

The Two Deaths of Pincher Martin

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Abstract

Pincher Martin, like that of *Robinson Crusoe* concentrates on the individual realization of the past during his last hour facing death after his ship is torpedoed. Clung on to a rock, out of his sheer desire to survive, he realizes his power of will and self-assertion fails to rescue him, as evil has been manifested within himself. He is a dominant person on the world of eating and killing where his selfish inferno shadows metaphorically the absence of innocence. Golding again highlights the conflict of sinful life and realizes that there are really challenging powers in the world. Golding being a spiritual man brings in the idea that "God" is our everything and he is our refuge and Golding gives a solution God is the thing we turn away from into life, and therefore we hate and fear him and make a darkness there.

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Pincher Martin, the most extravagant of Golding's novels depicts the realistic indomitable struggle of survival of Lt. Christopher Martin awaiting rescue when his ship is torpedoed in Atlantic during the Second World War. To Peter John, *Pincher Martin* is essentially "a story of a dead man" (*Pincher Martin* will be hereafter quoted as PM 589). Pincher kicks off his sea boots in the first chapter to stay away from drowning and shortly he tears apart his lifebelt but toward the end of the novel; it is made clear that he has drowned after he has inflated his life belt. It is Pincher's exploration of his whole past at the moment of his death. As the novel subtitled *The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin* in an omniscient view makes the second death of Christopher Martin real. Hynes relatively points out "Golding has used the man against the sea convention just as he used the desert island convention in *Lord of the Flies* to provide a system of expectations against which to construct a personal and different version of the shape of the things" (PM 26)

After Pincher's ship get torpedoed he manages to reach a barren rock and fights for his survival on a small island Rockall. Pincher Martin keeps himself alive for six days and in the course of time he retraces his past, at the end of which he is caught in a violent storm and perishes. His recollections reveal to us his moral struggle. It deals with the physical suffering of man fighting against death in the middle of the Atlantic. Pincher Martin denounces God and he accepts the tortures on the rock. He is face to face with the image of death which triggers in him introspective memory of his sinful life, dwindling into a sort of delirium. Pincher Martin's life as delineated by Golding in the novel is full of terror and decadence. Pincher refuses to die at the moment and he has clung to a rock and undergoes a series of metaphysical suffering. A series of flashbacks shows Pincher to be greedy, lecherous and selfish. Pincher is selfish as the new people in *The Inheritors* and they follow rules out of fear and cowardice and they forgo with their desires even risking punishments.

Man is created in the form of God and he has been given every privilege to act according to the will of God. The choice to choose between good and evil determines his accurate nature. Pincher gives importance for his own life. Pincher Martin creates his own world on the rock where he is struggling hard against the odds in his life. S.J.Boyd observes:

The rock is the world Chris created or chose or Willed his own will being "like a monolith" (PM 163) there is only the self and the desires which torture that self, a world devoid of satisfaction, fulfilment, peace or love a world where God is rejected and crucified for sin; that world is Chris life in microcosm and it is hell. (PM 55)

He centres everything in regard with his own life and all the other living beings are mere "things" to him. He does not give importance to meaningful human interrelationships for he is proud, arrogant, vile and savage when dealing with his friends. He used his relationships as limpets to climb as a safety rock to extend his ambition. His zero belief in God and his disbelief in purgatory encouraged his existence in vile and he clings to it against the arguments of heaven. He clings to the bad deeds as he clings to the rock and he neglects to have the purgation of self. He refuses to die when the moment arrives and he undergoes a traumatic metaphysical suffering. The incidents that happen in the Atlantic are not real for it is Martin's ravenous ego that makes him invent a rock and endure during his last time. It is Martin's sub conscious that brings in the

forgotten memories of the past that frequently crops up his ego now and then. A flood of connected images came back (PM9) and he became conscious “he knew who he was and where he was” (PM 10). Unaware he is dead he keeps busy netting down his survival technique by materializing the world he inhabits:

I am busy surviving. I am netting down this rock with names and taming it.... If this rock tries to adapt me to 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....I will use my brain as a delicate machine-tool to produce the results I want. (PM 86-87)

