

God and Escalation of Guilt in the Novels of William Golding

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William Golding is often regarded as a fabulist who looks hard at human evils and treats them allegorically.¹ The evils depicted by Golding seem to come from the darkness in the depths of our soul, and therefore from the original sin, so his fiction is often considered from Christian points of view.² Apart from the propriety of this method, the realities of evil show even more complicated phases. Golding often describes God as a cruel God or, you might say, the Devil in the mask of God. Golding's heroes' own evil is evoked and magnified by this facet of God. The law of God is often laid down by those whose diabolical cruelty is disguised as divine authority. Therefore, God's law can easily be mixed up with the Devil's.

Psychologically, this confusion dates back to the infantile experience in which the child is forced to be obedient to the father's most brutal injunction, as if to the divine law. The child is either blindly obedient, or stubbornly recalcitrant to the father's brutality.³ Golding's heroes, like this child, assume contradictory attitudes toward the cruelty of God or the Devil, who makes them more

¹ See, for example, John Peter, "The Fables of William Golding," *William Golding : Novels, 1954-67*, ed. Norman Page (Basingstoke and London : Macmillan, 1985) 33-45.

² See, for example, Paul Elmen, *William Golding : Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan : William B. Eerdmans, 1967) 11-20.

³ See Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XVII*, trans. James Strachey (London : Hogarth Press, 1981) 81-108.

and more sinful and punishes them afterwards. They prostrate themselves before God, or radically rebel against Him. Actually, a cruel God or the Devil is none other than the reflection of that part of their own evil. However, they cannot understand this symbolic relationship. The demarcation between symbol and reality, a reflected image and a real image is quite ambiguous in their minds. The incipience of symbolic order is, according to Jacques Lacan, bred by the father who interposes himself between the mother and the child, and frustrates the child's desire for the mother. The child is thus led to approve the father's symbolic function, which forms the basis of the symbolic order of language, social code, and even the law of God.⁴ If, therefore, the father were too relentless for the child to approve heartily (in such a case, as aforesaid, the child is either subservient or resistant), this child would not accept the father's symbolic function nor the whole field of symbolic order. Golding's protagonists more or less reflect this infantile temperament. They will not take symbol as such but as reality before their eyes. They cannot keep some distance from their mental picture or, in other words, they are trapped in illusion, delusion, or hallucination. They cannot enter the real world but stay in the imaginary. When such protagonists confuse the symbolic with the real, their behaviour puts on an insane character, capable of enormity.

In this essay, I will consider the process of escalating guilt when some representative protagonists fall into symbolic confusion.

⁴ This is what Jacques Lacan calls "*le stade de l'Édipe*" ("the Oedipus phase"), in the course of which "the child gains access to the Law... by symbolizing the paternal reality, by acceding, that is, to the 'paternal metaphor.'" See Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) 85.

I

When the boys in *Lord of the Flies* kill a sow to provide food, a patch of darkness takes possession of them. It starts to spread, until it looms large in the shape of imaginary beasts from the sea, from the mountain, and from the air. The boys, frightened at the existence of the beasts, try to liquidate them. This uncanny existence is actually hidden in the depths of the boys' minds. But they cannot fully realize the symbolic relationship between the beast and their inner darkness. For them, the beast is always a real beast—no more, no less. They keep trying to get rid of the symbol of their own bestiality. But symbol or the symbolic (signifier), if repressed or excluded, will form a signifying chain, one symbol replacing another eternally. Psychologically speaking, the repressed or excluded symbols become the subconscious current of metonymical concatenation, obstinately asserting their existence.⁵ The killing of the pig is replaced by that of Simon (mistaken for the beast), which is further replaced by the murder of Piggy, and almost of Ralph. Here we must keep in mind, that a patch of darkness spreads more and more widely on account of the cruel law and punishment of the Lord of the Flies (Beelzebub, the Devil). In other words, the boys' latent cruelty is extracted and magnified by this Devil. Among these boys, only Simon can stare fixedly at the Lord of the Flies as a symbol of his

⁵ As for the "signifying chain" and "metonymy," see Jerry Aline Flieger, "Purloined Punchline: Joke as Textual Paradigm," *Lacan and Narration: The Psychoanalytic Difference in Narrative Theory*, ed. Robert Con Davis (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 951, where he says, "metonymy, as the linking of one word to another, is associated with the excessive chain of desire which acts like the motor of language, driving the signifying chain forward into meaningful combinations."

own evil. The climax of this confrontation scene is as follows:

“You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you? Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are?” The laughter shivered again. “Come now,” said the Lord of the Flies. “Get back to the others and we’ll forget the whole thing.” Simon’s head wobbled. His eyes were half-closed as though he were imitating the obscene thing on the stick. He knew that one of his times was coming on. The Lord of the Flies was expanding like a balloon. “This is ridiculous. You know perfectly well you’ll only meet me down there—so don’t try to escape!” Simon’s body was arched and stiff. The Lord of the Flies spoke in the voice of a schoolmaster.⁶

This prophecy comes true. Simon is brutally murdered by the boys who have been haunted by the Lord of the Flies. Beelzebub’s voice leaves an impression that this Devil has the same charismatic dignity as the father’s or God’s.

