CHAPTER - IV

THE SEARCH FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

I. Introduction
II. Pincher Martin
III. Free Fall
IV. The Spire
V. The Pyramid
VI. Rites of Passage
VII. Close Quarters
VIII. Fire Down Below
IX. Conclusion
Chapter - IV

THE SEARCH FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

I

The theme of investigation in all the novels of Golding is the phenomenon called Man. According to Golding human nature is neither purely good nor purely evil. Man is a combination of beastly elements, human elements and spiritual elements. But the job of a writer, as Golding says, is to make man aware of his humanity. Accordingly, we find in Golding's characters a state of experience called primal innocence, untouched by the sophistications of conscious discrimination. Though, we all know, that man has progressed in proportion to his progress in conscious discrimination called knowledge, Golding regards this man's rise to consciousness as a sort of fall or degradation. Becoming aware of the inner workings and strategies and the goals to be achieved and the hurdles in the way of this achievement is the problem of self-knowledge. To be honest to oneself is to become self-aware of the activities of the various elements - the beast (passion), the reason, the humanity, the spirituality. In actual life, depending upon the predominance of any of these elements, each element is engaged in taking revenge on the others, whenever there is the absence of their
balanced harmony. Golding, in his novels wants to make us aware of the implications of this struggle for revenge. Humanity can ignore the implications of such a revengeful interplay of these elements at a great cost to itself. Leighton Hodson says, "The whole truth is with neither side—passions in the ascendency lead to violence and suffering; reason in the ascendency is bound to fail human nature since the unruly passions must bubble up. This is reflected in varying subtle ways in the novels against a wide background of human experience, and the tragic thing that is illuminated is the general unwillingness to admit a failing on one side or the other". E.g. Lord of the Flies shows how Jack and his choir are set against the steady-minded Ralph and Piggy. The Inheritors shows how the rational in the new men helps the oppression against the Neanderthals. In Free Fall, Sammy displays the dominance of passions and desires. In all this, Golding's main purpose is to analyse the motives of human behaviour in so far as they have a fundamental bearing on the main theme of good evil in his novels.

A great merit of Golding's literary genius lies in showing how perceptiveness in "making the reader re-experience basic

feelings and urges that he will be esteemed". As a writer, Golding's virtue "is precisely to underline the need for self-awareness, the need to look evil in the face and root out self-deception - all being themes he fully realises as fiction so as to make them, even if unpleasant, unforgettable". Golding says, "in all the books I have suggested a shape in the universe that may, as it were, account for things. The greatest pleasure is not say - sex or geometry - it is just understanding. And if you can get people to understand their own humanity - well - that's the job of a writer".

These words of Golding make it clear that understanding the interplay of raw passions and other elements of man's nature is the theme of his work. In other words, the motives and behaviour of the various characters are meant to understand the darkness in the heart of man, and bring to man a serenity of self-knowledge which frankly accepts the human condition: "Life is both a fine thing and a corrupt thing, both sunny and dark". The nobility of man stares the beast in the face rather than pose as though it does not exist. In Pincher Martin, Golding

2. Ibid., p.17.
3. Ibid., p.17.
takes us down into the cellars of Pincher's mind and shows us what he must face there. In this encounter, man comes to know his own internal enemies and friends and their strengths and weaknesses. The development of concrete and individual character thus illustrates the importance, and even the necessity, of self-knowledge. A man is his own worst enemy; no other can do him such dire injury as that which he can inflict upon himself. If he would discover the enemy in his ambush, therefore, he must carefully explore and spy out the secret places of his own nature. He must discover his peculiar bias, and watch keenly its growing or decreasing strength. He must often "recollect" himself and reckon up the gain and loss, the victory and defeat, in this inner combat with himself. And he must act in the light of this self-knowledge, with all the prudence of a general who calculates nicely the forces of the enemy and compares their numbers with his own. If a natural impulsive passion claims us as exclusively its own, if it enslaves us, then, the necessity is laid upon us to deny that impulse, to starve it, and, it may be, even to kill it outright. The most perfect mastery of impulse comes with the guidance of all its energy into the path of our positive life purpose. The balanced harmony of the various elements of man's nature is the outcome of their co-ordination and control. The danger of insurrection has almost disappeared. It is from idle impulse
that there is danger. The fire of a consuming purpose, thus, has purified the dull ore of all their natural sensibilities. Not, till the depths of our nature are thus stirred and all the energy of its native passion captivated by rational purpose, is the work of self-discipline through self-knowledge made perfect. The forces of nature are not merely checked and conquered; they are engaged in the service of an end which can utilise them all, and whose service is perfect freedom from the bondage of mere unregulated impulse. Here again, we see the need of self-knowledge: we need to know the positive, as well as the negative significance of our individuality. And such a knowledge of what we can do is at the same time, a knowledge of what we cannot do; a knowledge of our individual capacity is at the same time a knowledge of our individual limitation. The true 'practice' of a human being is not that in which he discharges best a task which has no essential relation to himself; it is that which calls forth and develops all his human powers, the man in the man, i.e., sub specie aeternitatis.

Golding's ideal of man is that, man must come to terms with the "cellarage". The character of Jocelin in the novel The Spire, "throughout his life, has been wearing his body out in avoiding, Golding implies, that this is the furthest one can go in self-knowledge. But by bringing this self-knowledge to Jocelin on his death-bed he further implies that its practical
application in the ordinary run of existence is too difficult". According to Golding, it requires, highest courage to look at darkness in the face and "come to terms with the ignoble within us, which is potentially destructive of our humanity". But, for Golding's ideal of man, the full knowledge of life, of the truth, cannot survive in the full reality of ordinary existence. Pincher Martin and Sammy Mountjoy are brought to the verge of self-knowledge and no further. Those who cross the boundary must die, as Simon must and Jocelin must. In all this, Golding is externalizing our internal problems, constantly reminds us and makes us re-experience those problems. But, it is unwise to expect him to solve those problems for us in so far as each one's problem is unique, and, therefore, has to solve it in his own way. Fortunate indeed is he to whom a thorough understanding of his own nature and an appropriate course of circumstances open up the path of realization of his individuality. With too many, their career is a routine matter leaving their deeper nature idle and unemployed. The true course of the self-development of most people have to face all the storm and stress of passion and of circumstance, the fiery time of youth and the deadening effect of years. This problem has to be solved by each one for himself.

