



Psychological trauma in Golding's *Pincher Martin*

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Abstract

Golding is one of those writers who feel an urgent calling to delve deep beneath the surface of the patina of culture and manners and wants to reach an understanding which is at the core of original sin that moves man. In trying to analyze these issues, Golding became a prominent moralist-novelist. He views the average man as sick, a fallen being “with a sinful nature” and feels that “his spiritual state is perilous”. He declared himself a moralist and considered the novel a fit vehicle for expressing the terrible reality of Man’s moral condition. This article will make a deep study of Sir William Golding’s life and the psychological and literary influences in his novel *Pincher Martin* that shaped his sensitivity and his creative genius. The novel *Pincher Martin* (1956) is set during World War II. In this novel a shipwrecked sailor named Pincher Martin imagines that he is clinging to a bare rock desperate to survive. His past is recalled; but at the end it is learnt that he died in the wreck and that the whole recollection had taken place at the point of drowning. This changes the work into a religious allegory of purgatory and damnation. It develops the theme of cruelty as the basic nature of mankind, underneath a thin veneer of civilization. This article will highlight the fact that the consciousness of man is so self-centred, and he is so terrified of the infinite that it creates for



itself a fantasy existence even in death and wants to enjoy the luxury of personal identity. The concept lends itself to deep psychoanalytical interpretation.

Keywords: Psychoanalytic, Allegory, Purgation, Self-Reconstitution, Symbolism, Trauma.

Introduction

Of English novelists to attain critical appreciation during the last ten years, William Golding has proven the most willing to explain his work to the public. He is an engage in a special sense; he acknowledges using fiction to examine human nature; he would dispel what he calls man's appalling ignorance of his own nature, by demonstrating that man is strongly prone to evil. William Golding is a British novelist who won the Nobel Prize in 1983 for his work entitled *The Lord of the Flies* (1954). The awards he got did not come in a short time, he has written several novels such as *The Inheritors* (1955), *Pincher Martin* (1956), *Free Fall* (1959), and others. His background, which lived during World War II, made him have his own views on dealing with things. In addition, his interest in contemporary social issues, as well as in-depth knowledge of the culture and traditions of ancient tribes form the unique style of storytelling in each of his works. This earned him a lot of criticism from literary critics, especially for the ideas and use of pure prose in his works. William Golding's *Pincher Martin* is about the problem of maintaining one's identity in the face of death/non-existence.

Perhaps the best way to describe Golding's *Pincher Martin* (1956) is to say metaphorically that *Pincher Martin* is Golding's enfant terrible. Like Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, *Pincher Martin* treats of the same subject: the status of the individual in society. However, there are certain things in the latter novel which make any normal critique of this fictional work rather difficult. To begin with, there is too much of Golding the man and the philosopher in the novel than



Golding the writer of fiction. In fact. Golding personalises the attack on his own character so intensely that a feeling of sympathy towards Pincher Martin on the reader's part comes to be seen as an almost inevitable sympathetic readerly reaction. Almost total exhaustion of the reader's emotions is required in order to finish a novel which shows nothing but a complete condemnation of its own hero without a single flicker of hope. Golding does not hide his feelings about Pincher Martin: "*In fact, I went out of my way to damn Pincher the nastiest type as much as I could by making him, I could think of*". (PM, 68) However, since the book seems to be about Pincher Martin, and as Golding tried his best to make Martin the nastiest type he could think of, the slightest hint that Golding's own implication of an alternative to that type might be my satisfactory would probably generate a heated argument about the novel. We shall see later that Golding's ultimate attempt to damn Pincher Martin seems to be the same attempt which paradoxically wrests the reader's admiration for the way his own character seems to reveal the value of thought.

