Psychic Tragedy amidst Farce in Golding's The Paper Men

Yasunori SUGIMURA

No other novels by William Golding have evoked so bad a response from the reviewers as *The Paper Men*, but no other novels by the same author can represent the protagonist's psychic structure so aptly and concretely as this. As for Wilfred Barclay, a renowned novelist, the more he is pursued by Rick L. Tucker, an unestablished American professor who uses Machiavellian tactics to become his official biographer, the more hostile he becomes toward the professor and the more obstinately suppresses his inner self. His personal papers and drafts are what Rick Tucker is eager to obtain by so much as searching for them in the dustbin of the professor's house.

In fact, Barclay and Tucker are equally at the mercy of the symbolic of a kind which would guarantee some power over the other if one monopolized it. Barclay wishes to monopolize the symbolic to have perfect control over Tucker who has an urgent need to make the most of it in order to get tenure and academic authority at his university. Tucker, on the other hand, actually controls Barclay by means of his personal knowledge about Barclay's hit-and-run accident in South America not yet brought to light. But the greatest power holder is a non-descript Halliday who subsidizes Tucker and continues to put pressure on him to publish Barclay's biography within seven years. If Halliday had no bearing upon academic world of literature, Tucker would not have to control Barclay by taking advantage of his weakness concerning the

crime or patronize him by pretending to rescue his life on the mountain. Nor would Barclay have to wield sadistic power over Tucker by forcing him to play out the part of "Barclay's dog" in exchange for the official contract of writing his biography. Both Barclay and Tucker suffer from the despotism of Halliday, who as a dynast governs Barclay's literary achievement and Tucker's academic one alike. Such a political power seems to debilitate creative imagination to such a degree that Barclay's art and Tucker's academic faculty are both crippled in some respects. Barclay's novel is full of quotations, vulgarity, crudeness; Tucker's paper deals with too simple a theme on the number of relative clauses appearing in Barclay's novel. It is as if Golding showed how artistic and academic creation is being damaged by an authoritative code. This code tries to expose enforceably Barclay's personal papers and thus congeal them, while these drafts are essentially in a state of being constantly erased and rewritten into more elaborate pieces. It is by these sublimational processes that any masterpiece worth publishing is produced from the drafts. The same holds true for Tucker's academic papers. Without Halliday's pecuniary pressure and his enforced deadline, Tucker would exert far more creative energy to improve and refine as much as possible his rather dull studies of Barclay. Halliday's power disrupts the dialectical process of signifying system inherent in language and literature. Tucker is subjected not only to Halliday's *authority* but also to Barclay as author. The author and authority have merged together within Tucker. This is why he is engaged not so much in the work itself but rather in the author-authority, which Barclay consistently fights shy of. Hence Barclay's hidden drafts as the congealed symbolic keep cursing Barclay and Tucker until they have ruined each other. They act in a neurotic manner, which means that they are out of symbolic order. By symbolic order is meant the signifying system in which one symbol (signifier) is always already replaced by another symbol (signifier), with the result that a series of differentiated signifiers makes an infinite spiral chain¹ in sublimational dynamism. The displacement and differentiation of signifiers are effected by what Julia Kristeva refers to as the semiotic which originates in *chora*, the womb of universe. *Chora* precedes any ordered or rational universe, and has the force destructive of any fixed code. Kristeva ascribes the semiotic to the maternal authority. The symbolic, every time it is destroyed by the semiotic, produces everrenewed signifiers one after another provided that the thetic (a kind of barrier between the semiotic and the symbolic) has flexible and semipermeable nature. On the other hand, if the thetic has got serious "sclerosis" and therefore the symbolic becomes prohibiting, the semiotic increases the destructive force, breaks down the thetic, and disrupts the symbolic order.3 The dipso-schizo, and the obsessional neurosis are characterized by the loss of symbolic order, and Barclay shows both symptoms. At least two references to his dipso-schizo are detected in the text. One is found in the advice of Johnny, "an old friend from his London literary days" and "a shrewd commentator" 4: "See a priest or a shrink. If not, at least keep away from doctors acting in tandem. Otherwise they'll have you inside before you can say 'dipso-schizo.' "5 As for the other, Barclay owns himself to be a victim of delirium tremens: "I walked through the hospital regulations in a state *cognate* that's the right word to madness or delirious trimmings [tremens] which since by your time the whole load of religious stuff will have come back..."(126). Whether his delirium be caused by alcohol or not (I suspect it is not necessarily due to drinking), Anika Lemaire and A. de Waelhence appropriately explain the symbolic disorder characteristic of this delirium:

