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Golding's Free Fall, the Spire and the Pyramid : A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

William 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. Free Fall is a study of human disintegration. It contains an endless amount of contradictions, oppositions and possibilities.The Spire is a study of dynamic human willfulness to a climax. Its medieval setting makes the recourse to imagery of angel and devil in conflict. The Pyramid is a combination of three realistic episodes with the presentation of a cosmic thing resulting in confrontation of two ideologies of mythic and rational.

KEYWORDS: Human disintegration, symbolism, myth, cosmic

William Golding has meticulously and ingeniously put his novels together and has loaded them with meaning. Golding likes his novels to be regarded as myths, and one of the consequences of this intended mythical quality of his novels is that every event and character has been deliberately selected to carry a certain meaning. 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. A critical study of Free Fall, The Spire and The Pyramid affirms the point.

FREE FALL (1959)

Free Fall is a study of human disintegration. This novel is a highly sophisticated enquiry of Samuel Mountjoy, the protagonist, who confers meaning on his existence; interprets his past and assimilates the events of his life into patterns of significance. He is ironically matched with Dante in pursuit of a Beatrice whom he destroys.

The tale is told in Sammy's own words as he seeks in middle life to track down his fall from grace. In the process, he recalls with clarity the traumatic events of his childhood, adolescence and youthful maturity. He is adopted by a neurotic parson after the death of his mother. Then he goes to school and joins Communist Party. He seduces the religious and passive Beatrice for whom he jilts after falling in love with and marrying Taffy, a party comrade. He is captured by Germans during the war and is interrogated by the sinister Doctor Halde about a possible prisoner escape from the POW camp. On his refusal to talk, he is locked in a broom-chest. He comments that his confinement in the closet was a mistake. After the war, he returns home and finds Beatrice in an asylum for her mental breakdown. She is insane, paying price not only of Sammy's deficiency in 'vital morality', but also the defective education that moulded him.

Human love has become a matter of uncertainty. Golding handles the love episode of Sammy and Beatrice carefully. It is interesting because of its unique fusion of the two strains, religious and rational, each trying to outdo the other yet never being able to do so.

A critical analysis of *Free Fall* explores the point that the novel contains an endless amount of contradictions, oppositions and possibilities. The miscellaneous human beings of this age will not have any difficulty of identification with a protagonist like Sammy Mountjoy with his follies and fine points. "Sammy's failure is then compounded: he has not only failed to find the bridge between matter and spirit, but he cannot make the vital connection between past and future which seems to form the essence of his autobiographical quest for identity." (O' Donnel, Patrick, 1980)

"In Free Fall, Sammy Mountjoy asserts that art is discovery; so it was in Pincher Martin…. Sammy Mountjoy confronts many problems. He is preoccupied with the loss of his freedom. He also struggles and fails to find a 'bridge' joining the material world- explained and ordered by reason- to the miraculous world of mystical vision first revealed to him in the prison camp- apprehended by some means beyond logical understanding." (Peter, David, 1982)

THE SPIRE (1964)

The Spire is a study of the dynamic human willfulness to a climax with the story of Jocelin, Dean of Cathedral. The spire of the title is the spire of Salisbury Cathedral and the principal action is the building of the spire. Even without sufficient foundation, this spire stands for a long period of time. It is said to be 'built on faith'. Such a spire is a symbol of compelling potentialities; it reaches towards heaven; it is made by man in praise of God.