In so far as the forces of the rebel nature are concentrated, at some one point or at a few points varying

6. Ibid., p.22.
7. Ibid., p.25.
according to the peculiarity of each individual's nature. Such storm of passion represents evil for the man; at this point the battle must be fought, here it must be lost or won. The struggle is not with evil in general, or with the nature in the abstract; it is with this particular form of evil, it is with our own nature, or "besetting" sin. For example, the struggle of the miser is with cupidity and of the lazy and the luxurious, with the love of ease. In other words, the task is always one of self-conquest in the light of self-knowledge.

And as the natural self of each is different from that of his neighbour, the moral task is always very concrete and individual. In his work, Golding's task is to create characters exhibiting in varying degrees of intensity and proportion, the interaction between passion (greed, lust, hate, jealousy, selfishness, pride, revenge etc.), reason, intuitive understanding and various other elements in man's nature, with a view to make us re-experience those very things which these characters are face to face with. Golding's handling of this theme is always controlled by a larger ideal of living in harmony within oneself, with others and the universe as a whole. Thus, the meaning of search for self-knowledge and awareness being the first step towards resolution and redemption is discussed in the next section.
A detailed analysis of the theme of search for self-knowledge is treated with reference to the novels — Pincher Martin, Free Fall, The Spire, The Pyramid, and a trilogy comprising of Rites of Passage, Close Quarters and Fire Down Below. How all these novels having the basic themes of self-understanding are planned on the progression towards this moment, from complete blindness to illumination is shown at length in this section.

II

Pincher Martin

Golding's writing about school boys, Neanderthalers and dead sailor appears to be a simple means of throwing a light on contemporary human nature. He believes that the only hope for humanity is self-knowledge, attained and practised by the individual. In an interview for Books and Art (March, 1958) he made it clear that the basic problem of modern humanity, in his view, was that of learning to live fearlessly with the natural chaos of existence, without forcing artificial patterns on it. He further asserted to his interviewer: "The difference between being alive and being an inorganic substance is just the proliferation of experience, this absence of pattern".8

Golding wants to scrape off the labels, to destroy the artificial patterns.

Peter Green says, Golding has indissolubly linked the concepts of human knowledge and human evil. But now, we also see that an additional element has been present throughout his work: the Prometheus myth. Man the maker, the inventor, the builder must suffer for his knowledge. Like Piggy, he has stolen fire from heaven. Like Lok, he has eaten the forbidden fruit. Expulsion from Paradise is only the beginning; it leads by slow degrees to the purgatorial caucasian rock, the eagle tearing endlessly at his vitals. So the scene is set for the third, Aeschylean, novel; Pincher Martin. 9

Further, Green quotes Golding's more explicit remark: "Pincher is simply in hell. The whole of Pincher Martin is Pincher's post mortem experience of himself ("Nothing burns in hell but the self"). "Myself am Hell"; "Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it". Again, Green says, from Marlowe to Blake, from Milton to Sartre, echoes of Pincher's self-inflicted purgatory come crowding to the mind. 10

10. Ibid., p.90.
Thus, the focus in this chapter is to trace the pattern of the
moments of Martin's self-awareness as he drifts and floats
among the whirling mass of memories and amnesia, between fantasy
and desire. As the novel progresses, one can see the protagonist's
convergence towards the vortex of recognition.

Golding's *Pincher Martin*, is thus an account of a journey
into the uncharted regions of Martin's being. His journey is
symbolic, representing a process of self-discovery. There are
two poles in Christopher's personality. He is *Pincher Martin*,
grasping, selfish, conniving, as determined to satisfy his
instincts as a lobster. He is *Christopher* - Christ bearer-making
a difficult trip across water, in the manner of Saint Christopher,
as a test of his spiritual potential. As the story develops, he
fails to realize this potential, and so is destroyed.

Christopher, as we have seen him in the previous chapter,
is literally without direction, subject to the motions of waves
and currents. We later learn that these are appropriate
circumstances, for his life has been a meaningless submission to
pressures of pleasure and pain. We see him caught in the
whirlpool of memories in that split of an instant between life
and death. He comes to have a panoramic vision of his past,
and, thus, confronts the truth he has always evaded.
Christopher Martin's lapsing into the past is, however, not just one glance at a distance traversed but a whole series of lost moments he thought existed no more. Martin's moment of illumination is an "infinity of scattered fragments in the fields of his vision" wherein his past has offered us in a thousand pieces "like a necklace of pearls where the donor at the moment of giving us, breaks the string". The world into which he is thrown after the destruction of his ship is neither familiar nor intelligible.

In the earlier chapter, we have also seen how Martin struggles for survival against all odds, and how he suffers for the wrong assertion of will and pride is seen in this chapter. Golding explains Martin's immediate experience of himself on the rock by an ingenious but effective dissection of the whole man into a number of separate elements. At one extreme is what he calls 'the centre'. For a proper understanding of Golding's theology, a precise definition of what is involved in this word 'centre' would be a primary requisite, but for the moment we may define it simply as the central organizing principle, that which makes a man a man; or, perhaps, the being of a man. Something of the significance of the term may be gathered from the fact that, in the earlier stages of Martin's agony, an intermittent

dissociation occurs between the 'centre' and the man's body. The body is conceived of as an assemblage of component parts which, when there is any weakening or relaxing of the grip of the central organizing principle, are liable to take on a kind of independent existence; so, for example, Martin's hands become increasingly detached from him, looking more and more like lobsters until, in a sense, they are lobsters:

"He eyed the peculiar shapes that lay across the trousers indifferently for a while until at last it occurred to him how strange it was that lobsters should sit there. Then he was suddenly seized with a terrible loathing for lobsters and flung them away so that they cracked on the rock. The dull pain of the blow extended him into them again and they became his hands, lying discarded when he had tossed them" (p.131).

