

The Use of Gimmick in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, *The Inheritors*, and *Pincher Martin*

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ABSTRACT

The problem that this paper deals with is that the unexplained or surprising endings in some of William Golding's novels can affect the thematic structures of the novels concerned. Furthermore, they influence the nature of the messages desired to be communicated by the author. Unexpected incidents in stories, such as uncalled for discoveries and revelations, can occur at any part of a story, serving the intention of heightening the readers' suspense. Story endings (especially when they are vaguely unexpected, unprepared for, and unexplained) are influential in turning the direction of events completely. Golding, as a famous modern British writer, is successful in employing special ways or tricks (he calls them "gimmicks") to conclude the plots of his novels strikingly. Because of this complicated manner of presentation, the endings of the first three of his novels, namely, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *The Inheritors* (1955), and *Pincher Martin* (1956) all share tricky endings. Gindin, in his study of the gimmick in Golding's novels (1960: 145-152), tries to relate the shift of emphasis in Golding's endings to the use of metaphor. The aim of this paper is to examine how such seemingly unfitting endings are organized in such a way as to fit into the whole thematic structure of the novels. Likewise, it aims at examining the plots and the nature of characters and other elements that twist the course of events in the stories, causing some radical changes in readers' views. Among the findings of the paper is that Golding, through certain incidents, presents hints that help in preparing for unexpected later results.

KEY WORDS: Gimmick, Novel Ending, Shift, Shock, Tricky

1. THE USE OF GIMMICK IN WILLIAM GOLDING'S *LORD OF THE FLIES*, *THE INHERITORS*, AND *PINCHER MARTIN*

William Golding (1911-1993) is normally ranked among the major British novelists of the post-World War II era. His prominence and fame as a writer arise from his ability to depict, in many different ways, "the anguish of modern humanity as it gropes for meaning

and redemption in a world where the spiritual has been crushed by the material" (Rollyson 2001: 444). As such, those depictions mirror the anguish and anxiety of the modern man suffering from seemingly interminable contradictions that are reflected on his beliefs and manners.

In many of his works, Golding reveals the dark places in the human psyche, particularly when individuals or small groups – placed in isolated environments and cut off from society and its rules – are pushed into extreme situations where they take off their masks of innocence and civilization and unfold their real identities. His works are characterized precisely by the exploration of such deep spiritual and ethical questions as "the darkness of man's heart" (Bhatnagar 2001: 694). Golding is an author whose successive works deal with a variety of subjects, time, and place. His techniques are distinctive, and his novels, which possess allegorical elements and mythical qualities, are intensely visual,

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highly patterned, and well-articulated. The myth they illustrate most powerfully is that of the fall, where "humanity loses freedom while gaining knowledge of good and evil" (Krueger & Stade 2003: 155).

In novel writing, there are three significant ways of how a writer can end a novel. The first of these is tragic, which is characteristic of the 19th and the early 20th century novel. The hero or the heroine meets a tragic conclusion as he / she is victimized by forces stronger than his / hers. An example of this is Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which ends with the tragic death of the Romantic dreamer Gatsby who has been ignoring the dangers posing around him. Another type of novel ending is the most popular one, which is a happy ending. The writer chooses to resolve the crisis of his plot happily by either introducing a reconciliation scene in the final part of the story, or by uniting lovers with the sacred bond of marriage. Although Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), for example, has incidents of murder and death in its last scene, it ends happily, for the two distressed children, Scout and Jem, are saved by Boo Radley, who has finally come out of his introverted isolation from society and people. In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), the boundaries between the sad and the happy conclusions are not clear-cut. The two lovers of the story, Jane and Rochester, are united in the end but in gloomy rather than bright or hopeful circumstances. The third type of novel has an open-ending, where things are left vague and unresolved and where the reader is denied satisfactory explanations. An illustrative example is D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and lovers* (1913). The ending of Lawrence's novel leaves the door open for further interpretations. On being liberated from the overwhelming dominance of his mother, Paul Morel, the novel's hero, goes out to the world either to live his life afresh or live a life of suffering with no identity of his own left. Successful writers should be fully aware, under any circumstances, of how to work out a fitting denouement to their plots (and sub-plots, if any) without falling, obligingly, in the trap of what to include and what not to include. Golding, as a famous modern British writer, is successful in employing special ways to conclude the plots of his novels surprisingly and shockingly.

