



High Impact Factor 8.1458 ISSN J-Gate



Double-blind  
peer reviewed

Vol. 9, No. 1

CLRI Feb 2022



Referred Journal



Page 60-85

GENERAL IMPACT FACTOR & More

## Racked on an Afterlife Rock: Survival of the Centre at the Margin of Doom in William Golding's *Pincher Martin*

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### Abstract:

This paper intends to analyse William Golding's 1956 novel *Pincher Martin* in the light of decolonisation and the resultant loss of empire and also their effect on the British psyche. That the novel is usually read a moral tale of salvation and damnation, but it can also be read as a reflex action of a dead colonialist's consciousness or a psychological reaction to the end of colonies. This consciousness gathers itself as a centre and continues to act in the line of colonialism even after his death, without even being aware of his death. Apparently a survivor of a torpedo attack, *Pincher Martin*

finds himself on a rock, which can be seen as a margin and which he tries to dominate and subjugate by using the tools of colonialism. However, this diehard colonialist is destroyed and defeated on the rock by black lightning. The novel is a moral allegory, but it is also an allegory of the confrontation of the centre and the margin presented in geographical terms. Geographically Great Britain is an island, and its expansion through colonialism is a part of its 'island complex' and claustrophobia.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Consciousness, Centre, Margin, Geography of the mind, Chaos.

Most of the novels of William Golding are characterized by unusual settings, unusual because they do not have the usual novelistic settings of society, mobility and dynamic interplay of cultural aspects of social living; the entry into this locale is marked by contingency, rupture, displacement, claustrophobia and entropy – all the elements of human uneasiness and suffering, the exit is marked by a bigger awareness of appearance and reality – obtained through a trick ending. These novels are designed to undermine the cultural hegemony of human civilization which turns out to be an appearance or veneer or facade, and which is peeled off at this rude and alien locale so that the abject naturalness of existence comes out as an overriding reality. The progress from the appearance of culture to the reality of nature is not a straight line but is achieved through the usual mystery and muddle, the failings, the trials and tribulations of human struggle and survival. It is by means of the setting that the central consciousness is placed at the periphery, even outside of culture so that the consciousness goes through trials and tribulations of existence and is forced to devise and improvise means to organise things by patterning and ordering the surrounding chaos of the periphery. This consciousness of an individual is shown as active agent of change, as organiser and builder, even a colonial agent. The result is a sort of epigenesis that looks back to the past or to the

archival as the root to connect with and to understand the present manifestation, and looks forward to some visionary future reality, in a process of atavistic discovery or revelation. The preservation of the unity and purity of identity by exercising intelligence becomes a Promethean endeavour for this consciousness in the backdrop of chaos and postcontamination. The settings are contrived as touchstone to enable this clash between cultural veneer and natural reality in geographical terms. One such touchstone is the rock in *Pincher Martin* on which the centre of cultural consciousness is tested amidst the margins of natural unconsciousness in a unique tale of survival and doom of an already dead man. In a post-mortem existence, the central character of the novel is shown to be organising things with his consciousness to keep him alive on a barren Atlantic rock. The dark centre of consciousness is placed at the margin of doom to be racked and hoisted with its own petard in the desperate tale of survival of the centre. In the process the centre comes to know and discover its own darkness of being in this morbid tale of self-knowledge.

The relationship between the centre and margin is an important political issue in Golding, expressed not in a direct political statement, but in the guise of a fable mode. Historically, Golding started writing his novels in the second half of the twentieth century when the British Empire was gradually getting dismantled. It was a time of decolonization and the loss of the colonies apparently shocked the British psyche. As the Eurocentric world order came to an end literature also started absorbing the shockwave in the form of new realities, new issues and new voices. Loss of the Empire led to an awakening and enlightenment in the colonizing mind about the uncertainty, fluidity and fragility of the state of being. The colonizing mind had to grapple with the margin. The experience was nightmarish, one of dismay and horror. It had to come to terms with the realities of the margin and listen to its voices, the voices of the other, and the oppressed subaltern voices. It was how the colonizing mind could reconfigure and rearticulate itself. William Golding

wrote about this predicament. What comes out is the fictional statement of the imperial self smarting under the new realities. Psychopathology, violence and trauma are the ontological dimensions that mark out Golding's fictional world. Understanding the conditions of Otherness is thus the problematic in Golding's novels. Behind his anti-enlightenment and dystopian vision one can see the reformulation of the master – slave narrative, the dominating self and the marginalized other, bringing out the uneasiness of the master, as the dominating or aggrandizing mind recoils upon itself in the form of the other, leaving the mind in an ambivalence that brings about the necessity to accept or at least recognize the other on equal terms. Writing in the backdrop of this postcolonial scenario unfolding in history, Golding finds the imperial and aggrandising consciousness displaced and dislocated in space and time, and in *Pincher Martin* this diehard consciousness is dismantled to show how the colonial residues of the past life still regulate and determine the ego of the colonial master in his present afterlife.