One of Pincher Martin's major endeavours on the rock is to bring these two extremes of 'centre' and body together and so to re-establish himself as a unified human being. The first stage in this process of 're-creation' is the recognition or recollection of his own identity. The operation is slow and painful, beginning even before he kicks off his seaboots when "suddenly he knew who he was and where he was" (p.10).

Through the maelstrom of physical and mental affliction "the groping consciousness" struggles towards the realization
that "wherever you are, you are here!" (p.24). He achieves a major peak in this quest when he recovers his name looking at his identity disc, he speaks "with a kind of astonishment", "Christopher Hadley Martin. Martin Chris. I am what I always was" (p.76). In fact, the recurrence of this thought becomes a refrain so that Martin is keyed up to the note "I am! I am! I am!" (p.145) in such a manner that he cannot think of any other reality. The act of speaking also signifies a material advance in his progress, for "speech is identity" (p.115). In normal life, to talk out loud is a sign of insanity. Here it is "proof of identity" (p.81). Nevertheless, speech does mark an important stage in Pincher's advance because it is the perceptible sign of his power to think.

However, to know oneself is not enough. How long can one exist in an unidentified and nameless landscape? Hence, like Adam in Genesis, Martin goes around naming places. To discover himself he has to abolish relationships with the external world. But he must not lose his hold over the cognitive reality. In that pristine moment, when the consciousness of living is accompanied by the consciousness of having lived, Martin hopes to control the natural forces. He is the primeval consciousness in the initial moments of existence.

"I will speak in here where my words resound and significant sounds assure me of my own identity."
I will trap rain water and add it to this pool.
I will use my brain as a delicate machine tool to produce the results I want. Comfort, Safety, Rescue. If he can think and act, he can be" (p.87).

This newly-gained awareness of his mental resources and intelligence makes him feel like God Himself - a thought which surfaces blatantly in the last but two chapters of the text. But, the knowledge that he has the power to control forces cannot save him from the darkness within. Like the body which, wherever it stumbles, comes back to the crevice, the mind too, after being tossed and turned around, goes back to the centre.

The dark centre gropes along, the walls of tombs, walks through tunnels, runs down the staircase into the cellar, accosting and fleeing from his fear of 'that thing', the dark reality. However much he tries to get away from it, the movement is towards the centre. Somewhere along the line, Martin loses the thread of his discourse, as it were, and asks: "Where the hell am I? Where was I?" It is not the same being who had affirmed his identity and place in the universe at the beginning. He is aware not only of his physical desolation but also of the tricks that his memory is playing upon him - making him forget his existence in time and space. And the anguish which he still does not admit to himself, makes him think of sleep. But to sleep is to annihilate one's self, to transcend time and space,
to forget and to consent to die. As a consequence, in an unguarded moment, the realization of the transience of life flashes upon him. Martin too wants to slip into forgetfulness for some moments: "Oh God! why can't I sleep?" In a mixture of astonishment and terror comes the answer; "I am afraid too" (p.91). He is afraid to touch that which is better left unexamined - the ultimate truth of things - the black lightning. That is what sleep would induce him to face.

The illusion of knowing who he is and where he is, is replaced by the horror of knowing that he is no one and is nowhere. Neither his identity disc, nor his papers, nor his photograph can restore the old Christopher Hadley Martin. He cannot stem the tide of disintegration that his circumstances has released. Whether he looks at his photograph or whether he tries to search for reflection of his face in water, he cannot find himself anywhere. However, Martin is not going to admit that his loss is total and final; the image of the maggot occurs and re-occurs from now onwards.

The longer he witnesses the trailer shots of Nathaniel, of Mary, Pete, and others, the more aware does Martin grow of the acid that he is floating in. The glass figure that was floating in water in the beginning presented the image of a lost being at the mercy of forces beyond him. Now, he is floating in
acid which shows how he's being corroded with the poison of hatred. From this distance in space and time, Martin can look at his reactions to Nathaniel and feel surprised at his emotions:

"There was amazement now that to love and to hate were now one thing and one emotion. Or perhaps they could be separated. Hate was as hate had always been, an acid, the corroding venom of which could be borne only because the hater was strong" (p.103).

Martin finally admits "I am a good hater" (p.103). The realization of the presence of venom in him is the acceptance of his intrinsic self, so that he wishes he were the sailor in that jar, for then nothing could touch him.

An awareness and a realization of his maggot-like existence increases the pressure of his fears; the mind, consequently, begins to ramble. The rock is somehow linked in his memory to the cellar of his childhood days:

"It's like those nights when I was a kid, lying awake thinking that darkness would go on for ever. And I couldn't go back to sleep because of the dream of the whatever it was in the cellar coming out of the corner ..." (p.138).

The ghost in the cellar that he was scared of as a child scares him. He cannot run away from it; he cannot move away. It is as if he were being pulled inside and down into an invincible darkness:
"Drawback the bolt of the vault. Well of darkness. Down, pad, down. Coffin ends crushed in the wall. Under the churchyard back through the death door to meet the master. Down, pad, down" (p.178).

The movement towards the centre quickens as Martin grows more and more aware of himself. Inside the battered and broken body, the self too lives out its hell. Martin's knowledge of his real being is the acknowledgement of the venom that has always been within him: "why drag in good and evil", he questions in one of those rare moments of lucid self-awareness, "when the serpent lies coiled in my own body?" (p.163).

But, if the serpent, the poison, lies within his own body, then he must purge himself of it. He subjects himself to the remedy. And his purgation takes place at two levels: the physical and the spiritual. His body going through the ultimate agony of pain is purged of the food poisoning; his being seems to be purged of the darkness of ignorance that had poisoned so far, "Now I shall be sane and no longer a slave to my body" (p.165).

The awareness and recognition of the nature of his self, however, does not change Martin from his predispositions. He has been a combatant and continues to remain so:

"I have defeated the serpent in my body. I knew I should suffer and I have. But I am winning. There
is a certain sense in which life begins anew now, for all the blotting paper and the pressure" (p.166).

He is ready for an open combat with his antagonist, the black lightning. Like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Martin stands unrepentant, refusing to accept defeat: "What though the field be lost?/ All is not lost". For Martin, the moment of triumphs, is short lived. He puzzles: "What piece have I lost in my game? I had an attack, I was doing well, and then ...." (p.172). All images decompose. Neither speech, nor intelligence is of any avail in face of the gaping dark.