What is termed as "gimmick" signifies a sudden shift of the point of view towards the end of a literary work. Incidentally, it is a technique that is characteristic and applicable to William Golding's novels. Golding consistently makes use of it with the aim to provide "a fuller view of the breadth in which his narrow canvas is meant to operate." This expansion of the perspective is done subtly "to deny an impression of impact and finality" (Budkuley 1994: 19).

Each of Golding's first three novels mentioned above shows the use of unusual and unique literary devices. Each is governed by a massive metaphorical structure, such as a man clinging for survival to a rock in the Atlantic Ocean or an excursion into the mind of man's evolutionary side to assert something permanent and significant about human nature. The metaphors are intensive; in effect, they underlie the majority of the details and incidents of the novels. Yet at the end of each novel the unique and striking metaphors turn into "gimmicks," or clever tricks that shift the focus or the emphasis of the novel as a whole or turn things upside down, so to speak. In fact, "gimmick" is the word that Golding himself applies to his own endings. In each instance, the role of "gimmick" seems to work against the main current of the novel. That is to say, it is designed to contradict or to limit the range of reference and meaning that Golding has already established metaphorically. The movement from metaphor to the "gimmick" raises critical questions concerning the unity as well as the meaning of the given novels (Gindin 1976: 197). Modern writer are more inclined to break any symmetry of the plots of their works by bring into them what looks unfamiliar, the all-encompassing revenge exacted by Carrie, the heroine of Stephen King's novel by the namesake (1973) upon her society is farfetched even though the motivation for it is deftly prepared throughout the novel.

Lord of the Flies (1954), which was Golding's debut as a writer, tackles the moral deterioration of a group of English schoolboys whose plane crashes onto a deserted island during World War II. They subsequently try to form a mini-civilization only to reach the horrific outcome that man is essentially evil. The book's view on human nature in relation with civilization, as illustrated through the boys' behaviors, makes it to be one of the most challenging books of the late 20th century (McClinton-Temple 2010: 491). A group of boys is situated on a paradise-like island in the course of some future war; yet they quickly descend into savagery and devil-worship (Stevenson 1993: 100). This is done intentionally to examine whether man's divine origin, as stated in the Bible, can hold fast in a variety of situations. When laws and rules fail to hold in an uncivilized environment, man easily reverts to his other dark side. This duality in man is vividly expressed by R. L. Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).

The novel was well received by reviewers and several very influential writers, including E. M. Forster, C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot, who were very enthusiastic about it. The novel achieved a huge international success (McCarron 2004: 2). The success is due to the language that is simple and easy to understand, as well as to the style that is smooth and straightforward. Furthermore,

the story is full of events that are suspenseful and highly evocative.

Golding's next novel *The Inheritors* (1955) is a tale of savagery about the extermination and subdual of the Neanderthals by the Homo sapiens in prehistoric times. Many critics deem the novel superior to *Lord of the Flies*. Shortly after its publication, Golding became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (Bloom 2010: 9-10). The Neanderthals are first portrayed compassionate and communal, but they are finally led by the example of the Cro-Magnons into sin and selfishness. Lok, a character who provides the early Neanderthal's point-of-view, is an unreliable narrator (Bhatnagar 2001: 695). He reflects from his limited perspective what is going on in the world of reality and the dangers lurking in the forest and posing to the safety of the Neanderthals. Thus, it is necessary to make a shift as far as the narrative perspective is concerned. A Cro-Magnon takes up the narration with a more reliable and more knowledgeable point of view.

The case is almost similar in *Pincher Martin* (1956), where a shipwrecked sailor (Martin), desperate to survive, imagines that he is clinging to bare rock. Meanwhile, his past is recalled. In the end, the reader, however, learns, astonishingly, that the man died in the wreck and that the whole recollection has taken place at the moment of drowning. This fact is revealed in the last chapter of the novel where the reader expects read more either about Martin's personality or on the last moment in his life. While discussing whether Martin "suffered or not" (Golding 1972: 212), Campbell and Davidson, two naval officers, reveal that the man "... didn't even have time to kick off his seaboots" (Golding 1972: 212) before drowning. Carey argues that this is "a surprise to the reader, for we are repeatedly reminded, in the course of the narrative, that Pincher had been able to remove his sea-boots before scrambling onto the rock" (2010: 150). This is a tricky technique that serves the purpose of the reader's reshuffling his initial views and attitudes. At any rate, Golding's employment of flashbacks serves the purpose of showing that one's past often remains indelible and influential in shaping one's present life.

