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## Pincher Martin': Symbolism Serving Fable.

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PINCHER MARTIN: SYMBOLISM SERVING FABLE

A Doctoral Essay

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Arts

of

Dianne Runion

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Pincher Martin: Symbolism Serving Fable

In his third published novel, Pincher Martin,<sup>1</sup> Golding delivers a lean, deceptively simple plot.<sup>2</sup> However, in the two decades since the novel's publication, critical disagreement has raged. John Peter believes that Martin died in the beginning of the novel and continues a kind of purgatorial existence.<sup>3</sup> Virginia Tiger thinks that the novel relates the hallucinations of a dead man.<sup>4</sup> Margaret Walters sees Martin's fight as resourceful and courageous,<sup>5</sup> and James Baker finds him to be a personification of pride and greed.<sup>6</sup> Golding himself describes his vision as that of a Greek tragedian,<sup>7</sup> but Baker finds the perspective essentially Christian.<sup>8</sup> Most critics have praised the novel, but some, most notably Kenneth Rexroth, see Golding as no more than a gimmicky iconoclast, attacking traditional survival classics like Swiss Family Robinson and Robinson Crusoe.<sup>9</sup> Critical agreement has centered upon only one point: Pincher Martin is a fable.

However, I find myself echoing Philippa Moody's response: "Yes, but what do you mean?"<sup>10</sup> I believe that the novel merits a fresh look--one that defines

fable, elucidates fable's central characteristic, and demonstrates how the symbolism of the novel supports its central concern.

Moody cites the fabular characteristics of microcosm and didacticism.<sup>11</sup> Robert Scholes adds that fabulation delights in formal and verbal dexterity<sup>12</sup> and that fables often have epic vision and mythic perspective.<sup>13</sup> But Peter considers anteriority of purpose the foremost characteristic of fable: the fabulists have "an initial thesis or contention which they are apparently concerned to embody and express in concrete terms."<sup>14</sup> Golding suggests his own anterior purpose:

Before the second world war I believed in the perfectibility of social man; that a correct structure of society would produce good will; and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganization of society. It is possible that today I believe something of the same again; but after the war I did not because I was unable to. . . I believed then, that man was sick--not exceptional man, but average man. I believed that the condition of man was to be a morally diseased creation and that the best job I could do at the time was to trace the connection between his diseased nature and the international mess he gets himself into.<sup>15</sup>

Golding sees himself as a fabulist, "a moralist desiring to inculcate a moral lesson."<sup>16</sup> If its moral lesson is the most important characteristic of fable, the phenomena in the fable should reinforce and

strengthen that didacticism. Carefully examined, the symbolism pervading Pincher Martin absolutely shapes the novel's moral lesson. When viewed as structural underpinning for the moral lesson, symbolism then offers primary clues of how to read the fable in terms of other controversial issues.

The lesson of Golding's first novel, Lord of the Flies, clearly shows that even prepubescent man is fallen. His second, The Inheritors, shows that prehistoric man was also fallen. But Pincher Martin seems to say more. Tiger claims that Golding means to demonstrate "contemporary man's inability to achieve any kind of spiritual vision," vision which constitutes a "preliminary step to salvation."<sup>17</sup> In a 1958 interview for the Radio Times, Golding described that lack of vision as it applies to Martin:

Christopher Hadley Martin had no belief in anything but the importance of his own life; no love, no God. Because he was created in the image of God he had a freedom of choice which he used to centre the world on himself. The greed for life which had been the mainspring of his nature, forced him to refuse the selfless act of dying. He continued to exist in a world composed of his own murderous nature. His drowned body lies rolling in the Atlantic but the ravenous ego invents a rock for him to endure on. It is the memory of an aching tooth. Ostensibly and rationally he is a survivor from a torpedoed destroyer; but deep down he knows the truth. He is not fighting for bodily survival but for his continuing identity



in the face of what will smash it away--  
 the black lightning, the compassion of  
 God. For Christopher, the Christ-bearer,  
 has become Pincher Martin who is little  
 but greed. Just to be Pincher is  
 purgatory, to be Pincher for eternity  
 is hell.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the textual evidence which Golding elucidates in the interview, we can state the moral lesson of Pincher Martin this way: without spiritual vision, morally diseased man will construct a doomed universe out of whatever is central to his own fallen nature. The symbolism inculcates that moral lesson. Symbolism of the drama, of Martin's moral disease and defective vision, of his metamorphosis, of the digestive and urinary tract, of disintegration and breakdown, of death and hell all define what Pincher is, delineate his universe, and detail the inevitable destruction of that universe.