The dark centre confronts the black lightning in the final moment. Heaven is black because Martin created God in his own image "Pincher Martin is hateful", as Colding says, "Therefore God appears to him as hateful". He, Christopher - the Christ-bearer has chosen his own path, made his own heaven. Wherever he turns now, there is darkness:

"Darkness in the corner doubly dark, thing looming, feet tied, near, an unknown looming, an opening darkness, the heart and being of all imaginable terror" (p.179).

It is the darkness of the centre as well as the darkness of impending death. In the grip of this darkness, of this terror,

13. TALK, Conversation with Golding - Jack I Biles, p.76.
Martin comes to realize that it is he who turned his back "On the thing that created it", and that now there is nothing but loneliness and the realization of it: "I am so alone! Christ! I'm so alone!" (p. 181). The centre takes up this thought and repeats it. In spite of this hard bar of steel inside him, Martin weeps. But this will be the only moment of pure remorse in the book:

"Because of what I did I am an outsider and alone"
"I am so alone. I am so alone" (p. 182).

He realizes that he cannot be a part of anything now. This is the final moment of recognition of the inner hell, of the inner darkness that Martin has created. This is also the last moment of his sanity. He might consider himself Prometheus or Ajax; the dark centre, however, is not indestructible. At whatever point he might place himself, Martin will be caught. Memory has still not finished with him. Martin is still being dragged into the vaults. Seeing Nathaniel on the screen of memory is to see his own death "a sort of black lightning, destroying everything that we call life" (p. 183).

The final confrontation between the mad centre and the black lightning is powerful because of its controlled intensity. This is the final moment towards which everything has been moving. Martin stands like Satan defying God, accusing Him of
leading him (Martin) into this corner. Of his own free will, Martin created his own God, chose his own heaven. And, despite the broken body, the tormented self, there is no regret, no seeking for heaven's mercy: "I have considered. I prefer it, pain and all". (p.197). Still clinging to his meaningless identity; he spits on the compassion of heaven only to be destroyed. He makes the act of dying not an act of dying into heaven but of being "erased like an error" by the black lightning which is timeless and merciless in its compassion.

At last Martin begins to "understand the pattern" (p.197). All his endeavours represent an affirmation that he is a man, that man has the equipment - intelligence, education, health, will - necessary for survival as a man, that man can help himself and is not in any sense dependent. Thus, in his last dialogue with the 'hallucination', which has a look of Nat but is evidently a personification of God, Martin insists that he has created out of his own mind, not only this hallucination, but also God Himself:

"On the sixth day he created God. Therefore I permit you to use nothing but my own vocabulary. In his own image created he Him" (p.196).

This is the ultimate ground of Martin's faith in his own autonomy, a faith that is challenged explicitly by God's echoing
of his assertion, "You are a projection of my mind" (p.194). As Martin asserts his own autonomy and independence, the logical and appropriate retribution is for his premises to be accepted and realized. This is the purpose of the 'metaphysical isolation' at which Golding has aimed; to bring his protagonist to the point where he must face his essential contingency.

Golding has played God's game "you gave me the power to choose and all my life you led me carefully to this suffering" is the fierce hammering home of the truth that man must have something on which to operate, a rock to control, a body to nurse and use, a mind to make patterns. For Martin the final horror comes when rock, body and mind all give way and there is left:

"nothing but the centre and the claws. They were huge and strong and inflamed to red. They closed on each other. They contracted. They were outlined like a night sign against the absolute nothingness and they gripped their whole strength into each other" (p.201).

Pincher Martin is consciously aware that he should admit the knowledge of his evil, his darkness, but he will not openly admit his guilt. He feels that man is on the run from times immemorial. He cannot help his selfishness and his appetite for lust and avarice. They are basically driving forces in the
life of a man who has a desire to attain material comfort and social power. They affirm his existence and importance primarily due to his excessive cosmic greed. The perilous process of living is very closely associated with the concept of self-affirmation.

Martin is aware of the difference between good and evil. The flashbacks to his life clearly show the dilemma of a modern man caught between the forces of greed and hunger for power and domination. Martin's inability to attain salvation, is to be read as a warning on contemporary man's inability to achieve any meaningful self-realisation of spiritual vision which seems to constantly elude his perceptive. Once the evil is accepted and becomes a part of human nature, the self of the individual becomes self-less. Loss of self can only mean, as in the case of Martin, a return to dark fearful cellar, which threatens to absorb the self into an endless fathom of doom and destruction.

Pincher Martin is not prepared to accept defeat without offering stiff resistance. What is tragic is he must know that he is forever denying part of the truth and he is incomplete. He must either confront the frightening dark or else torture himself endlessly in a heaven or hell of his own making. True to his reputation Martin remains stubborn and bold, but wrong. He insisted that he could create his own heaven and God told him, "you have created it", Martin's heaven is hell.
The whole shape of Pincher Martin is dictated by a firm, even crude, conviction that "the wages of sin is death", and that man's eternal destiny is ultimately his own responsibility. Nat represented the chance for Martin to become Christopher, the Christ-bearer instead of Pincher, to become a face instead of a snarl, for his hands to link in prayer and not become lobster claws, "huge and strong and inflamed to red" that "closed on each other" and "contracted". But Pincher remains a demonstration of Eliot's assertion that "the glory of man ... is his capacity for damnation". The assertive selfish will that throughout the book gives Martin his heroic quality is not surrendered. He prefers his own "heaven", "pain and all", to the only alternative, "the black lightning" of submission; "I spit on your compassion!" (p.199). "I shit on your heaven!" (p.200). He rejects the challenge of facing the darkness, of admitting man can become self-aware and know the source of evil in himself which is a necessary part of his creation. To admit the evil in human nature would be the surest destruction of Pincher's world and this he will not allow. All that is left of Pincher is his hands like lobster claws and the centre.