Two drunken friends have been apprehended and taken home by policemen who swoop through the area on bicycles, and who are metaphorically known as 'swallows.' The following day, neither of the drunks remembers the event, now lost in the mists of alcohol. A few bruises and the fact of being at home are all that bear witness to the event, which has been radically excluded from the web of memory. Some months later, however, one of the friends suddenly develops an ornithological delirium in which he has the impression of being attacked by lots of birds, particularly swallows, as soon as he leaves the house....What has happened? A. de Waelhence explains: I understand that a police cyclist is called a swallow, because I know that police cyclists swoop through the area, just as swallows swoop across the sky. But I cannot understand the relationship between the two and I therefore cannot use the word and the image of the swallow as a signifier of the police cyclist (its signified), unless, at the same time, I deny that a swallow is simply a policeman on a bicycle. It is this negation which co-constitutes the symbolic relation that the psychotic does not or cannot make. Once this relation is broken by the absence of the negation, then all the subject is left with is the visual and aural image—the word—of the swallow which, ceasing to be a signifier in the true sense, is transported as it stands into the real.6

In the same way, after Barclay has been told by Johnny that he is exoskeletal like crabs and lobsters, and that the worms get inside and have the place to themselves, this metaphor or signifier turns into the real in Barclay's mind. He cannot make the symbolic relation between the signifier (an exoskeletal animal) and the signified (Barclay himself).

Because this symbolic relation is broken, he is left with the visual image of the exoskeletal animal which is no longer a signifier but "transported into the real": "But-and here the patchiness comes in-I got into a nursing home somehow. I'd had a vivid encounter with the red hot worms under my carapace and a nice female doctor got them out of me through various chinks which she demonstrated by showing me a live lobster from the fish market and then again sometimes I think I dreamed the whole thing"(117-18). As has been suggested, Barclay's symbolic disorder is not entirely traceable to his particular alcoholism; Tucker lapses into the same disorder of the symbolic relation between the dog and himself. Once he is forced to immitate the canine bahaviour in exchange for the official contract, he gradually loses the symbolic relation, until he completely identifies himself with the dog and makes a dog-like attack on Barklay immediately after his sudden cancellation of the contract: "Rick gave a kind of howl. I've never heard anything like it. Perhaps it's how a wolf howls or a covote or something strange and Things got very confused after that. I mean he also kneeled down or rather flung himself down on his knees. He also bit my ankle. For a turbulent moment or two I thought that I was about to experience that massive male strength again but then he was more or less in my lap and his hands went to my head. He got them on my right ear and left cheek and I think he was trying for my eyes with any fingers and thumbs he had to spare"(182).

Barclay's obsessional neurosis is characterized by his peculiar attitude toward Tucker's wife Mary Lou, as well as by his dream, daydream, or hallucination. He is extraordinarily fascinated with Mary Lou, whose position is at once Tucker's wife and Halliday's mistress. Tucker, in league with Halliday, seizes much more power than his own to

control Barclay. Barclay somehow feels unusually attached to the woman who has already attained the consummation of love with her partner superior to him in power. Concerning a male case of obsessional neurosis, Bruce Fink argues that "just as his mother had probably been idealized early on, insofar as she was the Other's (his father's) wife and thus inaccessible," he "idealized women in his entourage who were involved with men he considered to be strong and hardworking." Tucker has presumably been well aware of this mental attitude of Barclay, and as the most effective tactics for the contract of writing Barclay's biography, he offers his wife to him overnight. Barclay only just turns down this offer, but the vision of Mary Lou continuously vexes him:

The vision of her, the glamour and the childish vulnerability caught me by the heart and the throat, nowhere else, it seemed. But there was a touch of panic too. I knew that the finger was on me, I was limed by her and would have to struggle to get myself free. Only the space of one day, morning, noon, night, to bring such change! It was there, the trap I had tried to avoid—and *would* avoid!—the bitter sorrow of a love that is fruitless, pointless, hopeless, agonizing and ridiculous. (77)

In such a vision, Barclay is bound by the closed Oedipal triangle in which Tucker plays the role of the father figure, Mary Lou the mother figure, and Barclay the child figure who is all the more deeply attached to the mother figure for being separated from her. This closed Oedipal triangle often produces the obsessional neurotic because of the repressive force of the ruthless father figure dominating the family and prohibiting the child

from access to the mother. The power of prohibition is such that every time the obsessive comes near to realising his desire, the Other intervenes and eclipses him. Consequently, he falls in love with anyone or anything that is completely unattainable.8 When the Other's imperative directs the subject to obtain *jouissance* from attaining the unattainable or ideals at the cost of his all satisfaction, sacrificing everything, the *jouissance* is for the Other, not for himself.9 The subject is ordered to satisfy the sadistic Other which is within him. 10 From the semiotic and the symbolic points of view, when the thetic has lost flexibility and the symbolic has become prohibiting, the semiotic as jouissance, thus as the unattainable, infinitely allures him, but never satisfies his desire anywhere other than in his daydream or hallucination. In other words, the semiotic as jouissance gains in power where the prohibiting symbolic predominates. Eventually, the semiotic as *jouissance* exerts destructive force, the thetic gives way, and the confusion of symbolic order follows. Moreover, in the process of satisfying the sadistic Other, the obsessive himself becomes sadistic. This is the psychic structure of Wilfred Barclay and Rick Tucker.

In Barclay's dream, daydream, and hallucination, the confusion of symbolic order and the sado-masochism above mentioned are both readily detectable. His longest daydream or hallucination occurs when he enters a cathedral in Sicily and a solid silver statue of Christ faces him in the north transept:

It was in the north transept. It faced me across the whole width. It was a solid silver statue of Christ but somehow the silver looked like steel, had that frightening suggestion of blue. It was taller than I am, broad-shouldered and striding forward like an archaic Greek

statue. It was crowned and its eyes were rubies or garnets or carbuncles or plain red glass that flared like the heat in my chest. Perhaps it was Christ. Perhaps they had inherited it in these parts and just changed the name and it was Pluto, the god of the Underworld, Hades, striding forward. I stood there with my mouth open and the flesh crawling over my body. I knew in one destroying instant that all my adult life I had believed in God and this knowledge was a vision of God. Fright entered the very marrow of my bones. Surrounded, swamped, confounded, all but destroyed, adrift in the universal intolerance, mouth open, screaming, bepissed and beshitten, I knew my maker and I fell down. (123)

Just as the mother figure is confused with Mary Lou in Barclay's mind, so is the father figure confused with the intolerant Christ who commands him to satisfy the sadistic Other. Barclay is always conscious of the divine intolerance; feels the steel string cutting into his chest, a strap tightening all over him. He feels God giving him a great pain in his hands and feet as if he were stigmatized. These experiences should be clearly distinguished from the sublimational one which Matthew Windrove in *Darkness Visible* has ever had in the bog. His body is completely submerged in the darkness but the lamp held over his head is not extinguished. This is Matty's spiritual light regained, which Barclay's experience utterly lacks. It is of great significance that this revengeful Maker, a wrathful God, is created in Barclay's own image¹² despite his remarks to the contrary: "I had been created by that ghastly intolerance in its own image"(124). This God is the sadistic Other within Barclay. The "universal intolerance," "ghastly intolerance," and "old nobodaddy" may imply his God, "old intolerance" Tucker, "One Above" Halliday, but