Apparently the story is cast in the usual Golding format of a moral tale. As a moral tale of salvation and damnation, it comes close to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, and in some sense it may be taken as another version of unrepentant Faustus. In the BBC Third Programme dramatization of the novel Golding gives this summary of his story:

*Christopher Hadley Martin had no belief in anything but the importance of his own life, 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. He did not believe in purgatory and therefore when he died it was not presented to him in overtly theological terms. 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 separately 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 face of what will smash it and sweep it away – the black lightning, the compassion of God. For Christopher, the Christbearer, has become Pincher Martin who is little but greed. Just to be Pincher is purgatory; to be Pincher for eternity is hell. (Golding in Radio Times, quoted in Surette 207)*

Such an outline strictly follows the development of story in the novel, emphasising the rapacious, ravenous greed of Martin who gets transformed from Christopher to Pincher and whose only obsession is selfish conquering of things by immoral grabbing and eating. The repudiation of the godly in favour of the devilish is the crux of the moral tale. Turning away from God makes him an embodiment of darkness, the dark centre confronting the dark lightning. Talking to Jack I. Biles Golding says, “When you turn away from God, He becomes a darkness; when you turn towards him, He becomes a light, in cliché terms” (Golding in *Talk: Conversations with William Golding*, quoted in Tiger, *The Dark Fields* 138). As an exemplar of the predicament of modern man, the novel is a demonstration of what Virginia Tiger calls the division “between the physical world which contemporary man accepts and the spiritual world which he ignores but which – in Golding’s view – does not ignore him” (Tiger, *The Dark Fields* 16). According to her, Golding’s moral vision attempts a “bridgebuilding” (Tiger, *The Dark Fields* 16) between the physical and the spiritual, a rift well nigh impossible to bridge, and she analyses the reason behind it:

*In a century of disbelief and formidable violence, Golding’s mythopoeia contends, mystery is experienced only as malignancy, not as holiness or wholeness. It is as though the spiritual is experienced not as individual or transcendent mercy, but as personal and universal guilt. Man abstracts from his violence – something his nature possesses in Golding’s view – and projects it as fear of a demon which will destroy him. He seldom abstracts from his goodness, something his nature also possesses. Thus, in the early fiction, the central symbol for the spiritual dimension is ‘darkness’ and the central symbolic episode involves the*

*nightmare world where character undergoes atavistic reordering or, in the case of Pincher Martin, death itself. (Tiger, The Dark Fields 16)*

Self-preservation and self-aggrandizement are manifestations of a fear of self-extinction, borne out of disbelief and violence, resulting in terrifying and nightmarish condition of guilt, remorse and suffering which breaks Pincher on the rack of a rock, a fat maggot that he has been is now finally 'eaten', but his consciousness "remains incredibly burning inside its dead envelope" (Delbaere-Garant, "William Golding's Pincher Martin", 538) before being wiped out by the dark lightning of divine retribution. His post-mortem consciousness takes recourse to man's vaunted intelligence and free will to defy the dark lightning. In order to preserve his identity against disintegration, his consciousness forms 'centre' or 'dark centre' or 'unexamined centre' of will and intelligence (Surette 219) but to no avail. Morally defiant, he becomes physically troubled and sick over his eating and constipation so much so that he applies an enema upon himself. The morality play element of his recollection of his past life as an actor when he acted as Greed is a telling image of his own devouring nature as Pete, the producer of the play, comments about him,

*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 a bugger who gets his penny and someone else's bun. (Pincher Martin 119)*

As the last remaining fat maggot inside the Chinese Box he turns out to be a rare dish of this eating parable, eating is no more a means of bodily survival but a paradigm of fulfilling the dominating ego.

*The whole business of eating was peculiarly significant. They made a ritual of it on every level, the Fascists as a punishment, the religious as a rite, the cannibal either as a ritual or a medicine or a superbly direct declaration of conquest. Killed and eaten. 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 or selling or marrying and begetting or cuckolding – (PM 88)*

The rock on which Pincher is now clinging to, after he is torpedoed and having died, for his dear identity of self becomes for him a monster tooth, the serrated edge of the rock appears to him a set of teeth into which he is a tiny morsel. On the rock he relives his entire career of eating and feels the need of purgation. The rock becomes a purgatory for him and he has to purge himself by going back to the cellar of his childhood and his every kill and prey, finally understanding the cosmic pattern he is in, preferring his own hell of pain and suffering to anything divine, and clinging to his own identity till the end. In his delirium he remains rebellious to God by justifying his acts.