Ultimately, the force of God, the lightning, will strike the sinner, and does not give up. It worries at the dead man's hands, now become claws, in order to find a crack in the defences; it bides its time for access to the centre:
"The lightning came forward. Some of the lines pointed to the centre, waiting for the moment when they could pierce it. Others lay against the claws, playing over them, prying for a weakness, wearing them away in a compassion that was timeless and without mercy" (p.201).

The implication of these last lines seem to be that eventually the black lightning of God succeeded in breaking the grip of the claws and Martin's resolution will break and he will submit to God.

III

**Free Fall**

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Sammy Mountjoy, the protagonist-narrator of *Free Fall* lost his innocence and became guilty due to loss of freedom of will. The study in this chapter, confines itself to his quest for self-knowledge. Like the preceding novel, the impact of the work is more in its poetic revelation of a search for self-knowledge, than as a portrait of main character. Both Pincher Martin and Sammy Mountjoy are held in the tormenting vice of the self. For Pincher the experience operates in very special conditions; his defiant self can do no more than hold out in a rear-guard action.
His self-knowledge is certainly too late. For Sammy in *Free Fall* it may be too late but he has survived his ordeal and can speak of it. He can also claim to have been transfigured by his confrontation with his own identity and the presence of evil, and this is the Sammy who tells us in his own words how his understanding of the world and of his own life has been altered. Thus, it is this new Sammy who opens his confession cum self-justification in a series of flashbacks as he searches through the "shuffle fold and coil" (p.6) of time, and conveys his determination to examine himself:

"I have walked by stalls in the market-place where books, dog-eared and faded from their purple, have burst with a white hosanna .... My yesterdays walk with me. They keep step, they are grey faces that peer over my shoulder" (p.5).

Though, this social novel is superficially described as a "lamentable story of seduction" (p.191), it is actually an essentially intransigent study of the basic universal human predicament: "not the relationship of a man to remote posterity nor even to a social system, but the relationship of individual man to individual man" (p.189).

Sammy makes a journey to the interior of self, and the novel deals at one level with resurrection and rebirth. Sammy's dilemma is: Is man to live by a relative or an absolute set of
standards, by one proceeding from within or one proceeding from without? Sammy is an artist, successful and well known - "I hang in the Tate" (p.7); and he is "violently searching" (p.5) for a pattern in his life, for an answer to the question "When did I lose my freedom?" (p.5). His search is the organizing structure of the novel.

Through the narrative, Sammy relates the significant events of his life and attempts to pin down where he has "fallen" or has become conscious of evil and guilt as forces existing within the world and himself. In the attempt, he recalls with increasing clarity the traumatic events of his childhood, adolescence, and youthful maturity.

Sammy was a bastard child, reared in the slums of Rotten Row. Persuaded by a friend when still adolescent to defile the high altar, Sammy was caught in the act and boxed on the ear by the verger. The blow led to his being taken to the hospital; while he was there his mother died. He was then taken to live at the rectory with a neurotic, eccentric priest. At school, Sammy discovered his talent for drawing, and there he first fell in love with Beatrice. He finished school determined, at any cost, to possess her. Thereafter, while studying at the Art School, he divided his attention and time between her and the communist party. At last he managed to seduce her; but after a while he was
wearied of her and she bored him. He met Taffy and married her, abandoning both the party and Beatrice, who subsequently lost her sanity. During the war Sammy was taken as prisoner and was questioned and threatened with torture. Placed in a blacked-out cell, he discovered, in the terror of isolation and darkness, his "own interior identity" (p.190), and emerged "a man resurrected" (p.186). That experience motivated and led to his quest.

In re-examining his past, Sammy is searching for a pattern which will give experience moral coherence; "I am looking" he says, "for the beginning of responsibility, the beginning of darkness, the point where I began" (p.47). Golding in an interview with Owen Webster remarked, that the basic problem of modern man, is "learning to live fearlessly with the natural chaos of existence, without forcing artificial patterns on it". 14 Man in his view is, a pattern-making animal; Christianity is a pattern, Marxism is a pattern, scientific rationalism is a pattern. But experience itself is patternless, and it is this fact that provides the central issue of the novel—pattern-making man confronting patternlessness. "The difference between being alive and being an inorganic substance", Golding remarked in the

same interview in 1958, "is just this proliferation of experience, this absence of pattern". And he said about *Free Fall*, then about to be published, "This time I want to show the patternlessness of life before we impose our patterns on it". 15

Sammy Mountjoy is examining his life with a view to discovering a pattern or searching for the precise moment when innocence was lost, when choosing became no longer free but, limited by circumstances which in turn further limited future choices. But this discovery within itself does not end his quest; rather it renews and then amplifies it. Why, through what influence, he wants to know did he make that particular choice and what was its nature? He wants to find a connection between his two worlds of experience - one the world of innocence and the other the world of his guilt-betrayal of Beatrice. In his childhood the two worlds are interlocked. He then discovers, as he continues to look back, that the choice was "between good and wicked fairies" (p.217), between his two teachers Rowena Pringle, who stands for the spiritual world, and Nick Shales, who stands for the materialistic world. The two are combined in Beatrice and when

"sex thrust .... (him) strongly to choose" (p.226), Sammy chose to the exclusion of her spiritual qualities to exploit Beatrice physically. This choice had been dictated by Sammy's preference for Nick: "The beauty of Miss Pringle's cosmos was vitiated because she was a bitch, Nick's universe was irradiated by his love of people .... Yet I did not choose a materialistic belief, I chose Nick", (p.226). Sammy adopted Nick's materialistic beliefs and point of view, according to which "there is no spirit, no absolute" (p.226).