The symbolism of the drama, symbols attendant upon Martin's acting career, dictates much of his mental imagery, speech, and action; furthermore, what Dick calls the theatrical ending smacks of striking the set.<sup>19</sup> As critics have pointed out, the series of pictures and the flashbacks Martin experiences are relevant to a cinema career. If the literal and metaphorical masks Martin describes recall the actor,

the discussion of the mask of greed, which suits him particularly well, suggests that he appropriately assumes his persona as one of the seven deadly sins.

The image of the tiny glass figure in a jar, which Tiger explains is a Cartesian diver, clearly symbolizes Martin's own circumstances, this time placing him in the role of actor and producer.<sup>20</sup> His body floats in a literal sea, and his ego floats at the center of his own universe. Tiger elaborates further symbolic significance of the Cartesian diver: "Man floats between two forces--the pressure of some divine cosmic power and the pressure of the merely selfish."<sup>21</sup> Of course, finally the merely selfish pushes Martin into eternal torment. Martin's description of "a little world. . . which one could control" describes both the function of his ego as the control center and the illusion that a human being can control a world.<sup>22</sup> The description of the glass jar with the figure reminds us of Wallace Steven's lines:

I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.<sup>23</sup>

Martin assumes that he can gather a hostile universe around himself, taming it to serve his own ends, but the pressure of the slovenly wilderness crushes him.

Martin's five acting roles are a part of the

symbols from the drama: a mixture of King Lear and Tom O'Bedlam, Ajax, Atlas, and Prometheus. Martin says at one point, "I must have the lead" (168), and frequently he takes it. Ironically, in his acting career Martin was a bit-part actor, an understudy, and a juvenile actor. He cannot handle the big roles. Critics who identify him with mythic heroes, seeing him as an existential hero, overlook the irony in the comparison which actually reduces Martin.

Martin declaims dramatic lines reminiscent of the stormy heath scene in which Lear rails at the wind and rain. Although he includes similar references to age and white hair, Martin adds his own vain worries about his "eagle profile and wavy hair" (166). Adding such dark, comic inanity renders any suggestion of tragic Lear merely ludicrous in the person of Pincher Martin.

I am indebted to Bernard Dick for pointing out that the Ajax references apply as much or more to the lesser Ajax as to the more familiar Greek hero.<sup>24</sup> The lesser Ajax raped Cassandra, survived shipwreck on his homeward journey from Troy, and swam ashore where he bragged of saving himself in spite of the gods. The boast infuriated Poseidon, who killed him by flinging the rock on which he stood into the sea. The more familiar Ajax went mad with jealousy and killed a flock of sheep, goats, and oxen. Obviously, both stories

contain parallels of Pincher Martin's story: the rape, the shipwreck, the boast, the lack of reverence for the gods, the jealousy, and the slaughter. But as Dick says, Ajax killed a flock of sheep, while Martin breaks "the backs of mussels."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Ajax had some justification for being jealous of Odysseus, who had received Achilles' divine armor which Ajax expected to inherit; Martin plots Nat's murder because he has won the object of Martin's lust, Mary Lovell. But there was never any question of Martin's being worthy of the girl or of Mary's feeling anything but loathing for Martin. At each point of superficial resemblance Martin cannot begin to measure up to either Ajax. Even his death shows a difference in kind. Poseidon annihilates the lesser Ajax while Martin is reduced to his quintessential claws.

Martin also sees himself as the Titans, Atlas and Prometheus, great sibling benefactors of mankind. But the weight of the world which Atlas bears on his shoulders for eternity crushes Martin in spite of his Hollywood scenario: "he gave it [the world] storm music, crash of timpany, brass blare and a dazzle of strings" (171). But the swell of background music cannot compensate for the presence of the whining, railing voice of the "chattering," "crawling," "pulpy" Pincher (127).



