

# The Narrative Art of William Golding In *Darkness Visible*

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**ABSTRACT :** *The language and style of Golding's novels has often been praised for its intensity, and poetic qualities. His language is generally plain and functional, with straight forward English that will be as intelligible to an educated adolescent as to a sophisticated adult. The novel Darkness Visible is primarily a study of evil. The novel is like a dramatized form of Revelation with the confused and blighted Matty serving as the voice of the prophet. It is a fast moving narrative and contains a wide variety of sentence patterns. Further one comes across a limited number of antithetical structures. The novel also displays the typographical details such as italics, abbreviations and capitals. The role of number cannot be ignored in the novel.*

The uniqueness of Golding's work lies in its density of texture, the tightness of organization and the profundity. He has meticulously and ingeniously put his novels together and has loaded them with 'meaning'. Thus Golding's writing explores moral dilemmas as the centre of human existence and he frequently places his characters in extreme situations to suggest a 'mythological' dimension to their lives. The shape of the novel is an analogue for the shape in the universe. As Golding is a religious man, he finds the shape of the universe to be more orderly and comprehensible than most of his contemporaries probably do.

The language and style of Golding's novels has often been praised for its intensity, and poetic qualities. His genius lies precisely in his ability to portray abstract moral and metaphysical themes in sensuous and seemingly everyday language. His art is to invest apparently natural objects and events with enriching imagery which imply a new dimension of meaning. His language is generally plain and functional, with a straight forward English that will be as intelligible to an educated adolescent as to a sophisticated adult. His language unites symbols and reality in as effective way as in any modern English novel. The language and imagery serve the archetypal elements of his novels.

The novel *Darkness Visible* is primarily a study of evil as it traces the career of Matty, a child mutilated in London blitz and suffering psychological damage, and that of Sophy, a child deserted by her mother and an amoral psychopath. It is also a map of our perception of the universe in terms of the spiritual and material. Golding has adopted the grotesque as the structural principle for *Darkness Visible* along with a number of Biblical and classical metaphors and powerful symbols. The novel is like a dramatized form of Revelation with the confused and blighted Matty serving as the voice of the prophet.

## 1. SENTENCE PATTERN:

The novel *Darkness Visible* carries various types of sentences. Golding has here employed short and simple sentences. The novel also contains comparatively long and complex sentences. Some examples of different patterns of sentences used in the novel are as follows

### 1.1. SIMPLE AND SHORT SENTENCES:

The simple and short sentences in the novel add to the variety in the narrative. The following simple sentences throw light on grief, fear and surprise:

“He was muttering”. (p.10)

“It was dead”. (p.22)

“Matty muttered again”. (p.86)

“Henderson stood still”. (p.85)

“The magic disappeared”. (p.112)

“Too boring”. (p.144)

“I wonder”(p.165)

“Sim sighed”. (p.187)

“Sim cogitated”. (p.197)

There are some short sentences expressing the meaning of joy, friendship and fulfillment. For example:

“Matty was smiling”. (p.19)

“They’re pretty”. (p.46)

“He spoke mildly”. (p.70)

“Gerry laughed”. (p.172)

“She smiled”. (p.216)

Some short sentences relating to different action of characters are as follows:

“The captain snarled”. (p.14)

“She spoke roundly”. (p.17)

“He mouthed”. (p.18)

“He braced himself”. (p.30)

“I feel”. (p.71)

“He guessed”. (p.76)

“They came again”. (p.94)

“She saw something”. (p.123)

“He peered about”. (p.143)

“I bite” (p.153)

“Sophy looked”. (p.164)

“She waited”. (p.189)

“Edwin stopped”. (p.204)

“Edwin answered”. (p.208)

“Sim spoke”. (p.211)

“He moved”. (p.215)

“I knew”. (p.253)

## **1.2. LONG SENTENCES**

A large number of unusually long sentences with compound and complex structures are found in the novel. These sentences throw light on the theme, atmosphere and characters, besides building up the narrative. Examples of long sentences that describe the atmosphere described at many points are as follows:

“At the end of the street or where now, humanly speaking, the street was no longer part of the habitable world – at that point where the world had become an open stove – at a point where odd bits of brightness condensed to form a

lamp-post still standing, a pillar box, some eccentrically shaped rubble – right there – where the flinty street was turned into light, something moved”. (p.12)

“High above the glance and visible now for the first time between two pillars of lighted smoke was the steely and untouched round of the full moon – the lover’s, hunter’s, poet’s moon, and now – an ancient and severe goddess credited with a new function and a new title – the bomber’s, moon”. (p.13)

“So then he was able to lay his twigs and put the pot on top and strike a match and light the twigs and he got more laughter and then applause as if he was clown who had suddenly done something clever; and through the laughter and the applause you could hear the crackling of the twigs under the pot and the twigs blazed and the flower seeds went bang, bang, bang and a great flame liked across the wasteland and there were shrieks and screams and people beating each other out and the children and people scattering and the screech of brakes as they ran into the road and the crash as cars shunted each other and cries and curses”. (p.70)

There are several instances of long sentences describing different actions of the characters. A few examples are cited below:

“It was half-way through his next sentence, which was about how much pleasanter a house was with children in it – and of course he had to add something silly like, or not children precisely, let us say a pair of delightful young ladies like you, where as when they left home if they went a long way away – half-way or somewhere in this twisting sentence Sophy had a naked realization of her own power should she care to exercise it, to do anything she liked with Mr. Goodchild, that large, old, fat man with his shopful of books and his silly ways, she could do absolutely anything she liked with him only it would not be worth the trouble”. (p.120-121)

“And she moved the control back and found the point between all stations; and immediately in the uncleaned room which seemed always to smell of drains and food, and to be organized, or disorganized round and unmade bed – the very light from the window seeming dusty and dim as if the whole world were no more than an annex to the room – immediately there came the voice of the darkness between the stars, between the galaxies, the toneless voice of the great skein unraveling and lying slack; and they knew why the whole thing would be simple and tiny part of the last slackness”. (p.172-173)

Sophy is found involved with sex activities in the course of the narrative. The following long sentence gives a description of that:

“And then, facing him, unable to take her eyes of his face, the severe, masculine mouth the eagle’s beak, the eyes that surely could see as far as she

through a brick person – then, both hands trapped by her sides by the swinging bags, her splendid, idiotic body took charge, and before him, her unbra'd breast rose up, their vulnerable, tender, uncontrollable, enslaving points hardened, stood out and lifted the fabric of her short in a sigh as clear as if it had been showed” (p.186)

### 1.3.SING-SONG BALANCING:

The novel *Darkness Visible* contains a few numbers of ‘this and that’ types of construction, which can be grouped under the heading ‘sing-song balancing’. These sentences generate a new rhythm in the narrative, besides having a typical beauty. Some examples are as follows:

Here and there, larger and wider, far and fast, up and down, disappearing and appearing, humbly and dumbly, out and down, more or less, now and then, dirty and witty, this and that, sooner or later.

### 1.4. SENTENCE WITH CLUSTERS:

There is the presence of sentences having clusters of similar words or group structures in *Darkness Visible*. The important patterns are discussed below.

Henderson, one of the characters in the novel cries. Tears came out of his eyes. He wipes the rear with a handkerchief. The clusters of verbs in the following sentences throw light on that:

“He groped in his pocket and brought out a large white handkerchief and he passed over his forehead and across his mouth and Matty watched his back and understood nothing”. (p.32)

Gerry is in the company of Sophy. They make discussion regarding Sophy’s sex relation with others. Gerry is in intimate moment with Sophy. The cluster of verbs in the following sentences throws light on that:

“Gerry put his mug on the floor, took hers from her, set it down, then turned over so that he was lying partly on her. He smiled into her eyes as he spoke”. (p.179)

The novel *Darkness Visible* contains a few clusters of negative sentences. They throw light on positive aspects in characters but negative situations occurring in the course of the narrative. For example:

“Matty was not frightened. It was not that he was brave. It was that he could not realize danger. He was not able to be frightened”. (p.61)