Consequently, since "right and wrong were nominal and relative", Sammy decides that "Sammy's good will be what Sammy decides", and he proposes "to enjoy what he could while it was going" (p.226). But his experience in the Nazi Prison camp and later his experience in observing the fate of the maddened Beatrice disclose to him the inadequacy, indeed the destructive consequences, of his choice; hence he can write that "truth seems unattainable" (p.226). He is then convinced that there is a world of the spirit, and he is equally convinced that there is a world of logical, material cause-and-effect. Sammy knows that "both worlds are real", he feels that, between them, "there is no bridge" (p.253). And his knowledge is Sammy's, and modern man's tragic dilemma.
In the earlier chapters, we have seen Sammy, while re-examining his past has proved to himself that the moment of choice was not in childhood nor in manhood, but during late adolescence when sex became brilliant in his mind. Sammy achieves self-knowledge but opts for sex as an instrument of the will for the subjection of Beatrice. The rule of self over another, made object, is the loss of innocence. It is at this point in the novel that the ambiguity of the title finally unfolds its meaning. Sammy is free to fall, to choose; but having made a wrong, because self-centred, choice he thereafter must call to his aid the logic of cause and effect and be dependent on events as relative to each other in order to justify his actions. In this he has diminished himself to become mechanical as matter, a tool for a job. He has abrogated his soul; like matter he is in free fall, apparently stable but in fact falling as all things fall relative to each other simultaneously in space.

Sammy remains unaware of the consequences of this cowardly act (seduction of Beatrice) until after the war. Then learning that Beatrice is in hospital, he pays her a visit. He finds her incurably mad, doomed to a life of "continual and exaggerated worry" (p.247). Whether he "tipped her over" - caused her to go mad - is unclear. Rightly or wrongly, Mountjoy feels responsible for what happened to Beatrice; guilt over his
behaviour to her is the guilt he refers to earlier in the narrative.

Sammy's search for the moment at which he lost his freedom is in reality an attempt to absolve himself of the guilt he feels for what has happened to Beatrice. Mountjoy is prepared to admit that he used Beatrice selfishly. But his affair with her occurred, he claims, after he had chosen to sacrifice, "everything" for her, including his freedom. "(By the time I deserted Beatrice)" he emphasises, "I had lost my power to choose. I had given away my freedom. I cannot be blamed for the helpless and mechanical reaction of my nature" (p. 131). Implicitly, Sammy imagines his sacrifice to have been a metaphoric leap from a position of freedom, of control over his actions, into a state of free fall, in which no matter what he does, his behaviour is ultimately determined by physical laws.

The idea that it is possible to lose one's freedom in this way gains weight from the scene in hospital in which Beatrice urinates involuntarily over her trousers and shoes. It would appear that for Beatrice, "tipping over" has meant falling from a position of behavioural control to one in which all her acts are subject to forces beyond the realm of choice.

The dark cell becomes a chamber of horrors, created by the perverse imagination of a fallen man. The central experience
of Sammy's self-torture is in the cell. Sammy when left alone on the island of the self, discovers the reality of his own dark heart, and what he discovers is too abominable for him to endure. At the highest pitch of terror he makes the only gesture he can make - a raw, instinctive appeal for help, for rescue. He cries out in terror: "Help me! Help me! (p.184). In the absolute darkness of what turns out to be only a harmless broom closet, the desperate prisoner loses his self-possession and pride. He becomes a mere child crying out in the darkness; and once he is reduced to that stature, the appeal comes from his lips naturally and without reservation. It is a total surrender of the self to the other. He leaves behind his ego - "I was dead anyway myself" (p.187), and the moment it is uttered the door bursts open on the forgotten world of spirit:

"The thing that cried fled forward ..., was shot forward screaming as into a furnace, as over unimaginable steps ..., is close as darkness against eye-balls. And burst that door" (p.185).

The door is a door of death; after he has been released from the cell, Sammy is aware that the "thing within" has perished. Walking through the grounds of the prison camp, he feels, like Lazarus from the tomb, "a man resurrected" (p.186); the world appears to him as "a burst casket of jewels (p.187). Everything seems to irradiate the metaphorical light that had
surrounded Beatrice's face years before. Moreover, he now appreciates that an ordered society depends heavily on the concern and compassion of man for individual man. The death of the "thing within" — clearly an aspect of Mountjoy's selfishness — has brought about the restoration of his artistic vision and a renewed and intensified concern for other people. One can say "renewed" bearing in mind that Sammy has never been totally evil. Earlier, in his narration we have seen him rush forward spontaneously to the aid of a man hit with a bottle at a communist party meeting and we have also see him refuse Halde information that might have imperiled his fellow prisoners. Beneath the shell of adolescent self-centredness is a fund of humaneness in Mountjoy; it is this that accounts for the intensity of his suffering over what happened to Beatrice.

Knowing what has happened to Beatrice he is tormented by guilt for the moral crimes he committed in his pride; it is this that drives him to write about his purported loss of freedom. But it is impossible for Sammy to obtain forgiveness from Beatrice, whom madness has rendered incapable of speech. Nor can he extend forgiveness.

Next, after visiting Beatrice self-righteously, Sammy sets out with the intention, of bringing the truth to the "spiritual parents" who conditioned his soul, and visits Nick Shales and
Rowena Pringle; but he finds it useless to make the speeches he has prepared. They remain committed to the worlds they professed long ago and neither is capable of understanding the duality of the universe, the basic lesson their schoolboy has learned.

Now Sammy understands that the innocent people like Beatrice, Nick Shales, and Johnny Spragg, and the wicked like Philip Arnold and Rowena Pringle belong to one category. But he is neither innocent nor wicked. He is among "the guilty" (p.251), a different category of people. And both the worlds between which he finds himself hanging in a state of free fall — the spiritual and the rational — meet in him", Cause and effect. The law of succession. Statistical probability. The moral order. Sin and remorse. They are all true. Both worlds exist side by side. They meet in me" (p.244). They however exist in him as the polarities. He concludes that "both worlds are real. There is no bridge" (p.253).

This final passage of the novel puts Sammy's position and his responsibility to himself quite clearly. It refers to his emergence from the cell and his realization that it was only a sort of broom-cupboard. The slimy object was a forgotten floor-cloth. He comes out dazed to meet his judge (the interrogator) but finds there is none. His case has been dropped; his interrogator was right and wrong to use the methods he did; "The Herr Doctor does not know about peoples" (p.253). It was an error
of administration. Dr. Halde understood the nature of the human heart: he knew that Sammy tormented himself into submission by creating his own hell and had his transfiguration by means of a small cupboard and a damp floor-cloth. But what he experienced was genuine all the same. There is no judge because we are our own judges and Sammy has been made torturous to justify his past to himself. At the same time, it is only through self-questioning that Sammy is able to recall his past and search for the patterns of his life. In this sense of 'questioning', self-interrogation is represented as the realization. Without the experience Sammy would have remained in a state of complete self-deception like Miss Pringle.