*“I prefer it. You gave me the power to choose and all my life you led me carefully to this suffering because my choice was my own. Oh yes! I understand the pattern. All my life, whatever I had done I should have found myself in the end on the same bridge, at the same time, giving the same order – the right order, the wrong order. Yet, suppose I climbed away from the cellar over the bodies of used and defeated people, broke them to make steps on the road away from you, why should you torture me? If I ate them, who gave me a mouth?” (PM 197)*

Thus Pincher Martin is portrayed as greed incarnate because he is so greedy of life that he refuses to die even in his post-life and defies God by blaming Him for his suffering. Pincher becomes an allegory of afterlife-suffering in a purgatory and a lesson for learning the technique of dying. It is pertinent theological question from a soul in the purgatory, a justification that absolves him from self-responsibility and morality of respecting others. Does Golding intend to make his character a Prometheus, and draw sympathy for the suffering soul of Pincher? An analysis by Elizabeth Stevens is worth quoting here:

*This [The Brass Butterfly] is a jovial version of the Prometheus myth, where knowledge brings its own evil, and it leads directly to the fierce portrayal of the same idea in Pincher Martin – where Pincher, the peacetime actor, cries out in a stage heroism that he is Prometheus tied to his rock. Pincher is fallen man – ‘very much fallen – he’s fallen more than most. In fact I went out of my way to damn Pincher as much as I could by making him the most unpleasant, nastiest type I could think of’ [Golding in an interview with Frank Kermode]. As Kermode remarked, Pincher lives up to his name of being greedy in every respect: [...] But Pincher in the end becomes almost a hero; his struggles are epic, his lonely battle against the fate he has himself marked out wins the reader’s admiration – possibly because, no matter how despicable he is, we do identify ourselves with him. (Stevens 9)*

Golding's 'nastiest type' is also the type that 'wins the reader's admiration' because 'we do identify ourselves with him'. This is a curious position we arrive at because Golding wants to condemn his character in this moral tale, but creates a character that remains a rebel in the reader's eye to win his admiration and sympathy. From the moral tale thus emerges a familiar pattern of romantic attachment to ego and its overreaching tendencies. Although personal, it has colonialist implications.

The moral tale of "Chris-Greed. Greed-Chris" (*PM* 119) and the heroic tale of Pincher-Prometheus are woven together by means of an adroit technique of mixing past life and the present through flashbacks and flashes of his present suffering. The same resourcefulness of Chris-Greed of the past life is now deployed by Martin in order to become Pincher-Prometheus. What has been morally negative now becomes amoral but positive medium of survival and defiance. Memory plays an important role in *Pincher Martin* as a carrier of sin and suffering into his present life of survival on the rock. The serpent lies coiled in the memory and as Martin discovers, it lies coiled inside the body as well.

That Golding is a colonialist writer in the guise of a fabulist has been cogently argued by Stefen Hawlin in his essay "The Savages in the Forest: Decolonising William Golding". Going beyond the traditional ways of reading Golding as a moralist and fabulist, Hawlin analyses *Lord of the Flies* as a colonialist writing "by setting it within the history of decolonisation, and hence to show how the novel reflects a profoundly conservative ethos" (Hawlin 125)

*Lord of the Flies* was published in 1954, in the middle of the period when Britain was beginning to give up Empire in a confused and reluctant way. 'Great' Britain's feelings of superiority were under threat, ruthlessly guarded in psychological and emotional terms but actually undermined by the pressure of nationalist movements and anti-colonial feeling. Later the official view was that Britain was engaged in 'the difficult and delicate politics of bringing new states to birth', graciously withdrawing having helped to enlighten the dark places of the world. The ambivalence of feeling involved in the decolonisation process lies at the heart of *Lord of the Flies*, for the novel is defensive about the surrender of Empire, and makes an attempt to restate the old Empire misrepresentations of white enlightenment and black savagery. Under a thin disguise it presents the cliché about the bestiality and savagery of natives, the 'painted niggers' in the forest, ready at a whim to tear each other to pieces in tribal conflict unless the white 'grown ups' come to rescue them from themselves. It is, in its odd way, a defence of colonialism. (Hawlin 125)

Hawlin's suggestion of reading Golding in 'other ways' (Hawlin 125) leads to surprising discovery that he is not merely writing fables of evil or the darkness of human heart, but is profoundly engaged in understanding the nature of the relation between the self and the other, the centre and the margin in a postcolonial setting. Like Hawlin, Kevin McCarron also finds Golding writing in the colonialist tradition. Commenting on *The Inheritors* which is a story of the decimation and extermination of the Neanderthals at the hand of Homo Sapiens, McCarron writes,

*Colonialism can be seen as an issue in The Inheritors; one that is linked to evolutionary theories. If one is at the top of the evolutionary ladder, then one has no moral obligation to respect the rights, or even the lives, of those who have yet to reach this plateau. Instead, there is a moral duty to impose one's superior values on all those people who remain in a state of unenlightened savagery, and if they remain obdurate then it is permissible to kill them. A large number of British novelists have written about colonialism and imperialistic conflict: Rudyard Kipling, George Orwell, Winifred Holtby, Joyce Cary, Paul Scott, and, with The Inheritors, perhaps William Golding could be added to the list. A reading of the novel which sees Lok's peoples [the Neanderthals] as the colonized and the New Men [Homo Sapiens] as the colonizers does not displace other readings, but may be seen as an indication of the ways in which fabular constructions, in particular, are amenable to a variety of approaches. (McCarron 10)*