“We don’t know about that. We don’t know what would burn. We don’t know where the kids would go. We don’t know anything. Not about that” (p.180)

The clusters of Adverbs play a very important role in the course of the narrative of the novel. They throw light on various aspects. The adverb used in the following sentences inform about Sandra, Sim and Edwin and their actions:

“She drifted off to sleep again and breathed easily. He tiptoed down into the shop. Sandra was still sitting. But then the shop bell tinged again. It was Edwin. Sim made shushing noises and then breathed the reminder melodramatically” (p.219)

Thus, the study of sentence patterns reveals the fact that they are highly functional in the course of the narrative. They add richness to the language of the novel too.

### 1.5. REPETITION OF ITEMS:

There are a few cases of repetition of items in *Darkness Visible*. They play very important role in the course of the narrative. They help in making the narration fast. They too highlight theme, atmosphere and character in the novel. A few examples may be considered.

Matty is fond of reading books. Especially he is fond of the Bible. Books are parts and parcel of his life. That is indicated by the repetition of the word ‘move’ in the following sentences:

“Matty began to blaze as when clouds move aside. It moved as he moved but soon he did not move. Could not move” (p.47-48)

Sophy and her sister Toni are twin sisters. But there is no similarity in their nature and attitude. The repetition of ‘day and night’ in the following sentence indicates it:

“If they had been identical is might have been better but they were as different as day and night, night and day you are the one, night and day”. (p.105)

Sophy is a girl with a modern attitude. For her sex is very vital. Sex makes life complete and enjoyable for her. That is indicated by the following sentences:

“It’s like the collapse of sex”. Sex, sex, there’s nothing like sex! Sex forever”! (p.167)

Some interesting repetition of items runs as follows:

It was silly of course, to think that but as she said that herself she had a thought to go with it; having a period is silly! silly! silly. (p.131)

...she convulsed, feeling without saying but feeling every syllable- I hate ! I hate ! I hate ! (p.138)

“On and on, wave after wave arching, spreading, running down, down, down...” (p.167)

Thus, the sentence and syntax pattern in *Darkness Visible* are semantically important too. All those help in getting the minute idea about the novel and its theme, characters etc.

## 2. THE NARRATIVE:

The narrative of *Darkness Visible* is as rich as the narrative of the novel *Rites of Passage*. The language used in the novel is very rich with different aspects such as similes, metaphors etc. All these help giving a special identity to the narrative.

### 2.1. THE STRUCTURE:

“Events converge in the last section of the novel, but the structuring of the first two parts and their interrelationship is important. “Matty” ends where “Sophy” begins and the relationship between these two parts is that of a mirror-image. This can be represented as :



A key to the numbers reveals the shape of these two parts:

1. Fire of Blitz: fire at Wandicott school
2. Death of Henderson: Sophy’s imaginative killing of child
3. Matty’s uncertainty about self-“Who am I ?”: Sophy’s certainty is decision to kidnap child
4. Matty rejects “daughters of men”: Sophy finds sexual partner in Gerry
5. Matty goes to Australia : Sophy works at Runways Travel
6. Matty’s baptism: Sophy and Toni struck by tidal wave
7. Spirits tell Matty what he must do: Sophy discovers inescapable law of “Of course”
8. Matty sees twins going into shop: twins go into shop

“Matty” moves forward from 1 to 8, “Sophy” moves from 8 to 1. This relationship warrants attention.” ( Redpath Philip: 1986, pp 8)

### 2.2. THE LANGUAGE OF NARRATIVE:

The language of *Darkness Visible* is very special. It is just like a capsule packed with vitality. In the novel Golding has used the third person’s narrative in past tense. But theme is not easily understandable as he has used ornamental language. There are uses of imagery and symbol and complex sentences which make the novel very difficult to understand. For example:

“Matty was not frightened. It was not that he was brave. It was that he could not realize danger. He was not able to be frightened. So he lurched and bumped on, juddered and slid and thought he would like a drink but knew he had none, watched the needle of the fuel indicator drop lower and lower until at last it bounced on the pin, and still there was nothing but the merest track and then the car stopped” (p.61)