II

From the fragmentary flashbacks showing his past, Christopher Martin in *Pincher Martin* is an extraordinarily sinful man. He cuckolds his coactor Alfred, and trips up the producer Peter on a motorcycle, intending to kill him. Moreover, Martin has a pathologically strong sexual desire for Mary Lovell, who has been engaged to Nathaniel Walterson, a Christian and Martin’s

⁶ William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973) 158.

colleague in the Royal Navy. Attempting to hurl Nathaniel overboard out of pure jealousy, Martin himself falls by an inopportune torpedo attack. He is instantly drowned without any time to kick off his seaboots. However, Martin's enormity reveals itself only in the stream of consciousness *after* this death sentence has been executed. It might safely be said that this strict punishment functions not as retributive justice but as an occasion to escalate Martin's guilty conscience, or even the very guilt. In his hallucination after physical death, he curses God and defiles everything relevant to Him until he is utterly perished. He is even more sinful after his death. He regards this punishment as God's, but, in fact, it is the cruel and sadistic kind which Martin would exercise over others if he could ever become God. See, for example, the first mental picture which crosses his mind when he begins drowning :

The jam jar was standing on a table, brightly lit from O. P. It might have been a huge jar in the centre of a stage or a small one almost touching the face, but it was interesting because one could see into a little world there which was quite separate but which one could control. The jar was nearly full of clear water and a tiny glass figure floated upright in it. The top of the jar was covered with a thin membrane—white rubber. He watched the jar without moving or thinking while his distant body stilled itself and relaxed. The pleasure of the jar lay in the fact that the little glass figure was so delicately balanced between opposing forces. Lay a finger on the membrane and you would compress the air below it which in turn would press more strongly on the water. Then the water would force itself farther up the little tube in the figure, and it would begin to sink. By varying the pressure on the membrane you could do anything you liked with the glass figure which was

wholly in your power. You could mutter, —sink now! And down it would go, down, down; you could steady it and relent. You could let it struggle towards the surface, give it almost a bit of air then send it steadily, slowly, remorselessly down and down.⁷

Here, the controlling hand is, of course, God's, and the glass figure Christopher Martin. But this image could come from Martin's own experiment in science, probably in his school days. Therefore, in his imagination, God's hand might overlap with Martin's, the glass figure with his victim. What, then, makes Martin regard this mean, sadistic commandment as God's? As mentioned before, this mental state originates in the psychology of the infant who has received the father's relentless punishment under the authority of God. Although we are told that Nathaniel believes in God and has strange power to commune with Him, we have an impression that he gives himself airs under the shelter of God's influence.⁸

Christopher Martin is alienated from the union of Nathaniel and Mary, as if he were their son. And his drowning is the father's (Nathaniel's or God's) punishment, which is intended to separate his son (Martin) from the mother (Mary). This separation is a symbolic castration. But, in Martin's mind, the castration is not symbolic but real. In his hallucination, a lobster attacks his phallus with its pair of claws, pursuing Martin wherever he goes. Martin wards off all these symbolic attacks one by one, but the symbolic will keep asserting

⁷ Golding, *Pincher Martin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) 8-9. All further citations and references are indicated parenthetically in the text.

⁸ See Frank Kermode, "Golding's Intellectual Economy," *William Golding: Novels, 1954-67* 62.

their existence in the form of an eternal signifying chain in his subconscious.⁹ The lobster is replaced by a series of other sea animals which attack him—barnacles, sea-gulls, sea anemones, and so on. These sea animals are in turn replaced by natural menaces—a thunderstorm, lightning, a hurricane, etc. To crown it all, God suddenly appears and calls upon him to surrender. But a series of these revengeful persecutors reflect Martin's inner cruelty, as well as Nathaniel's. The father's (Nathaniel's) cruelty corresponds with his son's (Martin's). The son revolts against his father with equal atrocity. Therefore, God's cruelty is none other than Martin's. God, abruptly confronting Martin, wears seaboots. Since Martin has rejected the whole field of symbolic order, he is unable to see his own figure reflected in God. Similarly, he hardly understands that the vindictive lobster is his hand. He falls into a state in which he cannot identify his reflected image in the mirror. He doesn't even reach what Jacques Lacan refers as "the mirror stage" ("*le stade du miroir*"),¹⁰ where infants at the age of six to eighteen months can identify their images reflected in the mirror. This stage therefore gives infants an opportunity to have a relation to the outer world, as well as to themselves. As Lacan observes, "this moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates...the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations."¹¹ "The mirror stage" is therefore a turning point at which the infants step into the world of

⁹ As for such an eternal signifying chain in the subconscious, see Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre III : Les Psychoses* (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 97, where he says, "Alors, nous refoulons, de nos actes, de nos discours, de notre comportement. Mais la chaîne n'en continue pas moins à courir dans les dessous, à exprimer ses exigences, à faire valoir sa créance, et ce, par l'intermédiaire du symptôme névrotique."