The allegory becomes exploratory of colonial impulse in his third novel *Pincher Martin* where the human image becomes grim “in the refusal of grief and growth and of the possibility of accepting forgiveness and mercy” (Gallagher 205). In *Lord of the Flies* Ralph is shown crying for mercy and forgiveness, in *The Inheritors* Tuami the artist man rejects the idea of violence, but in *Pincher Martin* there is no time for grief and cry for mercy, only blatant defiance. The centre of life refuses to be integrated and reconciled with the margin of death and extinction of identity. Can it be taken as the survival of colonialism in a postcolonial setting? Can it be taken as an elaboration of a maxim, ‘colonialism is dead, long live colonialism’? If it is so, then it is not presented as a direct statement but in geographical terms. Golding takes us inside the mind of a dead man, presumably the mind of a dead colonialist by means of the geography of the mind.

The centre-piece of this geography of the mind is the rock in the middle of the Atlantic, Rockall. Wayland Young in “Letter from London” reports,

*While the multi-racial uproar of the British Empire changes and disintegrates to the South, to the North it has had a strange little accretion. On September 18<sup>th</sup> 1955 a naval party was winched from a helicopter onto the island of Rockall, hoisted the Union Jack, and annexed it to Great Britain while a Royal Naval vessel fired a salute of twenty-one guns....All Englishmen, all romantics, have a shadowy echo-continent of the spirit lying submerged away to the West of their Hebrides, with one Rockall rising sheer and astounding into the cold, incomprehensible storm-light of the northern ocean, on which beat the waves of fear and desire. (Young, Wayland 477)*

Michael Roberts in his poem "Rockall" describes the Rockall and the possible experience on living on this rock which, according to M. J. W. Pittock and J. G. Roberts, has striking resemblance to Pincher Martin's experience on the rock (Pittock and Roberts 442-43),

Rockall, two hundred miles west of Benbecula,

Bare rock, eighty-three feet wide, seventy feet high,

First seen by Captain Hall, 1810, reported inaccessible –

The last spur on the Great Atlantic Shelf.

How shall the mind think beyond the last abandoned islands?

The gulls cry, as they cry in the isles of despair,

The waves break, as they break on Tiree or Foula;

Man is alone, and death is certain.

Was it better to have died in shipwreck?

Here, naked under the bare sky,

The traveller wakes; and sanity is the same as madness

Under the grey sky pressed down to the sea's rim. (Michael Roberts, "Rockall")

Wayland Young's Rockall is annexed as part of British territory and symbolic of every Englishman's romantic feeling for expansion over the 'waves of fear and desire'. Michael Roberts's Rockall is a poetic description of the 'isles of despair' for the traveller, situated at the outer rim of the British territory. For Golding, Rockall becomes the realization of the Englishman's desire and despair of living at the margin of doom in terms less of survival but more of domination and conquest. Golding's novel uses the same framework or the 'same paint box' of the English island stories as exemplified if Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. That Pincher Martin resembles Robinson Crusoe has been pointed out by S. J. Boyd, "The two resemble one another in their sheer determination to survive, the force of will that impels them to go on, to keep up the struggle, and the ingenuity which they bring to that struggle" (Boyd 51). The outcome of their efforts to survive at the margin of their world epitomises not only a moral tale of salvation and damnation but also a political tale aggrandisement and colonisation, even though in a limited sense.

However, the way Pincher's survival and colonising spirit are worked out, the similarity becomes superficial and the novel becomes as different from Defoe's novel as it is from Taffrail's novel of the same name, *Pincher Martin, O.D.*, and also Ambrose Bierce's short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge". Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor find the difference with *Robinson Crusoe* in terms of realism.

*It will seem at first that the awareness is mainly, even obsessively, physical; an experience through the senses of a man's subjection to his environment. But in fact where the 'realism' is taking us is inside his head. We might not be able to predict the full outcome, but it will eventually reveal a fearful imaginative logic. The rock, whose 'realism' is itself so considerable an achievement, will disappear; the inside of the head will remain the only 'reality' that exists. (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 124)*

And in spite of the similarity in name, Golding's novel is different from that of Taffrail's, as pointed out by Virginia Tiger,

*Taffrail writes: 'Pincher Martin committed his soul to his maker [...as] the most trivial events and the most important happenings of his short life crowded before him onto his overwrought brain'. In an identical situation, the responses of the two Pinchers are directly contrary. A similar opposition occurs at the conclusion of each fiction. In Taffrail's story, Martin is rescued by a fisherman: in Taffrail's hackneyed phrase, 'from the very jaws of death Pincher Martin stepped ashore'. In Golding's revision, another sort of Fisherman tries to bring about another sort of survival, but there is none. (Tiger, *The Unmoved Target*, 94-95)*

And similarly in spite of close resemblance with Bierce's story, Golding's novel is different from the point of view of ending. According to Leon Surette,

*But even the Bierce short story has proven to be a poor analogue for Pincher Martin, since by the end of the story it is clear that Bierce's protagonist imagines escape and flight in the short moment between the opening of the gallows trapdoor and the snap of his neck. A re-reading of Pincher Martin forces the recognition that it is a post mortem narrative, and not a moment-of-death narrative. (Surette 206)*

Paul Crawford however finds Golding's *Pincher Martin* as the "Biercean colonization of the afterlife or, rather, the last flicker of personal consciousness during which he literally invents hell for himself" (Crawford 88).

