

**Abstract**

of the thesis

**The Postimperial Neurosis in the First Five Novels of William Golding**

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**Title: The Postimperial Neurosis in the First Five Novels of William Golding**

**Review of Literature:** The most primary of critical studies which give a direction towards shaping the subsequent critical opinion about William Golding as a novelist are Golding's own essays and interviews that define and establish him as a fabulist and moralist, concerned with writing moral fables of the darkness of human heart in the postwar time, illustrating this darkness in terms of violence, displacement, aggression, paranoia, death, chaos and the fall. The vast majority of articles appearing regularly in journals, some of which are collected in the Casebook series, follow the lead and cue given by Golding's essays and interviews, with both conventional and sometimes very unconventional reading and provides stunning insight into Golding's novels. They remain the true corpus of the critical literature on Golding to rely on in any research on him. There are numerous articles written on him. In contrast, full length studies are few and they all are important ones, like Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor's *William Golding: A Critical Study* (1968), Virginia Tiger's *William Golding: The Dark Fields of Discovery* (1976), Stephen Medcalf's *William Golding* (1977), V. V. Subbarao's *William Golding: A Study* (1987), S. J. Boyd's *The Novels of William Golding* (1989), Kevin McCarron's *William Golding* (1994) and Khandkar Rezaur Rahman's *The Moral Vision of William Golding* (1990) are mostly the original readings of the novels of William Golding and they contribute hugely to the critical understanding of the novelist based on the methodology of what is known as liberal humanism. Virginia Tiger's 2003 book *William Golding: The Unmoved Target* is largely a compendium of prevalent new and insightful views appeared in contemporary articles. Going beyond this repetitive criticism, Paul Crawford's book *Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside Down* (2002), marks a departure and takes up a historical and political study which the author claims as a pathbreaking new study of Golding. Crawford studies Golding from the point of view of satire. Crawford's study surely opens up a new way of reading Golding. However, such new ways of reading Golding, especially reading him as a postcolonial writer, have already emerged in articles like Stefen Hawlin's "The savages in the forest: decolonising William Golding" (1995), in which the postcolonial methodology is used with great conviction. And new studies have started to come out to establish Golding as a postimperial writer like Rachael Gilmour's article "The Entropy of Englishness: Reading Empire's Absence in the Novels of William Golding" which came out in a book significantly titled *End of Empire and the English Novel since 1945*, edited by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (2011). And there are flashes of psychoanalytical criticism in some of the articles, and this

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aspect requires a full length study, which is not yet done, and my thesis intends to fill this gap in Golding criticism.

**Research Objective:** My thesis entitled “The Postimperial Neurosis in the First Five Novels of William Golding” studies William Golding as a post-empire British novelist. His first five novels, written in the fifties and sixties, are apparently novels of darkness of human heart, but historically speaking, they are deeply political novels of the trauma suffered by the British imperialism in the wake of decolonisation and the loss of the empire, a severely traumatic experience which is now repressed into the unconscious of the British psyche, and requires what Freud calls the ‘compulsion to repeat’, an idea that he adumbrated first in his seminal essay “The Uncanny” and developed in his later works. The compulsion of repeating the painful, traumatic experience compulsively is the neurotic manifestation of the unconscious which is known in psychoanalysis as the ‘return of the repressed’. Golding’s first five novels are thematically connected, and they are repetition of his first novel *Lord of the Flies*. Therefore a psychoanalytical study can open up a way the true understanding of his disturbing and dystopian novels. The postcolonial and psychoanalytical tropes and concepts like condensation, displacement, melancholia, abjection, semiotic, symbolic, apology, dehumanisation, humanisation, myth and archetype can be the keywords and key concepts involved in any contemporary reading of the novels of William Golding. An overview of the existing literature on Golding makes it amply clear that there is a need for giving a contemporary look to Golding who remains an interesting and challenging writer in the critical opinion of our time.

The first five novels are novels of end of innocence – of darkness of human heart, and they become the novels of consciousness. This thematic connection happens at two levels, first, the metaphysical level of being and becoming; and second, the level which is a matter of allegorical interpretation, is the historical sense of contemporary post-empire dilemmas, dislocations, mortification, trauma and a gradual coming to terms with reality. The novels are stories of disturbed consciousness, discovery and revelation. The novels represent dislocation as a metaphor for chaos and a consciousness of the end of innocence. For the colonial British psyche, the fall of the empire or the end of the colonies was like to usher in a state of chaos, a fall from the state of innocence to the state of experience, and a frantic effort of survival in a grim situation of dislocation. Golding’s novels, especially the first five ones, are hardly social novels; rather they are marked by a secluded and narrowed-down setting, loss of humanity

and violence, a frantic effort to control and order by a central consciousness and an eventual disintegration and degeneration into chaos. My thesis is that the postimperial neurosis is the mainstay of Golding's fiction.