In *Darkness Visible* Golding has used a lot of alliterations, similes, cluster of adverbs and adjectives. All these make the language of his narrative very ornamental. For example:

“He thrust his books into their hands and limped quickly away. They held on to each other, laughing like apes. They broke apart, clamorously collected their fellows. The whole troupe clattered up the stones stairs, up, up, one, two, three storey to the landing by the great window”. (p.24)

“Whereas *Rites of Passage* delighted in language, *Darkness Visible* calls language itself in question. Above all where *Rites* depended on artful juxtaposition of scenes and pictures, it is only a continuous process of deeper and deeper exploration that can hope to make darkness finally visible, beyond paradox and different points of view, through some sequence of focusing.” (Gregor I & Kinkead - Weekes M: 1982 pp.119)

Thus, Golding’s narrative in *Darkness Visible* is very rich. The uncommon language and devices used in the novel are indication of the feature of the language of his novels.

### 3. NUMBER:

Golding uses certain numbers in his characteristic way to convey message. The number 2 is very significant. The focus of the novel is on two characters such as Matty and Sophy. Matty moves forward from chapter 1 to 8 whereas Sophy moves from chapter 8 to 1. Fire and water are two powerful symbols. *Darkness Visible* is a map or blueprint of our perception of the universe in terms of the spiritual and the material, light and darkness, God and Satan which will be resolved in the final section “One is One”.

The number 1 refers to God in his variety. The first section of the novel begins with the name “Part One-MATTY” which focuses the central character Matty ; followed by the second section “Part Two-SOPHY” with Sophy which is an equally important character; the third section “One is One” offers so many possible interpretations that a single interpretation becomes impossible.

The date 6/6/66 (the awful number in Revelation ) and 7/7/77 (a real coincidence of Sophy to the ‘mess things are’) are quite significant.

Having no name for Matty “born from the sheer agony of a burning city” (30), he is first given a number – 7, the mystical number of the Book of Revelations, then two Christian names- Matthew Septimus which refers to Matthew in chapter 7. Further, the magical number 7 is also associated with the healing, generative power of music and dance “with reference to Matty dancing to the music of Beethoven’s 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony.” (Crompton, D.W. 1982. pp.215)

The journal flooded with dates form a significant part of the novel.

### 4. TYPOGRAPHICAL SUPPORTS:

*Darkness Visible* displays the use of typographical details such as italics and capitals. These elements also play a very important role in so far as their contribution to the theme and characters of the novel are concerned.

A large number of italics are used in the novel. They are highly significant. Golding is seen using italics in the novel when he wants to give emphasis on any expression. A few examples are cited below:

*“Matty believes I bring someone with me”*. (p.19)

*“The silly man”*. (p.34)

*“The daughter of men”*. (p.49)

*“How can I help until I know what I am?”* (p.56)

*“Some have made themselves eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of God”*  
(p.61)

*“But I don’t want her back”*.(p.107)

*“What would Roland say, she might just do, and if he’s hooked on her”*.  
(p.150)

*“The way towards simplicity is through outrage”*. (p.167)

*“It is black one; moving your way over”*. (p.172)

*“I see what you mean, yes, I was listening”*. (p.200)

*“Oh God I hope to God they don’t ever think to open that cupboard”*. (p.246)

*“That was a narrow escape”*. (p.263)

The phrases or clauses in full capital are very rarely used in *Darkness Visible*. There are only a few examples of it which are related to God. For example:

GOOD CHILD’S RARE BOOK (p.47), FAREFUL DAY (p.87), LAST CHANCE (p.88), HIM THE LORD OF THE EARTH AND THE SUN AND THE PLANETS AND ALL THE CREATURES THAT ARE ON THEM (p.92), BUE ME (p.147)

Golding’s achievement in *Darkness Visible* is as much linguistic as philosophical. The timely message is brilliantly conveyed through the language he has chosen for the novels and is quite appropriate and concerned with the modern consciousness.

- All references of the novel *Darkness Visible* are from Faber paperbacks edition, England, 1980

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