¹⁰ See Lacan, *Écrits : A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 1-7. See also Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966) 93-100.

¹¹ See *Écrits : A Selection* 5; *Écrits* 98.

symbolic order and law.¹² Martin, it seems to me, has regressed to a stage even before this “mirror stage,” i. e., to the imaginary, the essence of which Lacan defines as “a dual relationship, a reduplication in the mirror, an immediate opposition between consciousness and its other in which each term becomes its opposite and is lost in the play of the reflections.”¹³ When he tries to identify his own image on the surface of water, Martin’s self and its other are both ruined “in the play of the reflections.” Martin’s monologue “How can I have a complete identity without a mirror?” (132) is followed by this passage:

He climbed down to the water-hole and peered into the pool. But his reflection was inscrutable. . . . He leaned over the pool, looked through the displayed works of the fish and saw blue sky far down. But no matter how he turned his head he could see nothing but a patch of darkness with the wild outline of hair round the edge. . . .

He turned back to inquire of his full face but his breathing ruffled the water. He puffed down and *the dark head wavered and burst.* (133-134 ; italics mine)

We can find many proofs of Martin’s identity crisis in this novel, and among them the following is the best example:

¹² Lacan observes: “This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.” See *Écrits : A Selection 2*; *Écrits* 94.

¹³ See Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan* 60.

Christopher and Hadley and Martin were separate fragments and the centre was smouldering with a dull resentment that they should have broken away and not be sealed on the centre. (161)

Thus, the "separate fragments" of Martin's identity can never be put together again. His mirror is not only the surface of the pool of water, but also a dwarf, which he has built out of rocks, weed, and a chocolate paper. He always confirms his identity by speaking to it. However, just as his image wavers and bursts on the surface of water, so does the dwarf easily collapse and turn into scattered stones in the end (192). Martin's symptom has something to do with what Jacques Lacan calls the "fragmented body" ("*corps morcele*"),¹⁴ which is the hallucination of the infants who fail to identify their own images on the mirror by clinging to the foetal condition previous to the mirror stage. According to Lacan, before "the mirror stage," the infant cannot experience its body as a unified whole, but as something dispersed.¹⁵ "The mirror stage," however, turns this dispersion into the unity of the proper body.¹⁶ Martin, completely bound by the foetal condition, i. e., the imaginary, cannot so much as arrive at "the mirror stage," the first step toward the symbolic world. Such confinement in the imaginary is caused by his inability to symbolize his self, his evils. The impossibility of symbolization is attributable to the extreme cruelty of law which punishes him. This law may appear to be God's, but, in fact, it is his own

¹⁴ See *Écrits : A Selection* 4; *Écrits* 97.

¹⁵ See Joël Dor, *Introduction à la Lecture de Lacan* (Paris: Denoël, 1985) 99, where he says, "De fait, avant le stade du miroir, l'enfant ne fait pas initialement l'expérience de son corps comme celle d'une totalité unifiée, mais comme quelque chose de dispersé."

¹⁶ Joël Dor 99-100.

cruelty reflected. The evil of self and its other eternally reflect one another, the identity of both lost "in the play of the reflections." Consequently, self is engulfed in the abyss of an indefinite product of evils.

III

It is *The Paper Men* which vividly describes the escalation of evils by the eternal reflection of self and other. Like Christopher Martin in *Pincher Martin*, Wilfred Barclay excludes the symbolic (signifier) one after another. The signifier is others' law which binds him. This others' law belongs to Rick Tucker, bogus professor, who tries to pry into the scandals of Barclay's private life, and to Halliday and his group who furnish funds for Tucker. Originally, Barclay's private life has some secrets which he positively refuses to expose to others. They are evils inherent in his soul. On the other hand, the law which Tucker exerts upon Barclay's evil is tricky and spiteful. This law, if rejected, changes its shape and pursues Barclay wherever he goes. The pursuit begins when Tucker casually asks for Barclay's signature on the menu at the restaurant. Then, Tucker's wife pursues Barclay, demanding his signature by using her sexual charm. In order to exact the signature, Tucker goes so far as to gain Barclay's gratitude by plausibly rescuing him from fall to the ground, which Barclay believes to be far below on account of a dense fog, but in fact only a few feet from the handrail purposely broken by Tucker. The sordid law, thus pursuing Barclay, gradually incites his intrinsic evils. He plays with Tucker's imploration, making him so servile as to yap like a puppy.