Like Golding’s other novels, Martin’s loneliness and his association with air, wind, and darkness make him stay away from civilization and only in memory he comes to social contact. Loneliness gives a chance for man to have self-realization but he is very determined and intends to keep up his. It is ultimately the state of soul after death. He clings to the rock and explores it and manages to discover drinking water and he also piles up stones and baptizes it as “dwarf” to attract the rescue troop. Golding neatly shows up the working of his conscious mind intended on his survival He thought. The thoughts were laborious, disconnected but vital. Presently it will be daylight. I must move from one point to another. Enough to see one move ahead.Presently it will be daylight. I shall see wreckage. (PM 14)

Martin is filled with terror of staying alone and it is nothing but the extension of self dominant past experience. The barren rock is again the repulsion of Martin’s nature, devoid of love and compassion dredges him to experience his last moments of his life in isolation. He feels that his life alone on rock is unendurable and he cries “I’m so alone Christ I’m so alone ...The centre formulated a thought. Now there is no hope. There is nothing. If they would only look at me, or speak -- if I could only be a part of something” (PM 181-82). The island that Martin has created is a projection of his missing tooth:

He looked solemnly at the line of rocks and found himself thinking of them as teeth. He caught himself imagining that they were emerging gradually from the jaw-but that was

not the truth. They were sinking; or rather they were being worn away in infinite slow motion. They were the grinders of old age, worn away. (78)

He feels that the rock is so familiar and understands what is so “hauntingly familiar and painful about an isolated and decaying rock in the middle of the sea”(PM174).His callous experience in the past and the infliction of others envisage a post-mortem narrative throughout. Martin has great trouble in infringing on the legal code. Knowledge and intelligence stems negative emotions like greed, jealousy, revenge and pride. Martin claims “I am intelligent” (PM 3) even when he is a living human sufferer in the middle of an ocean. He feels that his knowledge would lead him for survival when he thinks: “I have to fight to survive-then I can manage” (PM 84). As a god defying and faithless person, Martin has no fear in God and leads amoral life designing a set of queer rules. He does not have special emotions towards a friend or enemy. His past life reveals himself to be guilty of rape, seduction, murder and maiming. One of the characters comments Pincher Martin as “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 wide open and both hands out to grab. He’s a cosmic case of the bugger who gets his penny and someone else’s bun” (120). Hence Golding himself calls him “a fallen man... Very much fallen—he’s fallen more than most” (Hynes 132).

Martin’s knowledge seems to be twisted as a parachutist’s harness and leads to destruction rather than to salvation. He believes that his intelligence can make him survive but what Golding puts forth is man’s basic selfless qualities which are essential key factors that lead him towards salvation. Love and compassion is a mocking factor to Martin and he is denied of it at the end. He attempts to murder Nathaniel for his failure in seducing Mary. He even pretends to kill them both in order to have her. He carries on an affair with the producer’s wife , Helen in order to get the roles he wanted that is to keep him out of military service. He cripples his friend on his bid to win the motor cycle race. His hatred towards Nathaniel is zipped off when the destroyer is torpedoed off in the ocean. His last scrupulous act of drowning Nathaniel makes him face what he intends to do in the real world. Golding has designed Nathaniel as a Christ Figure with intuitive knowledge (Broes 11). Martin’s aggressive nature “think about eating women, eating men, crunching up Alfred, that other girl, that boy...” (90). Eating leads to

gluttony and once again the eating is also emphasized on eating anemones and mussels on the rock to keep him alive till he is rescued. He must eat to live and the burning desire to live forces him to eat what is available to him on the rock and it is obviously the paradigm of the life that he lived in the past:

The whole business of eating was peculiarly significant.... 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... (PM 88)

The love for Nathaniel is great that Martin likes him more than anyone else but he plans to kill him when he feels jealous that he is growing more powerful than him when he joins the navy especially when he wins Mary's love. The plot that he weaves to drown Nathaniel chills the marrow bones of the readers. Nathaniel Walteson , the only close friend of Pincher Martin has symbolic relation with Pincher's mind commenting on this relation Samuel Hynes remarks " The existence of his friend Nathaniel is interwoven with Pincher's in the way that good is interwoven with evil, dark with light " (PM 30). He decides to give a sudden warning to indulge the ship a quick turn and plunge Nathaniel into the sea. It is only the cuckolded director who knows that Martin is bound up under masks to cover his identity. On casting in a morality play the director recommends Christopher the role of Pride. He asks his friend "What about Pride, George? He could play that with-out a mask and just stylized make-up, couldn't he?" (PM 119).He knows that Martin grabs the best of everything and hence he finally settles on greed and addresses him "Think you can play Martin, Greed?" (PM 120).This confirms that Martin grabs everything where he lays his hands on. In isolation the centre in himself tries to shape up his identity that is filled with contempt and disbelief