Bernard Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub demonstrate the difference between the mythic Prometheus, "selfish only in mankind's interest," and Pincher, who is selfish for himself.<sup>26</sup> In some ways Pincher more closely resembles the vulture tearing at Prometheus' liver for eternity in the way he tears at his own intestines by way of the enema he devises. Martin, grimly playing his Prometheus role, comically confuses his Greek and Norse mythologies, another symbolic pattern which should keep the reader from taking his heroism too seriously:

Hoé, hoé! Thor's lightning challenges me! Flash after flash, rippling spurts of white fire, bolts flung at Prometheus, blinding white, white, white, searing the aim of the sky at the man on the rock-- (167)

Even his final madness--the one escape left him once education and intelligence have failed--is at least initially an assumed role, this time a combination of Lear and Tom O'Bedlam:

. . . he saw that he was not dressed properly for the part. His mouth and he were one.  
"Change your clothes! Be a naked madman on a rock in the middle of a storm!" (171)

Tom with his underlying wisdom and fundamental altruism helps to redeem his father while Martin is only concerned for himself. Thus, in every role he chooses Martin parodies that role and stands diminished by the comparison.



If Martin's roles are all actor's masks, what then is the real man? Much of the symbolism in the novel functions to define his moral disease and lack of vision. Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor tell us that "Golding is essentially concerned with Being, not Becoming,"<sup>27</sup> and Tiger tells us that past, present, and future episodes all reveal the same state of being: "Pincher-dead is Pincher-alive."<sup>28</sup> Pincher, however, does not and cannot see himself as we come to see him. The symbolism of his damaged eye, the mote which he cannot see, prepares us to accept his damaged vision. Jack Biles asserts that Martin could never see himself because that thinking point of awareness "cannot examine itself, because it is working when it tries to examine."<sup>29</sup> Even if he cannot see that center, Martin knows he is what he always has been: "I am what I always was" (68); "I am who I was" (116).

Martin lives in a "globe of darkness" (61) hanging "onto himself in the centre of his globe" (125). Golding frequently calls Martin's eyes windows, traditional symbols for the gateway to knowledge, vision, and understanding. Martin's windows, however, are fogged, "surrounded by inscrutable darkness which extended throughout his body" (74). The universe finally closes around the windows until they appear to be the only visible thing in a darkened room (142). The fogged

vision never clears, for he ultimately faces God through still blurred windows (172), blurred with the imagined guano solution that prefigures so much fecal imagery in the novel.

Martin has several opportunities to look at himself, but he never succeeds in doing so. The echo from the pool initially frightens him, causing him to pull away; but he returns to gaze into the water like Narcissus, except that he can never get a clear picture. Coils of red slime in the water, externalizations of the serpent within, cloud the pool. The pollution probably provides an objective correlative for Martin's psychological state, and, in combination with the white guano, it could be a further polluted representation of the red and white flowers which sprang from Narcissus' body. Martin's self love is putrefying, but he can never see the reality of himself, only those dramatic projections which ironically help to symbolize his real character.

His acquaintances can clearly see the real Christopher Martin and not his symbolic projections. When his producer Pete tries to decide which one of the seven deadly sins Christopher should portray--all of them apply--he introduces Martin to greed as if he were a person in this frequently quoted passage:

Chris-Greed. Greed-Chris. Know each other. . . Let me make you two better acquainted. This painted bastard here takes anything he can lay his hands on. Not food, Chris, that's far too simple. He takes the best part, the best seat, the most money, the best notice, the best woman. He was born with his mouth and his flies open and both hands out to grab. He's a cosmic case of the bugger who gets his penny and someone else's bun (106).

The hyphenated reference to "Chris-Greed" makes it clear that Greed is indeed another name for Christopher Martin. The producer knows that Martin has cuckolded him and hates him for it. Martin has treated a supposed friend similarly, has apparently defiled a young boy, and has raped the virginal, sorrowing Mary, whose divine connotations help to render the rape more horrific.

Multiple symbols reinforce Martin's central characteristic, greed. His is the tenacity of the limpets he uses as pitons for climbing the mountain of rock. Greed lies within him like the "serpent coiled in [his] own body" (99). Martin strikes at Mary in a serpent-like rape, "the very rhythm of the body reinforced by hissed ejaculations--take that and that!" (132). Those people around Martin know the deep truth of what he only identifies as a digestive disturbance: "I am in servitude to a coiled tube. . . the serpent lies coiled in my own body" (144).

He later wrongly assumes "I have defeated the serpent in my own body" (146). This failure to recognize the beast within prevents Martin from seeing any need for God's grace.