all of them represent the same sadistic Other within Barclay. they are always interchangeable and take "particular pleasure" in making them suffer or catching them "at their disadvantage." The very name "nobodaddy"—nobody's daddy—means nothing other than the ruthless father figure produced by the superego which is the origin of sadistic Other within the subject. Sigmund Freud argues in The Origins of Religion¹⁴ that the primal father of the primal horde has ever monopolized every woman, and when his sons steal her, they are killed, castrated, or expelled. Freud goes on to say that the sons, who have finally killed their primal father and devoured him, thus usurping his power, later feel profound remorse for their deeds and restore the father's power in the form of totem, enjoin exogamy, impose a code that strictly prohibits the incest between mother (daughter) and son. According to Freud, it is the function of the superego that dissuades the sons from the desire for the mother and daughters, or threatens to castrate the sons by dint of the primal father's authority restored by the sons themselves who feel guilty conscience and remorse following the killing of "the outstanding fatherfigure."¹⁵ Thus the superego is, Freud argues, constructed in the infancy by the father figure who induces fear of castration as well as awe in the infant's mind. Conversely, it is this superego which in turn produces the image of such a father figure, Halliday for example. A collector of young and beautiful women, he has much in common with the primal father. Should Barclay attain any reconciliation with Halliday-God, it is the function of the superego that unites them. In this sense, the following scene must needs be distinguished from that of Matthew Windrove's revelation, or from Sammy Mountjoy's epiphany, although some critics identify the one with the other. In a delirium or dream Barclay sees from his hotel room in Rome Halliday standing on a church roof, and finds himself on the roof top with Halliday:

I was standing on the roof next door where Halliday had stood. was looking down at the steps. There was sunlight everywhere, not the heavy light of Rome but a kind of radiance as if the sun were everywhere. I'd never noticed before, but now I saw...that the steps had the symmetrical curve of a musical instrument, guitar, cello, violin. But this harmonious shape was now embellished and interrupted everywhere by the people and the flowers and the glitter of the jewels strewn among them on the steps. All the people were young and like flowers. I found that he was standing by me on the roof of his house after all and we went down together and stood among the people with the patterns of jewels and the heaps of flowers all blazing inside and out with the radiance. Then they made music of the steps. They held hands and moved and the movement was music. I saw they were neither male nor female or perhaps they were both and it was of no importance. What mattered was the music they made. Male and female was of no importance for me, he said, taking me by the hand and leading me to one side....I think that there was a dark, calm sea beyond it, since I have nothing to speak with but with metaphor. Also there were creatures in the sea that sang. For the singing and the song I have no words at all. I woke up not singing but crying; or of those tears it is better to say that I wept and went on weeping. (160-61)

Concerning this passage, Julia Briggs argues that Barclay sees a vision of transcendental beauty, and that this vision "recalls Sammy's revelation on being released from his cell" because Barclay hears the people all

blazing with the radiance make music and the movement is music.¹⁶ J. Boyd also compares this vision to that of Sammy, and holds that for Barklay "sexuality, homosexuality and sexual misdemeanours are of no importance."17 Jeanne Delbaere quotes Franz Wöhrer as saying that Barclay's vision of "dark, calm sea" derives from Meister Eckhart's Godhead or Gottheit. 18 Furthermore, Jeanne Delbaere appreciates Wöhrer's reference to Barclay's allusion of "Istigkeit" experienced in his vision of Halliday as Eckhart's theological and philosophical concept. According to Wöhrer, Delbaere argues, the "isness" is the English translation of "Istigkeit," and has been in use in English since 1865."19 As regards Eckhart's Godhead, in my opinion, Matthew Windrove in Darkness Visible undergoes its equivalent in the ritualistic experience in the bog of half mud which gives off the stink of vegetable and animal decay; the warm mud full of leeches "down there in an even darker darkness, a more secret secrecy"(73). Matty, with wheels round his waist and the lamp held above his head, walks deliberately into the water:

He walked in, his feet went, his calves, his knees, strange creatures touched him underwater or snaked away over the rippled surface and still he went, down and in. The water rose past his waist and to his chest. The frog broke out of the hypnosis of the light and dived. The water at past this midpoint of the pool was at the man's chin; and then suddenly, higher. The man floundered and the water washed. For a yard it may be, he was out of sight and there was nothing to be seen by whatever was watching but an arm and hand and the old lamp with its bright white globe and the dancing crazy creatures. Then black hair floated wide on the water. Down there underneath he was thrusting strongly into the ooze with his feet and he got his

head up and grabbed a breath. After that he rose steadily towards the other side and the water ran from him and from his hair and his wheels; but not from the lamp. Now he stood; and though the air was hot and the water steamed he began to shudder, shudder deeply, convulsively, so that he had to hold the lamp with both hands to keep it upright and from falling in the mud. As if this shuddering was some kind of sign, thirty yards away across the water, a huge lizard turned and loitered off into the darkness. The man shuddered less and less. When he was no more than trembling he picked his way round the pool and back to the car. (75-76)