The centre, looking in this reversed world over the binnacle, found itself be set by a storm of emotions, acid and inky and cruel... so unwillingly loved for the face that was always rearranged from within, for the serious attention, for love given without thought, should also be so quiveringly hated as though he were the only enemy. There was amazement that to love and to hate were now one thing and one emotion.(PM 103)

He stays as a maggot swollen with the sufferings of others and as a real 'Chinese box' unable to dug himself out of consumption. "For an instant he felt himself falling; and then there came a gap of darkness in which there was no one" (PM 167). It is very clear at the few pages of the novel that Christopher Martin is dead but the narrative weaves a story indicating "nothing but another step on which one must place the advancing foot" (149). He accuses God for his free will and the hallucinations.

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 that same bridge, at that same time, giving that same order (PM 180).

He also adds "If I ate them, who gave me a mouth?" (197). The memories of Mary keep flickering in his mind as fragments in a "Chinese box" and after the act of futility he wants to possess her and promises to marry but her attraction towards Nat makes him feel "Eaten". Martin imagines and associates himself with the Promethean figure and refuses to die and he is deprived of salvation. Like Atlas he is made to stand with weight of the sky overhead and like Prometheus he is struggling to survive on a barren rock. Prometheus struggles for the goodness of humanity but Martin defying his own fate cries out "I am Atlas. I am Prometheus" (PM 164). Peter Green sees Pincher Martin as a Promethean figure, as one who "sums up every quality that distinguishes man from the beasts" (90). And to add to this Golding comments on the denial of Purgatorial stay in an interview:

He is not fighting for bodily survival but for his continuing identity in the face of what will smash it and sweep 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. (Kermode 60)

Only as a driven factor he joined the navy and he cannot be claimed to be compared with the great legends Prometheus or Odysseus for he has not done any heroic deeds. He has lived for his own cause and has done things for personal gains. The mythic legend Prometheus is saved and redeemed of his good deeds towards humans though he flouted the Gods. The claw appearance in his body remembers that Martin unlike Prometheus nurtured his own proud egoistic self where

he grabs at every opportunity and did not build anything fruitful. His resistance to death is amazing for he struggled “spat and snarled” (PM 42). The arrival of Davidson and Campbell who found the body finds that he did not have time to suffer for he did not have time to kick off his sea boots. Martin struggles to die and he says “ I’m damned if I die”(PM 72). The ordeal on the rock is an earthly experience that he has created in his subconscious mind. He could not separate his self from reality for “sleep was a consenting to die, to go into complete unconsciousness, the personality defeated” (PM 91). He always wants himself to be adored as a hero , for he thinks that if he dies his personality gets defeated and he wants to fight the rock as he fought in the sea during the war. He suffers because he has neglected the redemption of his soul and keeps his soul damned. As in Genesis , Martin has been suffering for six days and on the final day he is struck by a lightening and he finally dies . The rock has been designed by Golding as a symbol of purgatory but it is the arrogance self that Martin is denied of it

His friend Nathaniel , a religious man warns him of God and the preparation that he has to undertake to travel to heaven after death. He teaches Martin to die in the grace of God. The sort of heaven we invented for ourselves after death, if we aren't ready for the real one. Take us as we are now and heaven would be a sheer negation. His ego does not allow him to shed the world that he has created for himself and is completely blind to the basic instincts of human life and he thus flouts the will of God. When the black lightening strikes he tells “I spit on your compassion!” (199). Samuel Hynes shows Martin as a person where “good is interwoven with evil, dark with light”(30). This novel is particularly a vision of evolution that the modern man is undergoing. He is not sure of the reason of his suffering as Martin suffers on the rock. People are able to accept a change but they are not prepared for a revolution. Man is caught between the area of his consciousness and his environment. An apocalyptic vision is foreseen when Pincher is bereft of humility and when he continues to stand on his evil deeds without remorse. He preserves his identity on the price of death. Annihilation by loss of innocence is again what Golding tries to impose on the minds of the readers. When innocence is lost , there is no chance of realizing the reality within and it inspires only fear and Martin could not merge with the most peaceful glorious thing at the end. Leighton Hodson comments on the novel as “*The Spire* is the

finest symbolic expression of Golding's intention to make people understand their own humanity" (96).

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