Martin's center projects that evil within himself onto the outside world: even the seagulls lack innocence, for they have no "primal innocence of unvisited nature" (50). Knowing that traditional symbolism links seagulls to the souls of drowned fishermen and sailors helps us see them as part of Martin himself. Their frequently mentioned screams and squawks mime Martin's thespian ranting. Another description of the gulls recalls the greed passage: "They settled and cried with erect hands and tongues, beaks wide open on the high point of the rock" (42). Martin repeatedly sees in them flying reptiles, a projection of the serpent within, and finally calls them flying lizards, suggesting a dinosaur, consistent with the reverse pattern of creation he employs. Thus we learn the nature of the real Martin not only through his ironically symbolic actor's masks but also through his own distorted perspective, through the perspectives of those around him, and finally through his symbolic projections onto the world.

Any critical study of symbolic structures in support of the fable's didacticism must necessarily



examine Martin's metamorphosis, for it, more than any other phenomenon, most clearly reveals his fallen nature. Baker has pointed out Golding's debt to Ovid; in The Metamorphoses gods change mortals into a form that enacts a moral judgment which is either a blessing or a punishment.<sup>30</sup> Golding would surely affirm the general if not the specific debt: "I think it is true that Greek literature really has been a big literary influence in my life."<sup>31</sup> Martin perfectly deserves his transformation into a pair of lobster claws, a moral judgment absolutely consonant with his greed. I would add to Baker's observations Golding's debt to Kafka. In their grey and isolated worlds, wearing hard shells of dung beetle and lobster, living our private hells reminiscent of their earthly occupations, Gregor Samsa and Pincher Martin inhabit similar nightmares.

From the early pages of the novel, Martin's hands bear in them the essence of claws: getting a life of their own, they approached a pocket, "raised a flap and crawled inside" (29). Seconds later they "flicked out. . . and grabbed rock" (29). Then in a brilliant symbol cluster Golding connects rock, hand, and lobster to tell us something more about the stony, grasping essence of Pincher: the lobster he sees in the weeds among the rock "clenched like a fist and was gone" (99).

Sometimes Martin's whole body resembles a lobster:

"he backed with innumerable separate movements like a lobster backing into a deep crevice under water"

(41). Toward the end of the novel Golding moves from simile to metaphor. Pincher's hands are no longer like lobsters; they are lobsters. Thus trope helps establish the metamorphosis:

As his jaws worked he sat still with two lobsters lying on the rock beside him. The meal went on under pricking rain, a stirring of wind and scuds of dimples across the surface of the water. He took morsels of food with one lobster and brought them to his face (155).

Martin ironically feels "ancient antipathy for things with claws" (51), perhaps because he realizes intuitively the central fact of his being: he "should have been a pair of ragged claws/Scuttling across the floors of silent seas."<sup>32</sup>

Digestive tract symbolism pervades the novel, defining Martin's character, supplying metaphors of his action, and delineating the doomed microcosm he creates for himself. His sexual functions are also described in terms of eating--appropriately so for a creature governed entirely by his appetites. Martin says of himself, "the sane life of your belly and your cock are on a simple circuit" (169). By describing him with "mouth and flies open," the producer similarly repeats the basic circuitry. The main feature of the glass

figure Martin remembers and identifies with is the glass tube extending through its body, a fitting objectification of a man who is primarily gut.

Dozens of references to teeth and mouth begin the alimentary symbolism. Related to the claws, teeth bite and tear, but they also symbolize a kind of vicious virility--human "nature red in tooth and claw."<sup>33</sup> Golding frequently describes Martin's mouth snarling and his teeth snapping.

Often tooth symbolism merges with rock symbolism. The earth thrust the broken end of rock up "through mud and clay until it erupted as the tooth bursts out of the fleshy jaw" (69). Then in horror Martin realizes that the rocks are being worn down like teeth in the "ancient jaw of a sunken world" (28). When he realizes that the rock island is the shape of his once aching, now missing tooth, he is terrified because of the implication in his own mind that he made up the rock. The "decaying rock" complete with decaying fish and gulls furthers the death imagery and Martin's horror (153-154).

Martin eats those around him:

And of course eating with the mouth was only the gross expression of what was a universal process. You could eat with your cock or with your fists or with your voice. You could eat with hobnailed boots or buying and selling or marrying and begetting or cuckolding-- (79, 80).



He sees himself "eating women, eating men, crunching up Alfred, that other girl, that boy. . ." (81). In his hatred for Nat, he says, "I could eat you" (90). But, of course, given what he recognizes as "the cosmic nature of eating" (80), Martin has to realize that he too is food. The producer's wife needs to eat him before she puts him in a play; his own hatred and lust for Mary generates "the acids. . . chewing at his guts" (92). Martin verifies his belief in the cosmic nature of eating when he describes himself lying in the middle of the sea "a morsel of food on the teeth that a world's lifetime has blunted" (82).