The result of his revelation, however, is to make him review and judge by means of hindsight all his past experience and the motives of those he knew. Without his revelation, indirectly attributable to Halde, he could not know, as he now knows about himself and others, hence he puzzles over the commandant's plural for a singular as if it were the Sphinx riddle.

Sammy's last words: "There is no bridge" (p.253) are something of a falling short. Sammy sums up the result of his search for a pattern of patterns. He fell from innocence into the common schizophrenia of modern man. He oscillated from one pole to the other, from Nick's world to Pringle's world; but neither world,
neither reality, has provided a resting place for his soul. The primal innocence he knew is forever lost. Yet something precious remains to him; the wonder and terror of being wholly alive in a universe which is measureless and unpredictable.

Thus, he has achieved the self-understanding he set out to achieve: but he implies — and Golding too — that by its visionary and apocalyptic nature this truth cannot be adapted without compromise to ordinary living. Thus the novel is more in its poetic revelation of a search for self-knowledge than as a portrait of the main character.

Leighton Hodson rightly says that there is certainly a progression from the old Sammy to the new: Golding emphasises Sammy's mental state rather than the portrait of him. He has revealed how Sammy seeks and finds a pattern of meaning in his life by means of the tool of self-awareness provided by his visionary experience. The novel is more concerned with the process of the search than in involvement with Sammy as a person.¹⁶

His experience in the darkened cell has, paradoxically, enlightened him; yet he remains partly self-deceived in thinking that he chose to lose his freedom. Thus Sammy has yet to learn fully the lesson "Love selflessly and you cannot come to harm".

¹⁶. Golding, p.86.
The general conclusion appears to be that evil and unhappiness are unavoidable, that it is man's fate both to inflict and to endure suffering. Evil and pain are everywhere as we know in *Lord of the Flies*, 'the Beast is in us'.

IV

The Spire

The Spire, like his previous novels *Pincher Martin*, and *Free Fall* has the basic theme of self-understanding, and is planned on the progression towards this moment, from total blindness to illumination. Like the earlier novels, the principal concern here is with the use of character and situation to convey not just a moral but a poetic embodiment and intensification of certain human failings, the whole novel being a vehicle that permits the reader to re-experience the self-searching of the protagonist. This is obvious in the case of Pincher and Sammy; and here in *The Spire*, this is the aim and also the outcome of Jocelin's case.

The novel is built on two movements; the building of the Spire and an examination of motive. The building of the Spire and its evil consequences is dealt in the previous chapter, while in this chapter, the slow-dawning realization of the nature of the
events Jocelin instigated (i.e., self-understanding from complete blindness to illumination) is dealt with. On the completion of the Spire's construction a dramatic reversal which shatters the protagonist's illusions occurs; Jocelin, the protagonist, is forced to review his own motives and acknowledge his own deceptions. Only as he pushes on with his ambition does he come to understand his own past, his motives, and exactly what he is doing to the people he involves in his enterprise. It is this progress of understanding that is the chief movement in the novel. Here, Jocelin comes up against the cellarage of his own mind, those things which he has deliberately repressed, and his journey of self-discovery issues in the understanding "I'm a building with a vast cellarage where the rats live; and there's some kind of blight on my hands" (p.210).

The story-line of the novel is simple: Jocelin, Dean of Barchester cathedral, believes himself in a vision, that he is chosen by God to cap the magnificence of his cathedral with a four-hundred-foot spire and by force of will compels the spire to be built, against the judgment of both clergy and builders. The novel begins with the first stages of construction, and ends with the spire built, and Jocelin dead. But the focus of this story is not either on character or on action, but on symbolic meaning. Jocelin dominates the novel, not as a character but as a growing moral awareness; and the spire dominates Jocelin.
As he gets to know the meaning of the spire, so the reader comes near the understanding of the meaning of the novel.

At first, Jocelin does not understand the significance of his perceptions, but only as the book proceeds, he comes stage by stage to a comprehension not only of what happened then, but of just what he himself is doing and why. What happens to the building happens to Jocelin too. The novel traces the forming in his consciousness of connections between parts of himself which he previously believed to be separate, just as the work on the cathedral unites the inside and the outside, which "yesterday, or a Hail Mary ago, .... were a quarter of a mile apart" (p.12). The novel too is "doing the unthinkable", joining "earth to heaven" (p.69).

"I never guessed in my folly", Jocelin thinks, "that there would be a new lesson at every level, and a new power" (p.108). But there is, the power to destroy as much as the power to create. Jocelin is driven to the heights, and in the process inevitably destroys himself and those around him, by denying other human faculties.

By the end of The Spire, Jocelin has come to realise exactly what happened to Pangall in the violence under the crossways, and with each step in his growing awareness, he has
come to discover other things also. Something he knew subconsciously breaks through into his consciousness - that he knew Pangall was impotent and arranged Goody's marriage with him accordingly, because his own interest in her was powerfully sexual. By the time the spire is capped, Jocelin has destroyed Pangall and Goody, Roger Mason and almost destroyed the cathedral itself as a place of worship, for no services have been held or candles burnt in it for months. Still the action is ambivalent, neither wholly good nor wholly bad, for he alone had the faith necessary to crown the cathedral so gloriously.

When he himself dies at the end of the novel, it is in a bewitched condition, haunted by Goody and her tumbling mass of red hair, and entangled in the tendrils of a plant of sexuality. It is not certain even at this point whether Golding wants us to believe that he is saved and has found the ability to pray, or whether he remains, as he himself says, "like a building with rats in the cellarage" (pp.210, 213, 219). Golding's novels never have one unequivocal "message", as Jocelin says in the novel, "That's too simple, like every other explanation. That gets nowhere near the root" (p.195).