That the metaphysical sense of evil also incorporates the historical sense of institutionalised (through personalized) evil of hate, lust, eating with mouth and cock, domination, thievery, exploitation, grabbing and ultimately getting reduced to a pair of inflamed (exhausted) red claws before the black lightning on the tooth-shaped rock becomes an allegory of current condition of colonialism the face of which is now replaced by a snarl. This is achieved through the probing into the consciousness of the dead protagonist *vis-a-vis*

the antagonist in terms of time-past, time-present and the time-future which are all, according to Virginia Tiger,

*... tied into an image of all-time (or no-time). I would argue that in this novel time is not a sequence but a simultaneity, with past, present, and future existing at the same instant, a paradoxical invention that gives the fable both its subject and its form. Pincher's experience on the rock, his ostensible present, exactly parallels the patterns of his past life. Memory flashbacks keep coming across the present, and at certain points what I would term 'Time-Past' is gripped in 'Time-Present'. Similarly, his future pricks at his consciousness. Nathaniel Walteson is a friend from the past, but his spiritual lectures, when recalled, insinuate the very 'Time-Future' that possesses Christopher Hadley Martin. (Tiger, *The Unmoved Target*, 98)*

Virginia Tiger also suggests that the progress of the protagonist through the unravelling of his consciousness happens through the emphasis on his names at relevant time slots, like, Pincher at Time-Present, Chris at Time-Past, and Christopher at Time-Future (Tiger, *The Unmoved Target*, 109-110). What underlies Tiger's analysis of the progress of Pincher's post-mortem consciousness is the progress of a colonialist in the decolonized era (as symbolized by the destruction of the destroyer *Wildebeeste* which was carrying Christopher Martin) when the condition of colonialism itself is like a consciousness set in terms of a flourishing time-past, a clinging-to time-present and a purgatorial time-future. Lee M. Whitehead finds the shades of existentialism in Pincher's classic battle against nothingness (Whitehead 19). According to Whitehead, "By having his protagonist die on the first page, Golding brackets the "vulgar conception of time"" (Whitehead 18). And "Golding's name for whatever it is that creates this world in the instant of death, rather than spirit, or soul, or subjectivity, is simply "the centre", a neutral word that parallels in spatial terms the temporal instant of death" (Whitehead 19). This centre that creates the rock-world with an impulse of colonialism confronts the margin of black lightning. The story moves from building and dominating nature with the common

tools of colonialism to the defeat of the centre which is now unable to hold on to its own creation/domination. And the margin represented the black lightning appears god-like to chastise Pincher sternly, "Have you had enough, Christopher?" (*PM* 200). The following passage from Lee M. Whitehead is a good explanation of the role of the centre *vis-a-vis* the margin:

*We can see what the center is by seeing what it does against the background of the black lightning. Simply to see it doing sets off the contrast, for the black lightning does nothing; it is absolute, without limits, and finally ineluctable. It has simply to wait, for which it has an infinite capacity; the center must busily do in order to maintain a precarious identity. The black lightning, "the ultimate truth of things", is a "positive, unquestionable nothingness" (p. 91). All the doing of the center is assertion, creation, which, by the inner logic of its mode of being, leads inevitably to its own negation. (Whitehead 20)*

Pincher refuses the compassion of the margin, "I shit on your heaven" (*PM* 200), thus refuses an appropriate response/communication with it in a changed time. The time-past and time-present are valorised by Pincher at the expense of time-future. Time-future is the time for a revitalization of the relationship between the centre and the margin which Pincher as centre refuses to submit to. Pincher refuses to admit the margin and lives up to the reality of the centre to the last. Thus the novel "moves from the peripheral reality to the inner reality. Its movement is centripetal" (Lakshmi 35). Paul Crawford finds in Pincher a proto-fascist 'soldier-male' Nazi-like totalitarian personality (Crawford 92) and comments,

*As Christopher has eaten others, he too becomes edible – a lobster—subject to the annihilation of "black lightning". The tables are turned and he is consumed. Maybe, Golding hopes that totalitarian individuals like Christopher get some of their own medicine before oblivion. All the better that it is self-generated, as history has shown totalitarian regimes to be imaginative torturers. (Crawford 94-95)*

And as Robert Young in *White Mythologies* shows, citing Aime Cesaire and Franz Fanon, that fascism is the inward movement of colonialism, that fascism “can be explained quite simply as European colonialism brought home to Europe by a country [Germany] that had been deprived of its overseas empire after World War I” (Young, Robert 8). The life of Pincher Martin traverses both fascism as happens in his past life and colonialism as happens in his afterlife.