Unfortunately for Martin, he forgets the cosmic nature of eating when he assumes he is the last maggot in the Chinese box. Within that box the buried fish decays and is eaten by maggots, which in turn eat each other until one last succulent maggot--a rare delicacy--remains. Seeing himself a similar surviving delicacy, Martin fails to remember what the Chinese do with that treat:

I won't die  
I won't die.  
Not me--  
Precious (13).

He may not even be the last maggot, for other maggots chew at him, too:



She's the producer's wife, old man. Fat. White. Like a maggot with tiny black eyes. "I should love to eat you. I should love to put you in a play. How could I put you anywhere if I haven't eaten you?" (85).

Helen does eat him by not helping him get the part in the play, a failure which results in his being drafted. Figuratively speaking, she launches his ship. Martin's last word when the torpedo blows him off the bridge of the destroyer (which itself amounts to a tin box) is "Eaten" (165).

Anal, fecal, and urethral language and imagery abound in the novel, carrying the digestive tract symbolism to its logical conclusion. The guano covered rock, the limpets talking in "continual tiny crepitations" (66), the barnacles bleeding and weeping "uretic water" and "pissing" in his eye (57) all provide a contaminated setting of waste material. Martin's language reflects a similarly anal mind. His most frequent oaths and curses employ the vocabulary of sodomy: "And I get blown to buggery" (14), "sod you, bugger you" (17), and "Bugger off!" (50).

Critics have pointed out the birth imagery in the novel without ever really explaining how it works symbolically. While I would agree that Martin's crawl up the crevice of the rocks does resemble birth, careful reading shows that the birth canal is rectal--that Pincher's birth is an anal one:

. . . the cleft was dripping, dank and smelly as a dockside latrine (27).

. . . . .  
The dark, lavatorial cleft, with its dripping weed, with its sessile, mindless life of shell and jelly was land only twice a day (30).

. . . . .  
nothing clung to the rock but his own body and tiny barnacles and green smears of weed (31).

Why does Golding choose this birth imagery? What kind of world is Martin delivered into? His own first words provide a possible answer:

The words that had formed in his mind were: Where is this bloody rock? But that seemed to risk something by insult of the dark cleft so that he changed them in his throat. "Where the hell am I?" (27).

Golding's choice of the word "hell," the passage through the rock, the bitter cold all recall Dante's and Virgil's similar ascent in Canto XXXIV of The Inferno; however, Martin reverses Dante's and Virgil's course. They move from the inferno to purgatory while Martin moves from purgatory to hell. Dante and Virgil pass the three horrific faces of Lucifer, each with a bloody mouth, chewing an arch betrayer. They climb down Lucifer's body and out through his anus, an interpretation generally understood for centuries but often coyly skirted in translation. Martin moves the opposite direction, finally condemned "to lie on a row of teeth in the middle of the sea--" (82). The

frequent references to three rocks suggests Lucifer's three faces, and Martin's attempted murder of Nat links him to Brutus, Cassius, and Judas and qualifies him for the jaws of hell.

Pincher's passage from a symbolic anus, his cosmic enema, his last words, and the repeated anal and fecal imagery all help to suggest that he is feces, a suggestion borne out by his entire life. In addition to showing a hellish world, the imagery also tells us something about Pincher's mind, about the kind of world fallen man creates out of his own personality. Hints of similarity to Dante help show ironically and inversely exactly what Pincher Martin is.

The symbolism of the orchestrated enema should dispel any remaining critical opinion that Martin is heroic, Promethean. That he should need an enema in the first place reinforces his basic greed, for anal retention suggests a reluctance to give up his own precious waste products. Should the reader be disinclined to make that connection, Golding nudges him by juxtaposing the key greed passage already quoted to a new scene beginning with these words: "I haven't had a crap for a week" (107). One cannot doubt that Martin considers his enema an heroic intellectual victory: "I am Atlas. I am Prometheus" (144). He then creates out of his egocentric,

theatrical world a symphonic accompaniment of Tchaikovsky, Wagner, and Holst for his defecation. He next makes a drastically wrongheaded assumption by assuming that he has defeated the serpent within. God-like in his own eyes, he defies the gods with his final words: "I shit on your heaven!" (178).