"An even darker darkness, a more secret secrecy" of the bog is none other than the Godhead where Matty finds God, because the Godhead conceived by Eckhart is where the soul is killed to the selfish desire, but it is alive to God.²⁰ The light of his lamp, which is free from water and not extinguished in the darkness, is a counterpart of the "light" referred to by Eckhart: "The light shines in the darkness and there man becomes aware of it....It is when people are in the dark, or suffering, that they are to see the light."21 The crucial difference between Barclay's vision in Rome and Matty's revelation in the bog lies in their mental attitude toward God. In Barclay's case, God is always over or above him and he is unconsciously controlled from outside by Him, whereas Matty consciously goes down to his deepest part of the self and in the soul's "darker darkness," in the Godhead meets God or internalizes Him. Similarly, Sammy Mountjoy's experience when let out from the dark closet is filled with spiritual light, because in the "darker darkness" of the closet where he is confined by Halde a Nazi psychologist simply by way of mental torture, he is in effect offered a rare chance to make close self-examination into darkness,

which Halde's psychology cannot possibly explain or elucidate. In terms of music, songs, and the accompanying tears, Barclay's experience may resemble Sammy's,²² but their spiritual achievements are profoundly different due to the lack of Barclay's earnest quest for his soul.

Bernard F. Dick aptly points out the spurious nature of Barclay's quasi-religious vision. In his opinion, this scene is a parody of Dante's *Paradiso* (canto 1), where there is a stairway to heaven with the music of the spheres. Instead, "Barclay hears the sound of guitars, characteristic music of the 1960s, which he abominates. The new elect are not saints but flower children; the sexual differences that made it possible for Barclay to enjoy women have been blurred into androgyny. Heaven has become hell, the ultimate penance because it is the ultimate inversion."²³

In short, Barclay is eternally doomed to the hellish superego. Jacques Lacan assumes the father's dual role: one is the superego, the other the ego-ideal (idéal du moi).24 The superego has "senseless blind character, of pure imperativeness and simple tyranny," and "an obscene, ferocious Figure" which imposes "a senseless, destructive, purely oppressive, almost always anti-legal morality"25 on the neurotic subject, whereas the ego-ideal "exerts a conscious pressure towards sublimation and provides the coordinates which enable the subject to take up a sexual position as a man or woman."26 The ego-ideal is "an internalised plan of the law, the guide governing the subject's position in the symbolic order."²⁷ Thus S. J. Boyd's argument that for Barclay "sexuality, homosexuality and sexual misdemeanours are of no importance" clearly indicates the influence of the superego upon Barclay, not of the ego-ideal. On the other hand, by virtue of the ego-ideal Sammy Mountjoy and Matthew Windrove realise the internalization of the law in consciously sublimating the "darker darkness" of their soul. The formation of Kristeva's "thetic" depends upon whether one's bias is for the superego or for the ego-ideal. It is the superego that leads to the sclerosis of the thetic, which causes the semiotic to increase its destructive power, break down the thetic and the symbolic order. This sclerosis of the thetic and the resulting destructive force of the semiotic are expressed in a most suitable metaphor; the carapace and the red hot worms under it. To get rid of these worms and maintain the symbolic, the outside force of the law originating in the superego tries to bore a hole in the carapace. Thus the carapace is condemned to destruction both from within and from without. In this sense, the superego in tandem with the semiotic destroys the symbolic or the law which it has ever enforced. The superego is thus "at one and the same time the law and its destruction."28 If Barclay feels a kind of spiritual satisfaction when a doctor gets the worms out of him through the chinks she bores in his carapace, this satisfaction is impure, masochistic and obscene. By the same token, if he feels reconciled with his Maker when Tucker shoots him with a gun,29 this peace of mind is the same as he has felt during the extermination of worms, both pains being attributed to the breaking down of his carapace. According to Eckhart, so long as the shells of the soul and God remain unremoved, the soul cannot meet God. As for "God's shells," Eckhart says, "If there were nothing between God and the soul, the soul would see God at once, for God uses no media nor will he suffer any intervention. If all the shells were removed from the soul and all God's shells could be taken off too, he could give himself directly to the soul without reserve."30 Since Barclay's God is the Other within him, God's shell is actually Barclay's. But this is not to say that Barclay's carapace must be shattered by some outer forces. If he is to remove his exoskeleton, he cannot choose but transform himself into an "endoskeletal animal" with internalized law.