Critics have also pointed out the unconventional nature of Golding's tale of survival as a post-mortem narrative. The novel opens with Pincher struggling to survive in the watery wreck of his destroyer after it was destroyed in a torpedo attack and removes his seaboots (*PM* 10), but at the end it becomes clear from the conversation between Campbell and Davidson that there is no question of surviving, that Pincher “didn't even have time to kick off his seaboots” (*PM* 208). Such a trick-ending undoes the very logic of the action of the novel, simply because the action did not actually happen, or happened only in the mind, which is a matter of suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader. However, the logic of this strange tale of Pincher getting racked on an afterlife rock lies in the allegorical portrayal of the post-mortem survival of the centre at the margin of doom, as Pincher's mind shows extraordinary resoluteness of not to die, “I won't die./I can't die./Not me ---/Precious” (*PM* 14). And soon after the initial shock, suffering and bewilderment, he conjures up a tooth-shaped rock island for his survival and continuation. This rock is in the shape of a tooth which his mouth has lost. The creation of this tooth-island is to fill in the gap in his mouth, the mouth that has been a parable of eating and gorging. On the rock he continues to gorge sea anemones and mussels, as earlier he had eaten human beings at will, the past and present life merge in simultaneity, only to discover the serpent and poison in his bowels and the need to disgorge things by way of purgation. On the rock, parable of colonisation takes on a geographical colonisation. And this is done by invoking the

narrative of great heroes, Prometheus, Atlas, Ajax, Ahab, Lear and others, with background music of Tchaikovsky, Wagner and Holst. What becomes more important to Martin in his business of survival on the rock is the preservation of his identity and he shows great concern for his identity disc. He devotes himself to perpetuate his identity, ““Christopher Hadley Martin. Chris. I am what I always was!”” (PM 76). The novel is often considered by critics as a parody of *Robinson Crusoe* and the Prometheus myth, but it becomes a parody of Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* as well where an old fisherman struggles hard to catch a huge Marlin in order to prove to the world that he is not finished as a fisherman, “man is not made for defeat... A man can be destroyed but not defeated” (Hemingway 89) and the old man remains defiant to the sharks, the forces of his destruction, to the last.

The novel moves along with a racy narrative as a tale of survival, as Pincher gets set to the business of organising things. First he starts looking at the rock of colonialism closely as his hope of rescue fades:

*A single point of rock, peak of a mountain range, one tooth set in the ancient jaw of a sunken world, projecting through the inconceivable vastness of the whole ocean--- and how many miles from dry land? An evil pervasion, not the convulsive panic of his struggles in the water, but a deep and generalized terror set him clawing at the rock with his blunt fingers. (PM 30)*

Like the boys in *Lord of the Flies* he tries to remember the name of the rock-island on the Queen's map, but what he remembers is the captain's calling the rock 'a near miss' (PM 31) which in maritime terminology means nothing. This is how the margin is set up, to borrow Chinua Achebe's famous words for the European representation of Africa, as a foil to the centre, a place of negation, “it is the desire – one might indeed say the need – in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negotiations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest”

(Achebe 251-52). “The rock was negative. It confined his body so that here and there the shudders were beaten; not soothed but forced inward” (PM 48). In Martin’s existential postcontamination, Rockall turns into Fuck-all, an antithesis of Love-all, a denial of the Blakean divine image consisting of mercy, pity, love and charity. In his purgatory of the rock, Martin is made to remember all his victims, especially Nathaniel Walterson, Golding’s saint-figure in this novel and Nathaniel’s beloved Mary Lovell whose surname sounds like Love-Well or Love-All, both were crudely victimised by Martin, Mary was raped and Nathaniel was hated most by Martin yet he wants to teach the fallen Martin the “technique of dying into heaven” (PM 71). Martin existential postcontamination is formed with these two poles of Love-all and Fuck-all, as Lee M. Whitehead points out,

*Lovell – love all – versus Fuckall, a plenitude versus a total nothingness, the genuine article versus its obscene reduction, are the two poles that meet at the centre. Christopher’s mode of life has been an obscenity; his death is its purge. If the primary metaphor of his mode of life is eating, the primary metaphor for the “technique of dying,” as Nathaniel calls it, from Christopher’s world is elimination. Eating and defecating, as we saw earlier, are associated in Christopher’s mind with pride and survival. (Whitehead 25)*

And thus he settles down to fill into this nothingness of the rock with his identity of a conqueror. In a parody of Genesis, Martin creates his surrounding by imposing his geography to defeat the margin. The terminology he uses is replete with a sense of aggression and domination, for example, he uses the technique of naming as a tool of subjugation, a colonialist’s prerogative:

*“I am busy surviving. I am netting down this rock with names and taming it. Some people would be incapable of understanding the importance of that. What is given a name is given a seal, a chain. If this rock tries to adapt me its ways I will refuse and adapt it to mine. I will impose my routine on it, my geography. I will tie it down with names. If it tries to annihilate me with blotting-paper, then I will speak in*

*here where my words resound and significant sounds  
assure me of my own identity.” (PM 86-87)*