But what happens to that last maggot? By logical extension of digestive tract symbolism, nature herself, before the final confrontation with God, eats away. The "sea thrust out tongues" (103); the summer lightning licked the inner crevices (130); "there was a constant gurgling and sucking that ranged from a stony smack to a ruminative swallow . . . a liquid slapping like appetite" (51). The sea, the rock, and decay erode the mortal remains of Christopher Martin until he is washed ashore with a symbolic tin box, the box which survives the last maggot.

Golding's first fable, Lord of the Flies, revealed what happens to the world inhabited by fallen man. It breaks down and disintegrates. Symbolism of disintegration and breakdown similarly characterize the doomed universe of Pincher Martin, who wrongly assumes that with his education and intelligence he can create a functional world out of his own fallen nature. We see differently as the novel parodies the Genesis myth.<sup>34</sup> Martin assumes one more dramatic role,



this time the biggest one--God. He too follows a pattern, but in a lucid moment realizes that the emerging pattern is "inimical," hostile (152). Like the Black Mass, Martin's creation turns the Genesis myth upside down and backward. In fact, the pattern of "creation" is really a regressive pattern of destruction moving in an almost exactly corresponding reverse direction to the Genesis story with a few points of difference to remove the fable from the province of allegory.

On the first day, an exhausted Martin rests. On the second day he builds a figure from the stone--a dwarf, which shows the meanness of man's creative attempts. He also finds food on the second day. On the third day he creates a pattern of seaweed. On the fourth he channels water to take advantage of the rain. On the fifth day he begins to go mad. On the sixth day he assumes he has created God in his own image. From then darkness closes in to the final apocalyptic destruction. We know Martin views his acts as divine when he describes his mere turning over in terms of "whole continents on that side," as "seismic convulsions" (43, 44). Other detail supports his mental associations with Genesis. The woman in his mind bears "apples, the forbidden fruit of her breasts" (130). Like a petty god telling Noah "I told you so!"

Martin says, "I said it would rain and it did" (151). Martin thinks that by predicting nature he can control it.

Martin assumes Adam's prerogative by naming the parts of his microcosm in a mistaken belief that "netting down this rock with names" amounts to "taming it" (78). But on a rock which Golding and the critics have identified as Rockall, the name which the Captain laughingly calls a near miss (Fuckall) and the name which Martin cannot remember, only apocalypse awaits the protagonist. Martin's forgetting the name of his rock suggests both his inability to "tame" the basic environment and his general attitude, via the near-miss name, toward human and divine creation.

Other details in the novel suggest disintegration. The language in the beginning presents a clear sequence of pictures rather like short clips of film which Martin's mind seeks to edit:

The pictures that came and went in his head did not disturb him because they were so small and remote. There was a woman's body, white and detailed, there was a boy's body; there was a box office, the bridge of a ship, an order picked out across a far sky in neon lighting, a tall, thin man who stood aside humbly in the darkness at the top of a companion ladder; there was a man hanging in the sea like a glass sailor in a jam jar (23).

As the book progresses, the film clips move faster and faster, getting tinier and tinier, more and more

protean, finally representing single frames superimposed on each other and piled up on the cutting room floor of Martin's mind:

The lines and tendrils felt forward through the sea. A segment of storm dropped out like a dead leaf and there was a gap that joined sea and sky through the horizon. Now the lightning found reptiles floating and flying motionlessly and a tendril ran to each. The reptiles resisted, changing shape a little, then they too dropped out and were gone. A valley of nothing opened up through Safety Rock (178).

Concurrent with Martin's mental deterioration we see physical deterioration: cuts, bruises, constipation, urticaria, fever, delirium, and a grand mal seizure. Ironically, he describes constipation as being "egg-bound," suggesting not only ill health but also a kind of ultimate regression. Martin, like the glass sailor in the jar, feels greater and greater pressure from the sky, pressure reducing him to a pulp.

Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor believe that when Martin knocks off the head of the dwarf, Golding is trying to symbolize the inability of the human head to control reality.<sup>35</sup> I believe it also further symbolizes the disintegration of Martin's universe and of his mind. Everything Martin attempts to create or to manipulate finally deteriorates. Fallen man cannot create an infallible world out of his own fallible nature.

