

**AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE THEME OF TEMPORALITY IN
WILLIAM GOLDING’S NOVEL *FREE FALL***

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Abstract

Time is an eternal entity without a beginning and an end. But life of human beings is limited and at the same time we have experienced that time does affect the life of all living beings. The present paper focuses on the study of temporal distortions in the life of Sammy Mountjoy, the central character of Golding’s fiction *Free Fall*. Through an analysis of his life, the paper aims at showing the universal concept of one’s helplessness before time.

Keywords - temporal distortions, universal concept.

What then is time? If no one asks me, I know:
If wish to explain to him who asks. I know not.

(St. Augustine 292)

Time is not just a specifically definable constant but a combination of concepts, events and rhythm conveying an extremely wide range of phenomena. To many, time is simply what a clock says and the clock anything - the rising of the sun, one’s stomach at noon, a chronometer or a calendar. Many of our notions of time are derived from natural process like the evolution of day and night, the solar year with its four seasons, the cyclic pattern of birth, growth, death and so on.

Recognition of time as a significant aspect of fiction has been slow in coming even though Lucas outlined its role in 1916 and Samuel Johnson’s metaphoric distinction between the arts of Fielding and Richardson signaled the relationship between form and time as early as 1768. Early in the 20th century the Formalist, especially Victor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky and Veselovsky independently and perceptively drew attention to the chronological order and the presentational order as they distinguished between story and plot.

The polarization of time into past, present and future is resented by modern consciousness. In modern literature clocks seem to exist only to be ignored, shattered and imposed upon. The objective pattern of 'A' following 'B' which leads to 'C' and results in 'D' has proved to be insufficient in presenting the wholeness of human experience. The clock is summoned forth as a negative symbol by the subjective consciousness of an individual who wishes to assert his own private time against the claims of public life.

The issue of William Golding's art is that there are many things which cannot be understood in rational and conceptual terms. The examination of *Free Fall* from the perspective of the treatment of time will unravel certain meanings of the novel which could not be brought out in traditional criticism.

The novel *Free Fall* is an archeological memory narrative. "Golding who see the novelist as a Prospero figure presides over the text not just as an 'author – ity' a creator of structure and reshaper of perceptions" (Philip Redpath 16). He continually injects fragments of flesh back to break down any notion of clock time in the narrative. The transitions from present to past are unannounced and abrupt contributing to the surrealistic flavor. In responding to the question of whether or not an artist has the responsibility to communicate to his audience he said :

I think one of the things that's the matter with us surely at the moment in that almost anything that is not worth saying can be said with infinite clarity and anything which is worth saying can only be put across in a special kind of thought way which hits people at many levels and says to them, 'Now, look here, this is not a Coca - cola advertisement, this is not a pronouncement by the Senate or the President or Queen or whatever, this is particularly relevant set of communication being made to whoever can grasp it. (Dickson 66)

Sammy Mountjoy, the protagonist of the novel tries to find out as to what he had done in the seemingly chartless wasteland of his past that made the once innocent child, the lonely and troubled man who writes. He gains in self - knowledge but the reader is taken through as exhausting and bewildering gymnastic route. He is required to make leaps and to establish connections on his own, while Sammy intransigent in his experiment with time, moves forward and backward, digging for pictures in the labyrinth of his own memories.

In the first three sections of the novel, Sammy looks back fairly consecutively at his childhood. In sections four, five and six his story takes a great leap forward to the period when he has become an art student, lives in London, seeks out his former school fellow Beatrice and forces her to become his very unsatisfactory mistress and finally deserts her as soon as he has fallen in love with another woman he marries. Section seven takes another leap ahead to a time Sammy is a prisoner of war in a German camp, being questioned by one Dr. Halde. As he refuses to denounce the prisoner planning to escape he is locked up in a darkroom. Section eight begins with the question, "How did I come to be frightened of the dark?" The answer to that question enables him to bridge a great part of the gap between sections three and four explaining in passing that though originally the pauper orphaned son of a decayed prostitute he had been adopted by Watts - Watt, a clergyman and this enabled him to attend the Arts school. Section thirteen has to do with a much later post - war time when Sammy visits Beatrice in a mental hospital where she carries on her incurably wrecked existence. There is only a brief fourteenth section, disclosing one essential fact about the dark cell, that is, the terrors had been solely made up by Sammy's own imagination and sick fears.

The historical chronology of Sammy's life is thus in the following sections in the book - one, two, three, eight, eleven, twelve, four, five, six, seven, nine, ten, thirteen and fourteen. The novel is composed of thirteen units and a Coda, the units being of uneven length and irregularly organized.

The sabotaging of time in *Free Fall* becomes significant in the sense that Golding's attempt is not to describe Sammy's life as it actually happens, but as it is remembered by Sammy, as he has lived through it. It is not the actual experience that is important but the texture of reminiscence, the Penelope's tapestry of a man's memory.

The temporal chaos in the novel can also be taken as a reflection as a Cosmic chaos. Distortion has become the normal condition of human existence and an inseparable part of the portrayal of reality. The novel focuses on that significant aspect of man questing for order on various levels and encountering in the process chaos within and without.

By superimposing the time of memory and the linear time the reader can see Sammy's personal history fall into plays within the largest context of history and he is offered a fully length portrait of the modern existential hero, poised between past and future, between the rational and the irrational, aware of the relativity of all things and sharing responsibilities in all evil performed. Thus the meaning is universalized. Sammy is every man. He may be a great artist but he is a sorry specimen of humanity, although at the same time a representative specimen trapped in the shackles and limitations of the human predicament. There are Mountjoy like trends and impulses unpalatable as they are, are very much a part of human nature.

The temporal distortions in the novel strain the readers brain but raise the novel to the stance of a 'writerly text'. The reader's role is not simply that of an observer or analyst as in a 'readerly text'. The reader is here invited to be an active participant in the process of creation. Golding firmly holds on to his dictum, "Art is partly communication but only partly, the rest is discovery" (*Free Fall* 102).

Art has the power to make strange or as the formalist Victor Shklovsky terms it 'to defamiliarise' the world with which we have grown overly familiar. So the temporal distortions may also be seen as an attempt on Golding's part to renew and refresh our perceptions of art and life. A new approach can enliven the art of writing which otherwise can easily collapse into a sterile and academic exercise. The shifting perceptive, flashbacks and confined setting in the novel may also be set to parallel methods and assumptions in the cinematic medium.

The sabotaging of time in the novel can be viewed from another angle also. We are all slaves of time. There are moments when something in us rebels against this linear existence. Some part of our self simply wants to stop, to put a break on this meaningless forward movement and to shatter the pseudo order imposed upon us. So artists like Golding when they capture the pregnant experiences of life distort the order, make it obscure, amorphous and fragmentary. As E.M. Forster says : "Neither memory nor anticipation is much interested in Father Time, and all dreamers, artists and lovers are partially delivered from his tyranny ..." (*Virginia Tiger* 142). With all its temporal confusions *Free Fall* is indeed a novel of time ruled and time captured.

Free Fall stands on the border between art and life. In fact, Golding has insisted that with *Free Fall* he was 'moving much more towards novels where I don't understand what everything is about', a declaration in keeping with his distrust of conceptual categories and his romantic affirmation of metaphor and myth as vehicles which find but do not impose order or coherence in the world. He does not impose a pattern but suggests it and as Arthur Symons instructs us :

To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create. (*Virginia Tiger* 142).

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