NOTES

- 1 Anika Lemaire, Jacques Lacan, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) 15.
- 2 Julia Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) 25-30.
- 3 Revolution in Poetic Language 72-83.
- 4 Julia Briggs, "The Paper Men," *Critical Essays on William Golding*, ed. James R. Baker (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988) 168.
- 5 William Golding, *The Paper Men* (London: Faber, 1984) 116. All further citations and references are indicated parenthetically in the text.
- 6 Lemaire 232.
- 7 Bruce Fink, A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999) 142.
- 8 Fink 124.
- 9 Fink 129.
- 10 Fink 129.
- 11 William Golding, *Darkness Visible* (1979; rep. London: Faber, 1983) 73-76.
- 12 Jeanne Delbaere, "Describing the Indescribable: The 'Things of God' in Golding's Fiction," Sense and Transcendence: Essays in Honour of Herman Servotte, ed. Ortwin de Graef (Louvain: Leuven UP, 1995) 138. Julia Briggs refers to the same effect: "He returns from his voyage of discovery having been forced to acknowledge the existence of God, yet the God he finds is formed in his own image, encased in a rigid structure, its eyes burning; it shares his intolerance and regards him as its chosen comic victim." See Julia Briggs, "The

- Paper Men" 160.
- 13 Irène Simon, "Vision or Dream? The Supernatural Design in William Golding's The Paper Men," Elizabethan and Modern Studies: Presented to Professor William Schrickx on the Occasion of His Retirement, ed. J. P. Vander Motten (Ghent: R. U. G., 1985) 239-40.
- 14 As for the superego, see Sigmund Freud, "Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays," *The Origins of Religion*, trans. James Strachey (1985; rep. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 364-386. See also Freud, "Totem and Taboo," *The Origins of Religion* 217-24.
- 15 "Moses and Monotheism" 333.
- 16 Julia Briggs 172.
- 17 S. J. Boyd, *The Novels of William Golding* (Sussex: Harvester, 1988) 198.
- 18 Delbaere 139.
- 19 Delbaere 139.
- 20 Raymond Bernard Blakney, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 200-01.
- 21 Meister Eckhart 17.
- See William Golding, *Free Fall* (1959; rep. London: Faber, 1974) 186-87. When Sammy is let out of the darkness he sees epiphanic vision: "I walked between the huts....Huge tears were dropping from my face into dust; and this dust was a universe of brilliant and fantastic crystals, that miracles instantly supported in their being. I looked up beyond the huts and the wire, I raised my dead eyes, desiring nothing, accepting all things and giving all created things away. The paper wrappings of use and language dropped from me. Those crowded shapes extending up into the air and down into the rich earth, those deeds of far space and deep earth were aflame at the

surface and daunting by right of their own natures though a day before I should have disguised them as trees. Beyond them the mountains were not only clear all through like purple glass, but living. They sang and were conjubilant. They were not all that sang. Everything is related to everything else and all relationship is either discord or harmony. The power of gravity, dimension and space, the movement of the earth and sun and unseen stars, these made what might be called music and I heard it."

- 23 Bernard F. Dick, William Golding (Boston: Twayne, 1987) 142.
- 24 Dylan Evans, An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1996) 52.
- 25 Evans 200-01.
- 26 Evans 52.
- 27 Evans 52.
- 28 Evans 200.
- 29 Irène Simon 245-46.
- 30 Meister Eckhart 166.