He minutely observes and describes the different parts and holes on the rock to be a master of whatever he observes. He names the three rocks as Oxford Circus, Piccadilly and Leicester Square, and erects a rock called Dwarf as a rescue signal for any passing ship. As the lord of the rock, he makes familiar movements, “He backed out of the water-hole, climbed the High Street and stood on the Look-out by the Dwarf...listened to the faint movement from the invisible aery half-way down Gull Cliff. He went down the High Street, came to his crevice” (PM 87). There is Prospect Cliff, there is Red Lion, there is Food Cliff and there is Safety Rock. He overcomes fear by imagining and inventing a cosy familiarity with his surroundings. He insists on presence, voice, wakefulness and thinking as a way of overcoming the fear. He assures himself of his power of education and intelligence to defeat the margin and his perceived Antagonist.

Speech is identity.

“You are all a machine. I know you, wetness, hardness, movement. You have no mercy but you have no intelligence. I can outwit you. All I have to do is to endure. I breathe this air into my own furnace. I kill and eat. There is nothing to ---”

“There is nothing to fear” (PM 115)

He works real hard and uses his intelligence to improvise his shelter, hunting his food, gathering drinking water, he even does “a real engineering job” (PM 128) by building what he calls the Claudian aqueduct. He makes a small pool of water to let a small fish live there. He develops an animosity with the sea-gulls, the inhabitants of the rock, and he finds them floating like reptiles. Little does he understand that he is ensnared in and by the elements of nature. He becomes confused between being and non-being. All the time he was sure about his identity, his being and his becoming, “I am who I was” (PM 131). But now he becomes uneasy about a gap, a delusion, a madness setting in, “Bright rock and sea, hope, though

deferred, heroics. Then in the moment of achievement, the knowledge, the terror like a hand falling” (*PM* 169). The sign of his mental disintegration appears in his seeing a red lobster and insoluble guano. From a heroic figure that he thinks himself to be, he mind passes to the Bedlamite, Poor Tom of the Shakespearean tragedy, *King Lear*. And he faces the storm of his struggle for survival as the centre now enters into a mortal combat with the margin and its grand manifestation, the black lightning. The real becomes merged with the textual as the sea “stopped moving, froze, became paper, painted paper that was torn by a black line” (*PM* 200). The entire rock island becomes a papery stuff, “there was no more than an island of papery stuff round the claws and everywhere else there was the mode that the centre knew as nothing” (*PM* 201). Buffeted by the storm and the black lightning, the centre is reduced to red claws locked against nothingness. Pincher or the claws “were outlined like a night sign against the absolute nothingness and they gripped their whole strength into each other. The serrations of the claws broke. They were lambent and real and locked” (*PM* 201). Thus Pincher ends up destroyed as broken claws.

In his survival and domination of the rock through six-day creation from nothingness Pincher regularly remembers his past performance as Pincher. Although it is part of the narrative technique of revealing Pincher's past life, it is also the way that Pincher draws strength by remembering how he had ‘eaten’ Pete, Helen, Peter, Mary and Nathaniel. The unethical nature of Pincher's past life is highlighted by means of what he inflicts on his victims egotistically and sadistically. Especially Nathaniel and Mary become a foil to Pincher's aggression in his past life, as the rock becomes a foil to his colonising spirit in his afterlife. “As the flashbacks to the past accumulate the world they reveal was ‘eat or be eaten’, and in that world the man on the rock, Pincher Martin, was, for the moment, king” (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 128). Past plays a big role in Golding's novels. The boys in *Lord of the Flies* try to build a ‘civilisation’ on their island and draw inspiration and strength from

their British consciousness, the books in the tradition of island stories, *Treasure Island*, *Swallows and Amazon*, *Coral Island* etc., the role of these books in shaping their outlook of civilisation is undeniable, and this outlook is in the line of the British imperialism. If Golding's novels can be read as tragedies, then the lack of regard for the sanctity of life and values of the Other can be regarded as the prominent tragic flaw. This tragic flaw of trampling down the Other is highlighted in all the novels, particularly in novels like *The Inheritors* and *Free Fall*. Failure to accept the Other is considered evil in Golding's vision of life. The Orientalist orientation and attitude of the centre towards the margin is the original sin that besets humanity. A racial memory of the Fall and the textuality of Orientalism merge in *Pincher Martin*. Paul Crawford has analysed the papery quality of reality and existence that Martin creates on the rock:

*Christopher's annihilation is prefaced by an engraved image in the rock of the "black lightning" (PM, 91) that destroys him. The image fittingly resembles "bookworm" (PM, 177) and reasserts the textual construction and indeed deconstruction of Christopher, his "rock," and Golding's novel itself. Ultimately, Christopher's reality breakdown is a recognition of textuality and its ultimate, illusory status: "There was nothing in writing!" (PM, 199). This whole final scene tears like paper: "The sea stopped moving, froze, became paper, painted paper that was torn by a black line" (PM, 200). In a frightening collapse of constructed reality, the sea is "erased like an error" and the "lines of absolute blackness" interrogate and dismantle the "rock" that "proved to be as insubstantial as the painted water" (PM, 201). The self-cancelling potential of words is remorselessly exhibited as the last square of engraved rock is obliterated by "black lines" (PM, 201). Eventually, the "island of papery stuff" is removed to leave a pair of kitsch claws "outlined like a night sign against the absolute nothingness" (PM, 201). (Crawford 88-89)*