Major Thrust

Pincher Martin, William Golding's third novel, is one of three novels in Golding's oeuvre, alongside *Lord of the Flies* and *Darkness Visible*, which explicitly takes up the subject of war and its influence on human psyche. The novel tells the story of a sailor, Christopher "Pincher" Martin who finds himself shipwrecked on a rock in the middle of the Atlantic. He tries to survive despite the dire weather conditions, and, more importantly, his suffering and ensuing agony. Martin's extreme situation is that of a grievously ill person who finds himself in total seclusion. His task is to recreate his sense of identity, which is already shattered by his experience of war and is further endangered by a delusional state of mind that has resulted from



extreme exhaustion and numerous injuries. Isolated on the rock, Martin can create his sense of self only on the basis of his thoughts and recollections. Disconnected memories offer an insight into his life: we learn about his youth, which he devoted to acting, his decision to join the navy during the Second World War, and the tragic night when their ship was torpedoed by the enemy. After a week on the rock island, Martin yields to his delusional fantasies and, ultimately, dies of exposure. Golding's authoritative interpretation of his novel clearly places Martin's struggle in the realm of the spirit. According to this view, Martin's self-imposed suffering results from the ill use of his freedom, which has led him to turn away from God. Martin is then a cynical egoist, whose "greed for life" has led him to the symbolic gesture of rejecting death as an end to his existence, even if it is capable of bringing him liberation from his suffering. As a result, he finds himself in a purgatory of his own making, in which he is ultimately forced to confront the monstrous prospect of his own extinction.

One of the central elements of *Pincher Martin* is the use of symbolism to explore the novel's themes and ideas. Golding uses a variety of symbols throughout the novel to explore the struggle for survival, the human condition, and the nature of reality. One of the most prominent symbols in the novel is the rock itself, which serves as a metaphor for the challenges and complexities of the human condition. The rock is a harsh and unforgiving environment that represents the challenges and struggles that individuals face in their daily lives. Martin's struggle to survive on the rock is a reflection of the struggle for survival that all human beings must face in order to navigate the challenges of life. Another important symbol in the novel is the ocean, which represents the vastness and complexity of the universe. The ocean is a powerful and unpredictable force that serves as a reminder of the forces beyond our control that shape our lives. Martin's encounter with the shark in the novel highlights the terror and



beauty of the natural world, and the power of the ocean to both inspire and terrify. The ocean is also a symbol of the unknown and the mysterious, representing the vastness of the universe and the unknowable nature of reality. The otherworldly creatures that Martin encounters on the rock also serve as symbols in the novel, representing the forces that shape our perceptions of reality. These creatures are strange and alien, serving as a reminder of the limitations of our understanding of the universe. They also represent the ways in which our perceptions of reality can be shaped by our own experiences and biases, highlighting the importance of objectivity and rationality in our understanding of the world.

Language is another important symbol in the novel, representing the power and limitations of human communication. Martin's struggle to communicate with others on the rock highlights the importance of language in shaping our perceptions of reality, but also the limitations of language in conveying the complexity of human experience. The novel suggests that language can be a powerful tool for creating meaning and connecting with others, but it can also be used to manipulate and distort reality. The use of imagery is another important element of *Pincher Martin*, helping to create a vivid and immersive world that draws readers into the story. Golding's use of vivid, sensory descriptions of the natural environment on the rock serves to create a sense of immersion and realism, highlighting the harsh and unforgiving nature of the environment. This creates a vivid and visceral reading experience that helps readers to connect with Martin's struggle for survival. Golding's use of symbolism and imagery also serves to create a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty in the novel, reflecting the uncertain nature of reality and the limitations of human understanding. The novel raises questions about the nature of reality and the ways in which our perceptions of the world are shaped by our own experiences and biases. The use of ambiguous imagery and symbolism serves to highlight the



limitations of human understanding and to encourage readers to question their own perceptions of reality.

Pincher Martin is involved in a contradiction caused by his greed and explored in a most appropriate image of the maggots while the text displays another contradiction explored through another image of the black lightning, or alternatively, the image of the immovable feet of God. The thrust of the novel is summarised in an implicit warning: either Martin acquiesces to Nat's advice or he dies. But although Martin does die at the end of the novel, the problem of greed is exposed, through the tenacity of this character, for what it really is, namely, a political problem rather than a religious one. If the problem of Martin's greed cannot be solved, and solved it must be before he can live harmoniously, except by believing in God and accepting the technique of dying into heaven as the only way, then surely what seems to be a representation of human resistance in the character of Pincher Martin is faced with an authoritarian, superhuman power. In *Pincher Martin*, we have the type of "personal novel" which borders on what might be called the fiction of special pleading. In this type of fiction we can see that only one person's feelings and needs are taken as absolute while other persons are created in these same terms. But although the novel fits the definition of the personal novel, we shall see later that *Pincher Martin* is not that personal after all.