A more careful analysis of this type of fiction employing sudden radical changes displays the fact that this "gimmick" is more than a mere trick to relieve the reader from tension or to abstain from the demands of the plot. On the contrary, it is a subtle device used smoothly to introduce the *climax* in its true shade of reality (Budkuley 1994: 20). In complex plots, climaxes are reached when tension becomes the most heightened.

In studying William Golding and his diverse fiction, Kevin McCarron states that Golding himself has described the ending as a 'gimmick' but, strictly speaking, it is "a shift in perspective"; a device which he also utilizes at the end of not only *Lord of the Flies*, but

also in *The Inheritors* and *Pincher Martin*. As a technique, it is clearly indebted to the Greek concept of the *deus ex machina*, which exemplifies a supernatural intervention. In *Lord of the Flies*, as an example, the effect of this shift in perspective is considerable and permanent (McCarron 2004: 6-7). With the sudden arrival of the rescue, the novel ends with the restoration of order and the return of the schoolboys to the social world they have come from.

The employment of the "gimmick" seems to "work against the novel, to contradict or limit the range of reference and meaning that Golding has already established metaphorically" (Al Obaidi 2012: 2). The "gimmick", however, acts as a trick made by the magician in the circus to show where an object or a bird suddenly turns into something else. Golding borrows this device and applies it successfully and competently to his fiction, especially when he uses it in the very final parts of the book. For instance, *Lord of the Flies* is a symbolic representation of the ever widening conflict going on in the island between the rational Ralph and the evil and violent Jack. Similarly, it is a register of the gradual transformation of the island into a spot of bloodshed (Al Obaidi 2012: 2-3). The course of the events suggests that the children's presumable innocence is steadily replaced by selfishness, greed, cruelty, moral indifference, which are more associated with adults, or "grown-ups."

When the children are eventually rescued by a warship officer, he calls the whole situation "a game" made by children: "I should have thought that a pack of British boys- you're all British aren't you? - would have been able to put up a better show than that . . ." (Golding 1962: 248). This is irony; the boys are never behaving in accordance with their innocent recognition of life and the world in which they live. However, the boys' final shocking behavior refers to the duality and changeability of human nature:

But the island was scorched up like dead wood - Simon was dead - and Jack had . . . The tears began to flow and sobs shook him [Ralph]. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy. (Golding 1962: 248)

In connection with Golding's use of the "gimmick", John S. Whitley contends that the "gimmick" endings of each of Golding's first three novels are techniques "for placing that ideological framework in a more complete perspective." In *Lord of the Flies*, the officer from the

"trim cruiser" is a useless, unknowing god from a machine of war, a complement to the important beast from the air (1988: 177). Characteristically, this trick is comparable to the Greek device by means of which a problem or conflict is suddenly and illogically solved and peace is unreasonably restored after a long period of unrest and disorder. The group of officers who show up as a rescue that has descended from nowhere rarely help in eliminating, or, at least, referring to the real causes of trouble. Their immature, naive analysis of the situation appears to be characteristic of Golding's special ending of the novel, which is contradictory to readers' expectations. This ending, moreover, is more climactic than a natural outcome of normal causal relationship governing the main plot.

In *The Inheritors*, a large part of the novel is told from the point of view of the last of the "people", Lok is a primitive man, a Neanderthal who gives an account of things and the environment with which he is immediately in touch without fully understanding their nature. He and the other people of his race are in full harmony with nature surrounding them. The last chapter, however, provides a shift in point of view, for it is seen through the eyes of one of the "new men", after exterminating or wiping out what they see as the "devils" (the Neanderthals). The theme remains as it is: man sees himself as a being tortured by pride and guilt, one who is unaware of his own limitations but has faith in his power. The result is that he continually runs into conflict with other men. Here, the "gimmick" does not alter or weaken the point of the novel. Rather, the "gimmick", represented by the switch in point of view, merely repeats what the rest of the novel has already demonstrated and shown. Awareness and rational intelligence are still intimately connected with human sin. Virtually, the final use of the "gimmick" leads to break the unity without adding relevant perspective. The "contrast" between the "people" and the "new men" is "more effectively detailed, made more sharply applicable and relevant, when dimly apprehended by the last of the "people" [the Neanderthals]" (James Gindin 1976:199-200). Besides, Tuami and his fellows from the "new men", in order to provide a contrast to the prehumans, should be made less innocent, and therefore, closer to the fallen humans who show up clearly in Golding's other works (Whitley 1988: 177). Below is shown how the "new man" is depicted:

Tuami, his head full of swirling sand, tried to think of the time when the devil would be full grown. In this upland country, safe from pursuit by the tribe but shut off from men by the devil-haunted mountains, what sacrifice would they be forced to perform to a world of confusion? They were as different from the group of bold hunters and magicians who had sailed up the river towards the fall as a soaked feather is from a dry one. Restlessly, he turned the

ivory in his hand. What was the use of sharpening it against a man? Who would sharpen a point against the darkness of the world? (Golding 1975: 231)

The above quotation provides a marked contrast between the innocent, unsophisticated world of the Neanderthals and the selfish, greedy, and evil one of the "new men", who are really "different" in, at least, their overpowering sense of superiority and arrogance.

The appearance of such a device as the "gimmick" in *Pincher Martin* occurs in the final chapter subverts the reader's attention from a man's attempts to survive to mere recollections and impressions of a man just before he dies. The description shows that Christopher Hadley "Pincher" Martin, a sailor wounded in the Mid-Atlantic during the Second World War, is alive and does his best to survive on a rock in the Atlantic. All the detailed descriptions of Martin's desperate attempts to survive prove to be fruitless and of no avail altogether when the author inserts in the final lines of the book some casual references to Martin (Al Obaidi 2012: 2-3). The dialogue between the officers in the British navy emphasizes this fact: "he did not even have time to take off his boots" (Golding: 1956: 212). Thus, Golding must have a passion for always contradicting his readers' expectations. On reading these final lines, those who have identified with Martin, on the one hand, perhaps feel sorry for the uncalled for decease of such a self-confident, brave man. As for those who could not develop any kind of identification with the principal character of Golding's novel, their first reaction must be relief or indifference, certainly believing in the workings of what is termed as *poetic justice*.

Besides, Whitley states that in *Pincher Martin*, the late revelation of the early death of the central protagonist does not only serve to provide the expected shock of a well-made tale, but it also points to the unchanging nature of Martin's self-absorption. This is to signify that Martin has already been spiritually "dead." Though the "gimmick" is supposed to cause a shock to the reader, it does not complicate or change his / her response to the rest of the novel; it, rather, clarifies that response to a large degree (1988: 177).

In conclusion, the reader understands this deliberate shift in narrative technique to be a gesture introduced by William Golding, who is, by all means, not a traditional writer. Although he appears to be following the devices used by Victorian writers, he has his own technical devices and linguistic tricks that help in crystallizing and supporting the major themes of his books (Al Obaidi 2012: 2-3). Since Golding is a modern writer, the introduction of new characters and unexpected events in the final parts of the stories proves effective innovative. From a different perspective, Golding's stories, with such endings, can be read as modern fairy-tales whose endings are not as happy and pleasant as the traditional

ones. Golding "gimmick" is more negative than positive, featuring the destruction of innocence or an old way of life in favor of a new one, which is dishonest and evil in essence.

2. CONCLUSION

As a modern novelist, Golding must have in mind the idea of experimenting with theme, form, and technique. The mode of bringing about a sudden and critical shift towards the end of the novel (the gimmick) is often regarded as a clever gesture whereby writers win their readers' attention and interest. Evidently, the more climactic the shift is, the more meanings and interpretations the novel can gain and acquire.

Lord of the Flies and *The Inheritors* share the feature of having an open-ending. Despite the fact that action, by the end of the two novels, is complete (the boys are finally rescued in the former novel, and the "new people" have come to replace the Neanderthals as the new race), what lies beyond these two endings remains mysterious, requiring further investigation. Therefore, such tricky endings suggest possibilities. Aside from the questions raised on ambiguity, one thing or fact remains fixed, which is represented in Golding's assertion of the point of continuity.

In another novel by Golding, *Pincher Martin*, the end seems completely at odds with the content of the novel altogether. Martin, the main character, is found dead at the very first page of the novel, which negates his false pride and sense of self-assertion. Compared with the lively nature round him, Martin is already dead spiritually, and this is what Golding must have desired to point out and communicate with his "gimmick" trick.

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