After no end of sporting with Tucker, Barclay flatly refuses him the signature, declaring, "You're not going to write that particular biography. I'm going to write it myself—"¹⁷ But the law still runs after Barclay, and gives him the *coup de grâce*. He is shot by demented Tucker. Thus, the evil of self and

other indefinitely reflect one another, escalating each other's evil, until both of them are lost "in the play of the reflections." Barclay and Tucker destroy each other, the one physically and the other mentally. This destructive reflection of self and its other is also witnessed in a scene, where God bullies Barclay when he enters the north transept of a cathedral and faces a statue of Christ :

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)

Later, however, it turns out that this statue of Christ is none other than Barclay's reflected image. The relationship between Barclay and Christ's statue is the same as that between Christopher Martin and God in seaboots. In Barclay's case, as well as in Martin's, the cruel God is nothing but the reflected image of his own evils. Barclay is finally crushed by his inherent cruelty.

IV

The destructive reflection mentioned above assumes its most serious aspect in the case of a clergyman. As discussed before, God's law contains the cruelest nature extracted from the process of indefinite reflection of self's and its other's evils. Self's evil, its other's evil, and that of God's (the Devil's) law escalate one another to the point of persecution. The evils inherent in Dean Jocelin in *The Spire* interact with those of Roger, master builder who is in charge of building

¹⁷ Golding, *The Paper Men* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) 182. All further citations and references are indicated parenthetically in the text.

the spire. We should notice in this story that the meanest element produced by this interaction actually becomes God's injunction that the spire be erected. For this spire is the "phallus," a symbol of Jocelin's insatiable lust for his faithful servant's wife Goody Pangall, with whom Roger commits adultery. The Devil's law is disguised as God's. Erection of the spire has therefore symbolic relationship with Jocelin's fulfillment of lust. But he cannot or will not understand this relationship, although he vaguely feels it:

The model was like a man lying on his back. . . . And now also, springing, projecting, bursting, erupting from the heart of the building, there was its crown and majesty, the new spire.¹⁸

If he clearly realized this symbolic relationship, he wouldn't take the erection of the spire for God's injunction. In Jocelin's mind, the spire is no longer a symbol but the very spire of the church, on which his clerical life wholly depends. Temporarily, however, the spire merging into "phallus" flits through his consciousness. See, for example, Jocelin's reaction when he happens to witness the scene where Roger is making illicit love to Goody:

It was so terrible that it went beyond feeling, and left him inspecting it with a kind of stark detachment, while the edge of the spire burned into his cheek. (64)

This "spire" is a miniature Jocelin carries about in his hands, and he imagines its point to be burning whenever swayed by carnal desire for Goody. Jocelin's

¹⁸ Golding, *The Spire* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) 8. All further citations and references are indicated parenthetically in the text.

guilt indefinitely reverberates Roger's. Roger is Jocelin's reflected image. As the spire is erected in the midst of their lusts, so does God or the Devil exist in the midst of their evils. Jocelin is destined to be agonized by the anxiety that he might serve the Devil instead of God. It is his ecclesiastical profession that prevents Jocelin from realizing the spire-phallus relationship. The more he refuses this symbolization, the more his guilt increases. If Jocelin were to be saved, he would have to look hard at his guilt and struggle desperately against the Devil's law. When Golding's hero is a clergyman, he usually lives the hardest life. For if he takes the Devil's law as God's, his calling will require his unconditional obedience to the Devil. He suffers, so to speak, the double bind.

In Golding's fiction, the essence of God is but one remove from that of the Devil. They sometimes mingle with each other.¹⁹ In *Darkness Visible*, Matthew Windrove is agonized by a cruel image of God in the Old Testament. This God seems to be interpreted by the author as the closest possible to the Devil. On the contrary, the two spirits, who have led Matthew Windrove to throw the Old Testament away into the sea, may seem, to all appearances, to be the Devil's agents, but finally turn out to be God's. In *Pincher Martin*, Nathaniel's harsh prediction "... because in only a few years you will be dead" might possibly be the Devil's coldhearted condemnation. Probably, Christopher Martin's desperate struggle is not against God but against his inner Devil. At any rate, the positioning of God involves very complicated problems in Golding's fiction.

¹⁹ See, for example, S. J. Boyd, *The Novels of William Golding* (Sussex: Harvester, 1988) 191-95; Don Crompton, *A View from the Spire: William Golding's Later Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 160-61.