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WILLIAM GOLDING'S *THE INHERITORS*: AN APOCALYPSE

NAGESH ARI

Lecturer in English, P.B.N.College, Nidubrolu, Guntur (Dt), A.P-522124

Email: nagesh.ari@gmail.com



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Abstract

William Golding's *The Inheritors*, published in 1955, serves as a statement of man's loss of innocence. It is a by-product of the maladies of modern milieu. The life, after the Great Wars, was left disillusioned with a dismal view. Intellectuals of the day responded with artistic rendering of the times with verisimilitude and even attempted to find the root cause of man's innate evil nature. Golding is viewed as a social psychologist in treating the imperfect human nature with a special focus on darker instincts. The destructive instincts of the excesses of civilization, culture and of man's inability to sympathize with fellow creatures have resulted in the unprecedented genocide. Golding attempts to glorify the primitive life. *The Inheritors* holds a poignant message of the perilous state of human existence. With the thorough disillusionment Golding draws a pessimistic picture of life. His exercise of anti-utopian vision accentuates inevitable apocalypse.

Keywords: milieu, Great War, social psychologist, civilization, existence, anti-utopian, Apocalypse

William Gerald Golding, a Nobel laureate, represents the state of affairs of modern era. He drew instances from his first-hand experiences of participation in World War II. The bloodshed and the aftermath left indelible impression on the psyche of the author. This disillusionment led to nurturing a pessimistic outlook towards human existence. Golding fictional world is a keen reaction to the gloomy state of the social and political institutions. He exhibits a keen awareness of the contemporary milieu and presents an apocalyptic picture like T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Kafka. The world of irrationality and man's failure to communicate with one another occupies the core of the novel *The Inheritors*. The Neanderthal people in *The Inheritors* are naive and are not used to the ways of New men. Golding seems to enact the dictum, "innocence

cannot hope for continuity, it must change or be destroyed."

Presentation of human nature seems to be the preoccupation of Golding. There is a sense of agony that man lost his natural rhythm in the civilized life which is beset with tribulations. The resultant counter discourse to the state of affairs is reposing faith in the golden past or glorification of primitivism. The Neanderthal men are treated as having contentment in every way with today, and the past and future are no issues to them. The harmony they enjoy in nature's presence is suddenly upset with the encounter with the new men. The characters are delineated as impervious to evil. The existence of evil is incomprehensible in the blissful state. Lok, a Neanderthal man assumes an arrow to

be a gift shot at him by the New men. There is an incisive sarcasm that Golding implicates the entire civilization about the failure to sympathize with the fellow creatures.

There runs a religious undertone in the anointing of superiority to Neanderthal men. Golding does not overtly subscribe to the religious philosophy, yet one cannot fail to trace the religious orientation. The bliss in the prelapsarian state of man is juxtaposed to the absence of God from man's consciousness and cultural strata. Godlessness of the world of *The Inheritors* can be understood through the thematic setting. The Neanderthal men are innocent of evil and lead a blissful life. They turn inquisitive about the New men and lose their innocence. The acquisition of consciousness is seen as fall in religious terms. In such an instance Lok and Fa of Neanderthal men run after the New men and lose their innocence. Golding enacts his conviction that man's rise to consciousness as fall. It is an inversion of Darwinian scientific descent of man. It can be surmised as a theological explanation of fall of man.

To be born a new man is to inherit a new consciousness, and that consciousness will always be aware of dimly of the darkness from which it springs, of the darkness beyond. But being thus aware of it, man turns it into an enemy, into that which is evil...once again Golding revealed not just the underside of civilization, but the negatives upon which civilization itself is built. Having experienced what Lok has experienced we can now see more closely both the necessary triumph of the new men and its inevitable cost. (Josipovici 242-243)

Golding's representation of Neanderthal men is awe inspiring. There is an inexplicable harmony among God, man and nature, which is characterized by ineffable sense of belonging to their world. Their sojourn for summer has everything of their familiarity—the stone, the river, the overhang and more importantly their deity, Oa (Oa is the possible inversion of Alpha and Omega) in waiting. Mal treats the familiar stone affectionately, as if it were their community member. Lok dances around the deity

Oa in an ecstatic state of celebrating on their return. Golding creates the characters who are capable of exchanging pictures instead of words. His intention seems to suggest their unified consciousness in which words have little role. "Ha has many pictures and few words." Fa remarks: "Lok has mouthful of words and no pictures" (*The Inheritors* 38).