Joceline, Dean of Barchester Cathedral, believes himself chosen by God to build a spire against the judgement of both clergy and builders. The focus of the novel is not either on character or on action, but on symbolic form given to moral meaning. Jocelin dominates the novel, not as a character, but as a growing moral awareness. *The Spire* is a novel about vision; vision that motivates Jocelin in his obsessive drive towards his goal and the goal itself is a symbol in stone of man's capacity for making visions actual

Dean Jocelin has limitations with the element of sexuality in him alongwith pseudo faith which guides him. His weakness for Goody Pangall is discovered in course of the novel. He believes in achieving his visionary task even if it is not through fair means. His truths of spirit can be compared with the truths of reason of Roger Mason whose reason asks him not to build so high a spire on so weak a foundation. The innocent Pangall is another character who is killed like Simon in *Lord of the Flies*. In the panic of seeing the foundations move, the army of workers use Pangall as their scapegoat and this ritual murder of Pangall is used in strengthening the weak foundations. Jocelin's use of Aunt Alison's money earned by whoring, for building the spire raises the question "whether bad money can ever be put to good use and that too by a man who owes his position to devious and corrupt practices".(Crompton, D.W., 1967) As a dean, his intentions are not that holy as he professes it to be.

The medieval setting of *The Spire* makes the recourse to imagery of angel and devil in conflict for Jocelin's soul appropriate and effective. The symbolism and the careful analysis of Jocelin's spiritual condition are rooted in a living Christian tradition.

THE PYRAMID (1967)

The Pyramid with its picture of boyhood in pre-war England has a more personal flavour. It is a combination of three realistic episodes.

In the first episode, the failure of love is presented. It is seen both as a class-conflict and as a confrontation of two ideals – mythic and modern. The love of Oliver, the dispenser's son for Evie, the daughter of the town carrier is not permissible because of the existence of a social pyramid in Stilbourne society. The very name Stilbourne suggests no liberalism in

social structure. The love affairs fail to attain the mutual reciprocation and becomes one-sided. Evie becomes a victim of nasty possessiveness and perversions. But Oliver's responsibility in the matter is no less. He wants the body of Evie, not her. This raises disgust and contempt of Evie for Oliver. Here the archetypal motif of a woman's desire to be a mother seems to haunt the mind of Evie despite her looseness. Oliver's father, a representative of the upper class society which is the custodian of conservative social traditions, as a rule, does not approve of his son's relation with Evie, a lower class girl. The clash of attitude between the upper and lower classes of Stilbourne finds reflections in the characters of younger generations. In spite of some attempts of mutual accommodation of attitudes, there is a clash of interest. Thus all efforts to make some music out of the relationship between the young lovers end in a total failure.

The second episode of the novel also depicts the story of a modern society. Here art instead of being a meeting point becomes a source of mutual hatred. It concerns the visit of a theatrical party to Stilbourne and Oliver's participation in it under pressure from his mother. Here Golding shows how art requires people committed to art only. Otherwise the purpose of art to bring about some sort of harmony is thereby vitiated. The sterilities of Stilbourne and the wrong attitude of its people to art and life compel Oliver to break the barriers of class bound society. But it lasts for a short while as he fails, once again, to transcend the sterilities of Stilbourne and catch up the music and harmony of art.

The third episode repeats the same theme while projecting the fact that music occupies a secondary place while subjects like Physics and Chemistry are more remunerative and exalted in status. The confrontation of Henry, the mechanic and Bounce, the music teacher, on the issue of mechanical noise from the garage, is a conflict involving principles such as harmony of myth and music on one hand and chaos of the age of science and technology on the other. Oliver's career in music comes to an end as he is to pursue more remunerative careers. Oliver who wants to have some touch of music alongwith Physics and Chemistry has to withdraw because of the disapproving remarks from his Physics and Chemistry teachers about necessity of music in this world. As a contrast, the age of science has little impact on music in professionals like Miss Dawlish. Apart from the teacher-taught relationship, this episode of the novel too projects the love-hate relationship of Bounce and Henry in the Stilbourne society which again ends in frustration. Oliver is a character born not to love. "He cannot break out of himself decisively in any of the three personal relationships which he depicts for us, even though he becomes conscious of his failure at last".(Babb, H.S, 1970)

The failure of Oliver in the three personal relationships, in the scheme of Golding is presented as a cosmic thing, a result of the confrontation of two ideologies – one mythic and the other rational, each failing to comprehend the other.

CONCLUSION:

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 and imagery serve the archetypal elements of his novels.

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