The setting of *Pincher Martin* is strangely a rock in the Atlantic Ocean. The action takes place during the Second World War. This is not mentioned directly in the novel, but we can certify this knowledge from the dialogue and from the description in the first chapter of the ship: *She sank out in the Atlantic. Hundreds of miles from land. She was alone, sent north-east from the convoy to break WT silence. The U-boat may be hanging round to pick up a survivor or two for questioning.* (PM, 92) Amid the outer turmoil symbolized by the war itself and the inner



turmoil symbolized by confusion and a sense of "nothingness", manifestations of destructive tendencies are brilliantly sketched in the characterisation of the hero-figure. A character that is gripped with the desire to dominate, possess, and compete fiercely with other rivals emerges out of the necessity to live in such a society. What the nature of that society is quite obscured in *Pincher Martin* where the character is "intentionally" made to personify the fatally destructive sin of greed in isolation from society. Martin's character is delineated as "personally" shaped. his actions "personally" motivated. and his destiny and stubbornness "personally" chosen. *Pincher Martin* inadvertently. or perhaps consciously. leaves out of consideration the fact that what we see in the novel are manifestations of destructive tendencies in a particularly capitalist society and focuses instead on the notion of "original sin". The argument at the end of *Pincher Martin* really becomes Philosophy. It is precisely this transformation in the text from focusing on the recollections of past events in the life of the nastiest character to focusing on the way of salvation which is behind different estimations of this character. And because Martin seems to be hopeless, Golding faces him with a merciless God represented, of course, in the image of the black lightning.

It could be argued then that *Pincher Martin* is not only about the nastiest type of character that William Golding could think of. *Pincher Martin* is clearly a rejection of the ideology of domination. It is obvious that greed is one of the elements which are built into this ideology, an ideology that destroys true individualism in its search for nothing less than individualism itself. Martin's destructive individualism, the text proves, should be destroyed. But another ideology which is as destructive as Martin's is created to combat it. It is this rebellion which is important in *Pincher Martin*, and it is this rebellion which makes one think of *Pincher Martin* as Golding's enfant terrible. The paradox lies in the fact that the only character which could



stand for what Golding needs, namely, the de mystificatory, emancipatory thinking character, is the same one drowned in the Atlantic. But once again, Golding the realist is at his best in *Pincher Martin*. Golding produces a text which reveals to us that its own textual ideologies are impossible. In other words, the text's possibility lies in its impossibility.

Conclusion

Martin's struggle to survive eventually lead to delirious attempts at self-reconstitution, ultimately resulting in his madness. The complexity of Golding's protagonist is that he is both a pathetic and a heroic figure; in his will to live, he stops at nothing, but it is this desire to survive that turns him into a mythic symbol of human endurance. *Pincher Martin* is a complex and powerful work of literature that explores the complexities of the human condition. The novel is a testament to the power of literature to explore the complexities of the human condition and to challenge us to become better versions of ourselves. It suggests that individuals must be willing to confront their own fears and desires in order to live an authentic life and that they must be willing to accept the absurdity of existence and create their own meaning in order to live a meaningful life. The novel also emphasizes the importance of finding one's own sense of identity, and of coming to terms with one's own sense of morality and power. It highlights the struggle for survival as a metaphor for the human condition, suggesting that individuals must find their own way to connect with others and to create a sense of community and purpose. *Pincher Martin* is a powerful work of literature that explores the complexities of the human condition. It delves into the themes of community, identity, morality, freedom, power, and the struggle for survival. It portrays the power of the human psyche and its impact on our perceptions of reality, and it raises questions about the meaning and purpose of life. The novel is a testament to the power of literature to challenge us to become



better versions of ourselves and to find our own way to create meaning and purpose in our lives.

Works Cited

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