**Statement of the Problem:** The major problem that lies on the way to establish Golding as a postimperial writer is that unlike many of his contemporary writers like Gunter Grass in Germany or Kenzaburo Oe in Japan who wrote novels interspersed with political and historical statements, Golding wrote allegorical tales which assume man's fallen nature as symptomatic of evil – or evil as the root cause of human savagery and violence. That is to say, his references to the contemporary political and historical condition were basically oblique and embedded in the allegories. In order to decipher the complex nature of his layered narrative, his novels can be analysed with the psychoanalytical and archetypal tropes found in the novels. Contextualising his novels with the help of the manifest-latent technique brings about a fruitful result in this direction, and his novels are found to be symptomatic of the postimperial neurosis, born out as they are from the contemporary postcolonial crisis.

**Research Methodology:** This postcolonial experience of the European intelligentsia like William Golding who felt the crisis of imperialist faith in the wake of the loss of the empire is hereby adjectivized as postimperial because it is used in relation to the European colonialist writers in the same way that Bill Schwarz in his "Introduction" to *End of Empire and the English Novel since 1945* call 'post-imperial' (Schwarz 26); and is concerned mostly with exploring what Bianca Leggett calls "heart of whiteness" (Leggett 403). Thus, postimperial is the version of postcolonial which continues the imperialist project of recolonization, rather than siding with the postcolonial ideology of decolonization of the mind. The point is made clear by Rachael Gilmour in his article "The Entropy of Englishness: Reading Empire's Absence in the Novels of William Golding":

On one level, Golding's longing to return to the moment of encounter, to see afresh the single footprint in the sand, represents an yearning for an old imperial order which is forever lost. Yet, robbed of such consoling fictions, he is also able to dream of a way to experience this moment in all its 'terror and excitement', to face alterity without seeking to reduce it into sameness.

(Gilmour 110)

The postimperial English novel like that of Golding is thus concerned with the nostalgia for a lost imperial order on the one hand – what Paul Gilroy calls "postimperial melancholia"



(Gilroy 90) in a slightly different context, in Britain's desire, to quote Gilroy, "to allocate a large measure of blame for the empire to its victims and then seek to usurp their honored place of suffering, winning many immediate political and psychological benefits in the process" (Gilroy 95) and in its "unhealthy and destructive postimperial hungering for renewed greatness" (Gilroy 95); and on the other, it is concerned with a potentially realistic soul-searching by attaining self-knowledge and self-correction, rendering apology and alleviation of guilt.

However, the postimperial neurosis is to be sought in the unconscious manifestations of a diseased mind narcissistically obsessed with its own self, which is in need for incorporating the other, within a Freudian framework. "Like Freud's melancholic subject, the England depicted here has isolated itself and grown introspective" (Leggett 410). And the mourning process in this kind of novel, to borrow the words of Bianca Leggett, is "executed through the bringing to light of shadowy, suppressed emotions and the decoding of hidden traces of Empire in contemporary discourse" (Leggett 410), that is to say, bringing to light the entire range of postimperial neurosis. According to Pelagia Goulimari, Freud in his "Mourning and Melancholia" "describes melancholia as mourning for a lost object of love that is without end or issue" (Goulimari 130). Goulimari continues,

Freud defines the three preconditions of melancholia as "loss of the object", "ambivalence" – love and hate – towards the object, and conversion of the object into a part of the self. The melancholic, unable to accept the loss, keeps the lost object alive by incorporating him or her as part of the self. (Goulimari 130)

The internalisation of trauma at the loss of empire is quite evident in Golding's use of the allegorical form which prioritises the discovery of the inner meaning through the gaps of what is spoken – the surface tale, and this hidden inner truth becomes visible in the reading process. In an allegory the hidden meaning is more important than the surface tale, so a valorised reading is key to understand any allegorical writing. A valorised reading can unearth the continued allegory that runs parallel to the surface tale, and gets revealed through the symbolism, which may be local and topical, but which is used purposefully to guide the reading process to a particular kind of meaning. My thesis intends to study the postimperial neurosis in the first five novels of William Golding by analysing the various psychological, mythical and other tropes and motifs found in the novels. The pathological obsession with regression, evil, guilt, paranoia, responsibility, chaos, scatology, forgiveness is almost like

