decent. Jack, the most evil character in the book, provides more effective form of government than Ralph’s.
to maintain order and provide food for everyone. He also could not hunt initially because of the enormity of the
knife. 

*The Inheritors* suggests that the *Homo sapiens* achieve historical success with their evolutionary knowledge of
guilt. The very cry of despair that Tuami utters suggests the growth of a new, more refined consciousness, one
that could not have come into existence without the knowledge of evil. The new people’s advances involve
destruction of a great art which Oa’s teeming belly could never produce. The ‘new one’, the infant survivor, of
Lok’s people, suggests the possibility of reconciliation between innocence and guilt, good and evil. The
goodness of the new baby is likely to be introduced into human kind and thus we would be the inheritors of a
new race with a new hope.

*The Darkness Visible* (1994) is primarily concerned with the act of ‘seeing’ and the novel implies that good and
evil are based upon our perceptions. Sophy is the true child of the modern evil world as she is attracted to the
darker passions of life, yet she is engaged in the same spiritual quest as Matty. The binary opposition is seen to
be illusory as “in the DV the antithesis that is destroyed is the one belief to exist between good and evil”
(McCarron: 45). Whether the world is malign or benign depends upon the constitution of the perceiver’s psyche.
Simon views the island as beautiful, for Ralph the sea appears as divided and enigmatic. Jack feels it as a place
of hunting or to be hunted. Dr. Halde effects a partial cure of Sammy and appears, inadvertently through, as
instruments of good. Jocelin as with Sammy falls to rise again. His irrational faith, his big dare makes a journey
towards heaven transcending all god and evil. Thus, Golding, in the words of Angus Wilson, “solved the
problem of expressing transcendent good and evil more satisfactorily than any other living English novelist”
(Wilson: 190).

Golding’s works make his readers ‘see’. His characters are rarely helpless victims of socio-economic forces
beyond their control. They are in each case an embodiment of a proposition about human nature, rather than an
individual. The world they live in is tragic; a world of man’s nature both to inflict and endure suffering; and a
world in which one must choose and the wrong choice can be the Fall. The war time captain does weep over the
darkness of man’s heart and convey a sense of prophetic urgency, a sense that evil in our time is burgeoning, is
spiraling towards some awful end. In the face of such pervasive gloom when the fowl brew is brim full, he
brings one redeeming moment by reawakening the *Delphic Oracle* (know yourself), the knowledge of good and
evil and their ultimate reconciliation with the unity, before the cup bubbles over.

Golding makes his realization of this world or the cosmos very daringly as a saint or a scientist:
What amuses me is the thought that of course there is a bridge and that if anything it has been thrust out from the
side which least expected it, and thrust out since those words were written. For we know now, that the
universe had a beginning. (Indeed, as an aside I might say we always did know. I offer you a simple proof and
forbid you to examine it. If there was no beginning then infinite time has already passed and we could never
have got to the moment where we are.) We also know or it is at least scientifically respectable to postulate that
at the centre of a black hole the laws of nature no longer apply. Since most scientists are just a bit religious and
most religious are seldom wholly unscientific we find humanity in a comical position. His scientific intellect
believes in the possibility of miracles inside a black hole while his religious intellect believes in them outside it.
Both, in fact, now believe in miracles, *credimus quia absurdum est*. Glory be to God in the highest. You will get
no reductive pessimism from me. (Noble Lecture: 1983).

Jocelin in *The Spire* is seen at war with himself. He faces the chaos within in his search for a pattern. He
imposes a pattern with the terrible paradox of his vision. As the spire progresses, Jocelin learns new lessons
leading to his full blown consciousness. The paradoxical meaning, the conflict of reason and faith gives way to
insight. He, like his predecessor Ralph and Sammny, moves to self-knowledge. The symbolism plays a great role
in all Golding novels. The Spire itself constitutes the central symbol with its various interpretations. Finally, it
meets the infinity in exultation with the fusion of the magical world of good and evil.

The two forks of the *Double Tongue* are in relation to the doubly-doubled key which derives its shape from a
symbol of a Goddess. It may be argued that the doubly-doubled key helps Arieka, as it was with Sammy, to
confront with her own ‘Being’ and ‘Becoming’ in the world of binary. Arieka’s double vision is paralleled with
Matty and Sophy in the *Darkness Visible*. Ionides speaks with double tongue stealing Arieka’s words and
Sophy, the antithesis of Matty, is a debauched woman. Her inside is in conflict with the outside. Matty’s face
has a binary connotation; one side is black being burnt during the London blitz which, otherwise, reflects
Sophy’s nature and the darkness of human heart. Arieka turns into permanence and Matty a saint. Duality is a
constant phenomenon among them like the double- forked key; both help each other in realizing their life, yet so
long life exists the duality is indispensible. Joceline too faces the duality as the upward and downward thrust of the
cathedral tower in *The Spire*. Sammy searches ontologically if any bridge between the two worlds of matter
and spirit.

Virginia Tiger has focused on the novelist’s question through Sammny if there is any bridge between the physical
world and the spiritual world. The central focus moves around what she has called as the “ideographic structure”
in which the two-narrative movements go simultaneously in each novel. The author’s prophetic insight shines
through all his works proceeding along double narratives. She holds that, “Golding intends that the two
perspectives are to be complementary, not contradictory.” It is the quality of great craftsmanship that the readers are forced to accept “at least in the imaginative realm…paradoxes of existence which the novel’s characters are represented as being unable to perceive or accept” (Tiger: 16-17).

The novelist is preoccupied with what is permanent in man’s nature and looks for how man is rooted to his cosmic situation. It is a kind of religious exploration embodying the primordial pattern of human experience. The Double Tongue explores the same while contemplating a visit to Athens Ionides guessed that nobody knew how to receive a Pythia. Contrary to common mind, Pythia and Delphi are not the same thing, but Pythia answers that it is: “theologically possible” (Double Tongue:130). Golding too has emphasized on the practice of detachment as a way to attain such theological state. Again Pythia narrates her visit to her father’s old house after a long gap reflecting her detachment from the world, “I cannot say that visiting my father’s old house was very affecting…I was glad to see, not having ever connected that house with anything but little put upon Arieka” (Double Tongue: 132).Such is the simplistic view of her own home as she began to see herself belonging to all being and a presence transcending the universe.

II. Conclusion

All the characters and their settings of Golding novel are modern. The world from the age of Vedanta or Homer down to the present time has remained the same except the altered situations and changed external factors, yet the modern people claim to be the most intelligent and attempt to rule the nature. Pincher martin challenged the god’s providence until he was engulfed by the black lightning. For Jack and Ralph, too, the island was a resource for boundless play of their whims and fancies, killing anything they liked and ransacking it to the highest possible limits. Golding created the magic world for them for the highest fulfillment of sense-pleasure, but another kind of magic poured into their ears through the omniscient voices in time to time what they little cared for. He knew that people would fail to understand the magic of his words, but again, it was his compulsion to do the needful to the world as a god-send to perform the Theurgy of spreading the Delphic oracle for the mankind so as to regenerate it from its so called modern slumber to the age old eternal truth that never fades or adds on age what he left in magical words in his creation.

References