In Golding's view, the centre is a mechanism of organising or patterning or erecting reality, and this is metafictional, the centre is

the author, the authority; the creation of reality is like writing or engraving or painting, that is to say, a form of textuality. And in the act of writing or expanding, the centre meets the nothingness or darkness of the margin. The margin remains a challenge, a threat to his identity; the centre and its writing is always in danger of getting obliterated, erased and torn apart. Faced with this danger, the centre is reduced to a pair of inflamed and stubborn claws. Whatever the claws extract from the margin, are all disgorged and taken away by nothingness.

A novel's vision of life is highlighted by the images it deploys to elucidate certain incidents in the narrative. Two important images that *Pincher Martin* deploys are the cellar image and the jam-jar glass sailor image connected with Pincher's childhood. Cellar is "the dark place from which he had climbed away into life" (Delbaere-Garant, "From Cellar to the Rock", 501). Facing imminent death on the rock, Martin starts to rewind his life, "If one went step by step – ignoring the gap of dark and the terror on the lip – back from the rock, through the Navy, the stage, the writing, the university, the school, back to bed under the silent caves, one went down to the cellar. And the path led back from cellar to the rock" (*PM* 173). Pincher's perception of the movement from cellar to the rock is a kind of epigenesis. According to Delbaere-Garant, "the two extremes of birth and death are seen as the two sides of one coin" and they constitute "the two ends of a circle closing upon itself in *Pincher Martin*" (Delbaere-Garant, "From Cellar to the Rock", 510). The rock becomes his nemesis, the death-incarnate for the fat maggot. The journey from cellar to the rock is tracked with the image of the Chinese Box, Pincher's eating career which is marked by his climbing up over the "used, defeated or 'eaten'" (Delbaere-Garant, "William Golding's *Pincher Martin*", 541) bodies of his victims, eventually to become the only fat maggot. On the rock he re-enacts this climbing up and down in order to avoid death but realizes that there is no more height to climb, that he has reached his dead-end, "his struggle against death is mostly expressed in terms of

climbing up and sliding down, up to survival, down to the cellar, the well of darkness, the “thing” on which, from birth on, he had turned his back” (Delbaere-Garant, “From Cellar to the Rock”, 506). Moreover, he realizes that it was his fate to be the successful fat maggot, the jam-jar glass sailor allowed to float or sink by controlling the air pressure, a pressure that constituted his fate. From the claustrophobia of the cellar, he moves to agoraphobia of the rock. He becomes aware of “more and more weight, a ‘ponderous squeezing. Agoraphobia or anyway the opposite of claustrophobia. A pressure’ – the vast pressure of the heavens on the glass sailor” (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 142). In the storm the rock becomes the image of bedlamite chaos. Pincher’s relation with the rock is like the relation between sanity and insanity, between order and chaos, between wakefulness and sleep. Pincher tries to affirm his identity/survival on the rock in terms of sanity, order and wakefulness. He wanted to civilize the rock; now the rock starts looking frightening to him, as it appears no more than an aching tooth. He stands like a rock of order and sanity, but he is inundated by the sea waves of chaos and insanity.

Thus the most dramatic scene that happens in the novel is Martin’s confrontation of the black lightning in his hallucination. And the black lightning asks him, “Have you had enough, Christopher?” (*PM* 194). This is a parallel to Simon’s confrontation of the Beast in his hallucination in *Lord of the Flies*, in which Simon is told by the Lord of the Flies:

*“Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!” said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. “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?” (LF 177)*

The Beast identifies itself as part of Simon and all mankind to illustrate Golding’s thesis that the Beast is not outside but within man, that evil is part of humanity. Similarly, although in a direction opposite to Simon’s experience, Martin considers the black lightning

as “a projection of my mind” (*PM* 194). Although evil is universal and mankind suffers from an always already postcontamination but Golding makes a distinction and indicts more the educated, intelligent and the enlightened centre of civilization, than the unenlightened margin of primitivism, because it is on the enlightened centre the responsibility of preventing the commencement of evil lies. Talking about the atrocities in the Second World War he makes this distinction clear in his essay ‘Fable’, “They were not done by the headhunters of New Guinea, or by some primitive tribe in the Amazon. They were done, skilfully, coldly, by educated men, doctors, lawyers, by men with a tradition of civilization behind them, to beings of their own kind” (Golding, *Hot Gates*, 87). Golding’s indictment is evidently against the enlightened centre than the unenlightened margin. This is evident in his first three novels. In *Pincher Martin*, he cuts open and dismantles the heart and head of a modern, rational, enlightened consciousness in order to show the extent of the deep-rooted psychological centring of colonialism.

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