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descending into the morbidity of the madness of King Lear and is tantamount to an apology for the oppression done; it is like unburdening of the guilt and eventually salvific. The historicity of Golding's novels can be characterized in psychoanalytic terms also – regression, repression, narcissism, trauma, death-wish – and these are partly explanatory and partly metaphorical in his fiction, it also constitutes a yearning for a promised land that is both a utopia and the healed psyche. Viewed from this perspective, his novels open themselves up for a valorised reading. The psychoanalytical field traversed here is both classical and structural psychoanalysis. The lack or loss of empire that underlies the colonial desire is expressed through the motives of the central consciousness placed in a setting of repressed unconscious of the margin, worked out in terms of survival motif and the centre's grappling with the margin. There is a coalescing of the psychoanalytical elements of displacement, the metaphorical and the paradigmatic. Involving the author, the reader and the text,

[b]oth psychoanalysis and literature are concerned with narrative, with telling stories. Psychoanalysis reads the past in order to make sense of the present. Like a detective story it starts with effects and traces these effects back to origins. In tracing back the history of his patients in order to discover what caused the neurosis, Freud found that the narrative was bound up with a fictional element, even though he was dealing with an actual case-history. Because memory aroused feelings not present to consciousness at the time, meaning was conferred 'nachträglich' (after the event), interpreting with the help of fiction. (Wright 150)

My thesis follows this methodology of psychoanalysis in a general way to analyse the first five novels of William Golding in order to explore the postimperial neurosis latent in his fiction, behind the manifest tales of violence, disintegration and chaos. Postwar and postcolonial are coterminous in his fiction; whereas the postwar is manifest in his novels, the postimperial remains latent.

**Research Questions:** My thesis attempts to deal with the following research questions:

1. What are the scope and meaning of the terms like 'postimperial' and 'neurosis'?
2. How does Golding work out the postimperial neurosis in terms of the culture and the irrational?
3. What is the role of the elemental return ?
4. What are the implications of off-campus history?
5. How do the Christ-figures fit into the theme of postimperial neurosis.

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**Chapterisation:** The application of the psychoanalytical methodology in a general sense, by examining the psychoanalytical tropes is particularly helpful in establishing Golding as a postimperial writer. An overview of existing literature shows that Golding is primarily studied ahistorically, as a writer of fables on human nature and perennial philosophy, and sometimes historically, as a satirical writer – as a writer who is politically involved with the carnivalesque in the human society. But a true understanding of his novels can be obtained through analysing him as a postimperial writer. My thesis attempts to fulfil this necessity in the Golding criticism. The ‘Introduction’ discusses the theoretical framework and the objective of this study. The first chapter ‘Culture and the Irrational’ discusses how Golding’s novels attempt a critique of the European concept of civilisation to expose the fundamental instability or irony that lies at the core of it; a civilisation whose foundation is rationality, and which suffers problematically because of its inability to cope with and accommodate the irrational. This chapter also discusses Golding’s repudiation of what he calls the Wellsian scientific humanism. The second chapter ‘Nature and the Elemental Return’ discusses Golding’s attempt to trace the defect of human civilisation back to nature. The antithesis of reason and unreason turns into an antithesis of culture and nature, and culture’s inability to resist the elemental return. Man’s symbiotic relationship with nature is the natural state of innocence, which is also a precolonial state, and which is like what Julia Kristeva calls the ‘semiotic’; whereas his artificial relationship with culture is the state of experience, a state of colonialism, and which is like what Lacan calls the ‘symbolic’. The third chapter ‘Justice and the Implications of the Off-Campus History’ discusses the role of justice in Golding’s postcolonial journey from Manicheism to liminality. It also discusses the role of the off-campus history in creating nationalistic and racial prejudice when the emphasis of the campus or mainstream history is internationalism and universalism. This chapter also discusses how and why should his novels can be taken as an apology for all the wrongs and atrocities done to the non-European colonised subjects. The fourth chapter ‘The Christ-figure as a Symbol of Self-Sacrifice’ discusses Golding’s use of Christ-figures in his novels in order to reveal the humanising process or project after all the dehumanisation done during colonialism. The ‘Conclusion’ discusses all the novels as a repetitious monoeuvre on the part of the novelist to chart out the return of the repressed.

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