When he constructs a doomed universe out of his own central fallibility, morally diseased man will sooner

or later have to face that doom, a doom which symbolism helps to delineate. Tiger calls this encounter the confrontation scene: "In the confrontation scene, the protagonist is forced through some fearful but ambiguous purgation--often in darkness, often in water--to encounter his own Being, 'the thing' in the centre of his 'darkness,' that which is his internal landscape."<sup>36</sup> Such central darkness is self-made, growing out of our turning away from the vision of God. Martin believes that the God who confronts his central darkness, the God who would force him to see the center to which he has been so blind, is a projection of his own mind. Babb makes the strongest argument against that belief: "Martin's ego, acting in its own interest, would never dream up this manifestation of otherness."<sup>37</sup> Therefore, God must be real. Martin realizes he never could have invented that "shred of spittle" he sees (173). The reference to spittle is particularly appropriate here, for Christ mixed his own spittle with mud to heal the blind man's eyes--a probable association pointing up Martin's defective vision.

Other details foreshadow the approaching confrontation of Martin with his dark center and with God. Symbolism including the loss of seaboots, the bare feet, the divine black lightning all predispose



us to expect a "holy ground" spiritual encounter. Christopher's name reminds the reader of "his name-sake, the third century saint. . . also making a precarious journey across the water as spiritual preparation."<sup>38</sup> Of course, Christopher Martin cannot support the weight of Christ. Martin's seaweed pattern, which he describes as a hot cross bun, purposefully recalls the traditional English Good Friday food. Martin's experience amounts to a kind of Golgotha for him but without subsequent redemption. Nat tries to teach Martin the "technique of dying into heaven" (64) and also theorizes the possibility of what Martin's ego actually does. Nat tells him of the "heaven we invent for ourselves after death, if we weren't ready for the real one" (162). Martin ends up dissociating any such heaven for himself: "I shit on your heaven!" (178).

All of these details clearly lead us to realize that the novel depicts Martin's testing or purgatorial experience. Frequently, however, the purgatory more closely resembles hell. Fire imagery flares through the pages. The polluted water supply allays thirst without satisfying it. Needles jab through the corner of Martin's right eye. His nerves shriek over the fires, racks, and pincers. He feels as if his body were being stretched mercilessly. And still

Martin prefers this experience to that of surrendering his ego. Ironically he shouts, "I'm damned if I'll die!" (64).

The black lightning would deliver tormented, selfish Pincher Martin from purgatory into the heaven "without form and void" which Nathaniel postulates exists (62). Such deliverance would be the final regressive step in Martin's reverse creation; however, he cannot deliver his ego to "the ultimate truth of things. . . the positive, unquestionable nothingness" (82).

Tiger thus crystallizes the meaning of Martin's doom: "Having dismissed mercy, Pincher, now reduced to his essential Being, claws and centre, will suffer eternally and never be destroyed. He has left Purgatory and entered Hell."<sup>39</sup> The black lightning etches a tree pattern in the rock, complete with stony apples--a tree of knowledge for the "dark centre. . . shrunk, and dreadful and knowing" (157). The noise of the thunder strikes Martin's hearing like the "grating and thump of a spade against an enormous tin box that had been buried" (168). The maggot knows his doom, the doom of eternal torment, as opposed to merciful annihilation:

Some of the lines of lightning pointed to the centre, waiting for the moment when they would pierce it. Others lay against the claws, prying for a weakness,

wearing them away in a compassion that was timeless and without mercy (179).

Each of Golding's first three novels shows man as morally corrupt: the boys in Lord of the Flies destroy their island paradise; the New People in The Inheritors murder and eat their fellow human beings; Pincher Martin lives through eternity as he lived his life--grasping, brittle, and irredemably egocentric. The structure of each of the novels is also similar. A short final chapter moves away from the central character(s) in a kind of high angle long shot to change the perspective from a microcosm to a macrocosm. Here the symbolism of death and the new perspective nudge the reader into extrapolating from Pincher Martin's situation something applicable to the human condition. Davidson arrives on an island to collect Martin's body from Campbell, the Scots crofter who found it. Babb has convincingly shown that Davidson is a personification of death and that his face resembles a death's head: he arrives from a black shape out of a wintry sunset in the west, he works a seven day week, he has unblinking eyes and a grin without humor.<sup>40</sup>

Campbell shows his compassion for Davidson, who, however, appears to like his job, and for Martin. He also shows his concern, the human concern about life after death: "Would you say there was any--surviving?