Orature, a practice of transmission of experiences, stories and histories has been in vogue in the primitive cultures. Golding's characters in *The Inheritors* recount their stories. Once they reach their summer home they settle down cozily exchanging their inheritance of faith. Mal recalls the story of the creation of the earth: "There was the great Oa. She brought forth the earth from her belly. She gave suck. The earth brought forth woman and the woman brought forth the first man out of her belly" (*The Inheritors* 35). They exchange their tribal histories that have been transmitted down from generation to generation. The story Mal recounts is analogous to the story of the creation, bearing similarities to the first chapter of the Genesis in the Bible. The description resembles the Garden of Eden, the land of perpetual summer. The life of Neanderthal men is characterized by contentment and cheerful acceptance of life. "Life was fulfilled, there was no need to look for food, tomorrow was secure and the day after that so remote that no one would bother to think of it. Today is like yesterday and tomorrow" (*The Inheritors* 47). Even death is treated with equanimity, when Mal dies of an accidental from the log. They express their faith that "Oa has taken Mal into her belly" (*The Inheritors* 91).

The Edenic world starts disintegrating when Mal has an apocalyptic vision, which reveals the burning of the forest symbolizing the offing peril. The serene world is invaded by a group of more intelligent than the Neanderthal men. Golding juxtaposes the world of the new men with that of the primitive men. They have speech but absence of unified consciousness of sharing pictures. Ha, the wisest in the group of the Neanderthal men pays the price first, in his pursuit of knowing the new ones. There runs an utter quandary among the Neanderthal men. Lok feels fragmented in his psyche and the agony is shared by Fa. Nil experiences the same welter. They are joyous of

reciprocating with the New men, but tragedy strikes in the form New men's invasion of the primitive men. The New men kill the Old Woman and Nil, and abduct Liku and the New One.

Golding exercises dystopian vision in schematizing the events in the serene world of the Neanderthal Men. Innocent cannot hope for continuity. It must change or be destroyed. The gut wrenching incidents in the life of Neanderthal Men prepare them for a new course of life. Their fall from the innocence to knowledge of causing evil to others can be clearly traced. Fa understands the consequence of throwing of twig, which can do harm. They have a picture of throwing the twig (arrow) at the hyenas, which in their first encounter mistook for gift. In a state of wreaking vengeance Fa exhorts Lok, "Give the twig back. Throw it now". He jerked his head violently, "No! No! The New people threw it to me" (*The Inheritors* 116).

Fa and Lok acquire a new identity and their original world is evanescent. Caught between the two worlds, they are in a limbo of comprehension and confusion. For the first time they experience split personalities. "Now more clearly than ever before there were two Loks" (*The Inheritors* 141). Their existential dilemma is commented upon by Fromm:

Man is the only animal who cannot feel evicted from paradise, the only animal from whom the existence is a problem that he has to solve and from which he cannot escape. He cannot go back to the pre-human state of harmony with nature, and he does not know, where he will arrive if he goes forward. Man's existential contradiction results in a state of constant disequilibrium (225).

Golding satirically surmises that moral structure is not a concomitant obligation with civilization and sometimes it has proved to be a detriment to the existence of value system.

The world of the New Men is not altogether peaceful. Man's inability to empathize with fellow being is trenchantly projected. Instead of accepting the Neanderthal Men, the New Men lose their security and are terrorized by the presence of Lok

and Fa. They leave the island and erect guards at the fence. They are on the verge of starving and are terrified of the illusions of ogres. Tanakil loses sanity and Chestnut tress falls over the cliff. They make elaborate preparation in their religious rituals to free themselves from ogres. Chestnut tree offers a finger to the stag head as a part of propitiating their deity. They eat ravenously. They draw figures to inflict pain with the help of their deity. The red figure pierced by a stake represents Lok and Fa themselves. Fa does not want to touch the mead but Lok persuades her to taste it. Their fatal attraction toward the New Men and the assuming the identity of the New Men completes the transformation of Neanderthal Men. Contradicting the fall of man in Genesis, here is an inversion, wherein a man tempts the woman to the knowledge of good and evil.

In the fable, *The Inheritors* Golding delineates the Neanderthal Men with many desirable traits. Their rise to consciousness and the knowledge of the sin is the price they pay. The end of the Neanderthal is replete with pathos. Golding leaves the moral implication to the readers. The failure to have a vision seems to be the tragic outcome of both Neanderthal Men and New Men. Golding explores the darkness in human being and puts it in the words of Marlan when Tuami sharpens his ivory dagger restlessly. "What was the use of sharpening against man? Who would sharpen a point against the darkness of the world?" (*The Inheritors* 231). Golding turns to a pre-historic time to interpret his theme, the problem of evil in the world and the man's response to it. He appears to have been convinced of the idea that the constructive civilization without moral basis is futile. The central idea and the enactment of the novel is an ironical inversion of the Biblical statement, "The meek shall inherit the earth", with an undertone of apocalyptic vision.

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