Or is that all?" (185). Davidson answers the question with literal reference to Martin: . . . "don't worry about him. You saw the body. He didn't even have time to kick off his seaboots" (185). Because the entire novel demonstrates Martin's suffering, Davidson's comment is deeply ironic. Death claims us all, but Campbell's question like the black lightning etches into our new awareness.

All three of Golding's first novels make dark comment on what they show, but of the three, Pincher Martin, ostensibly the darkest, offers the most hope. Although "the protagonist's particular history of guilt and greed is intended to stand as a fable for contemporary man,"<sup>41</sup> man (and Pincher) could choose not to turn away from God. That choice, however, demands faith or vision. If, as Baker points out, "the final chapters intentionally contradict the reality shown in the narrative--and thus expose the fallibility of the rational point of view,"<sup>42</sup> they also morally direct the reader's vision, helping him toward a wider perspective, one which may account for different realities, eternal values. And thus does the rich and extensive symbolism, which so clearly paints a despicable portrait of Pincher Martin, extend inward to the irrational province of the self's dark center in each reader. That center can then choose

to turn inward on itself, to invent a heaven--or hell--out of itself, or to look outward to a larger, divine light. Largely because of his use of symbolism, Golding tries with commendable success to influence the choice and to sharpen the center's vision. For, as Golding himself told Virginia Tiger, and as Pincher Martin so clearly illustrates:

"Where there is no vision the people perish."<sup>43</sup>



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Golding, Pincher Martin (New York: Capricorn Books, 1956). Originally published in the U.S.A. as The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin. [Hereinafter referred to in parenthetical pagination.]

<sup>2</sup>An enemy torpedo strikes the British destroyer, blowing officer Christopher Hadley Martin off the bridge into the Atlantic ocean. After removing his seaboots and struggling to stay afloat through the night, he is washed onto a rocky outcropping in the Atlantic where he thinks out and implements a plan for survival and endures for five days. On the sixth day in a final confrontation between God and his own dark center, Martin is reduced to a pair of claws, locked on each other for eternity. In a short closing chapter, a Scot delivers Martin's body to the proper authorities, and we learn that he was killed instantly, without having time to remove his seaboots.

<sup>3</sup>John Peter, "The Fables of William Golding," Kenyon Review, XIX (Autumn, 1957), p. 589.

<sup>4</sup>Virginia Tiger, William Golding: The Dark Fields of Discovery (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), p. 109.

<sup>5</sup>Margaret Walters, "Two Fabulists: Golding and Camus," Melbourne Critical Review, No. 4 (1961), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup>James R. Baker, William Golding: A Critical Study (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>Jack I. Biles, Talk: Conversations with William Golding (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>Baker, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>9</sup>Kenneth Rexroth, "William Golding," The Atlantic, Vol. 215 (May, 1965), 96-98.

<sup>10</sup>Philippa Moody, A Critical Commentary on William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 37.

- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-41.
- <sup>12</sup>Robert Scholes, The Fabulators (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 67.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., Chap. 6 ff.
- <sup>14</sup>Peter, op. cit., p. 577.
- <sup>15</sup>William Golding, "Fable," The Hot Gates and Other Occasional Pieces (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), pp. 86-87.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 85.
- <sup>17</sup>Tiger, op. cit., p. 109.
- <sup>18</sup>Baker, op. cit., pp. 35-36 [Radio Times interview as quoted by Baker.]
- <sup>19</sup>Bernard F. Dick, William Golding (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 58.
- <sup>20</sup>Tiger, op. cit., p. 135.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 136.
- <sup>22</sup>that is, the world of the Cartesian diver
- <sup>23</sup>Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar."
- <sup>24</sup>Dick, op. cit., p. 57.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 57.
- <sup>26</sup>Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub, The Art of William Golding (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 89.
- <sup>27</sup>Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor, William Golding (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 157.
- <sup>28</sup>Tiger, op. cit., p. 133.
- <sup>29</sup>Biles, op. cit., p. 21.
- <sup>30</sup>Baker, op. cit., p. 44.
- <sup>31</sup>Biles, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>32</sup>T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

<sup>33</sup>Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam" Part LV.

<sup>34</sup>Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>36</sup>Tiger, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>37</sup>Howard S. Babb, The Novels of William Golding (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1970), p. 39.

<sup>38</sup>Dick, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>39</sup>Tiger, op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>40</sup>Babb, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

<sup>41</sup>Tiger, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>42</sup>Baker, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>43</sup>Proverbs 29:18.



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