The death of Pangall, and Goody's later pregnancy by Roger, and then her death in childbirth, are all very important as part of the toll exacted of Jocelin by his self-deception.
The results of these episodes begin the process of breakdown that forces Jocelin into himself to face facts he had ignored. At Goody's death he realised how he had arranged the marriage with the impotent Pangall and had unwillingly helped to bring Goody and Roger together in the first instance. But still he engages himself into a position of self-justification without realizing the irony lurking in his thoughts.

"Yet like a birth itself, words came, that seemed to fit the totality of his life, his sins, and his forced cruelty, and above all the dreadful glow of his dedicated will. They were words that the choir boys sang sometimes at Easter ....

This have I done for my true love" (p.137).

The Spire rises with Jocelin's hope that he is establishing the one good thing in a corrupt world, an ark, a refuge, a ship that he will fit with a mast. The pillars strain and bend but eventually settle down, and is ready for the placing of the relic, a Holy Nail. This is brought from Rome by the visitor, an ecclesiastical inspector. An enquiry is held regarding the running of the cathedral, the closing down of church services, the use of church money and hence there is a delay. Jocelin openly admits his exploitation of people but still believes it was necessary:
"She (Goody) is woven into it everywhere. She died and then she came alive in my mind. She's there now .... And I must have known about him before, you see, down in the vaults, the cellarage of my mind. But it was all necessary, of course, Like the money" (p.166).

Jocelin has no means to convince the inspector and hence is forced to yield and is confined.

Golding describes in a powerful passage, how in the dark night amidst fierce gales Jocelin, enfeebled in body and spirit, fights his way from the deanery to the cathedral, snatches the silver box at the altar, and takes the Nail. Beating the devils off with the Nail, he makes his way up the coxcomb stairs "like a man climbing a mast at sea" (p.176) as "the roar of released Satan "forms" a sort of universal black back-ground" (p.176). The holy Dean assuming the role of the Pagan workmen beats the Nail into the wood. Thus, Jocelin has made the spire safe from the devils. "But he was not safe from them himself" (p.177).

In his exalted state he has a vision of Goody who seems to welcome him and resolve his tensions. He associates the achievement of the spire with his love for her. Jocelin justifies and wrongly interprets this glimpse of the truth as an atonement for the way he had manipulated her life.
By this time, if Jocelin has understood anything it is only his sense of achievement but not understood his own humanity. So Golding in the last phase of the novel reverses the pattern where Jocelin comes in face to face with a series of confrontations, which finally convince him of the way he has avoided the truth lying behind his motives and actions.

According to Golding, it is not that the search for meaning is in itself wrong, but the motive for the search is all important. It may be vision, a true search, it may be presumption, mere will. Jocelin believes he is fulfilling a mission that began when he was first chosen Dean by God. The action of the novel questions this assumption: Jocelin's position as Dean was in fact given to him as a sort of joke by his aunt, Lady Alison who points out how it was she who did the choosing. She mockingly tells him, "Listen nephew. I chose you" (p.184). Jocelin owes his Deanship to her influence with the king whose mistress she had been. Just as her tainted money has thrust the spire up, so her whoring has raised him to the position of the Dean. His office is thus obtained by corrupt means like the money for building the spire. Lady Alison's disclosure undermines his very faith in his vocation as well as vision. As he remembers the witchcraft he has been subjected to, he says, "There is a pattern in it. There's more to be destroyed. There must be more" (p.187).
Thus, Jocelin thinks himself to be only a part of a system of choosing, using, bartering, exploiting. He begins to see that he is used as he had used others. This is first part of Jocelin's self-awareness and it can be seen in a grander context. It is discovered that the bulging pillars, although they hold the strain, have subsided enough to put the spire out and are soft at the centre. They had been filled with rubble by the men of faith, "the giants who had been on earth in those days" (p.84), who had built them. The pillars themselves are discovered to be hollow and this coincides with the aggravation of the pain in his back. He is hurled down on the stone flag like "a broken snake" (p.188). The warmth in the back is suggestive of his heightened sexuality which is a symptom of spinal tuberculosis. His angel is after all a delusion.

Jocelin's spire bends; yet it stands. His spine too bends and Jocelin falls. But then he falls to rise to a truly tragic stature. The moment of his physical and spiritual fall is also the moment of his regeneration. His pious complacency vanishes and he becomes truly humble and fully human. With a newly acquired sense of his own unworthiness he goes to Father Anselm and Roger Mason to seek their forgiveness but is spurned by both of them. Father Anselm, denounces the way Jocelin's preferment had come so easily to him when he was only a minimal priest,
unworthy of his office. Jocelin realises the need to atone for his guilt.

So, Jocelin goes in search of Roger, who is now habituated to drink and professionally finished the work, to seek his forgiveness. In his final confrontation, he at last faces the truth. He admits that though he thought he was doing great work he was only breeding hate. He sees his sanctity as bogus and himself as a fool and a guilty man — "a building with a vast cellarage where the rats live" (p.210). He receives Roger's convulsive embrace of unbridled emotion but when it has subsided the whole truth is still not cleared. Since the building still stands perhaps they were necessary to each other, visionary and mason, as instruments of a grander scheme.

The final temptation of the visionary is pride in the vision, and Jocelin is undoubtedly proud. A deacon in the beginning says, "He thinks he is a saint! A man like that! (p.13). The face of the Holy spirit carved on the spire is to be Jocelin's; he believes his will, and God's, are the same. "You'll see how I shall thrust you upward by my will. It's God's will in this business" (p.40). In fact, it is Jocelin who is blind to any point of view or perspective other than his own. He sees the spire as "the bible in stone" (p.51), as "a diagram of prayer" (p.120), as the mast of a ship and so on, but not as a physical reality, as a stonework.
He refuses to recognise it even when Roger Mason draws his attention to it. Roger Mason says:

You think these walls are strong because they're stone; but I know better .... The stone is no stronger than the glass between the verticals because every inch of the way I have to save weight, bartering strength for weight or weight for strength, guessing how much, how far, how little, how near, until my very heart stops when I think of it. Look down, Father. Don't look at me - Look down! (p.117).

For Golding, to forget oneself in another reality is the chief good; it is indeed necessary for salvation. But Jocelin thrusts himself up, makes himself God.

Jocelin comes to realize his folly as he recognizes that God is indeed love - "If I could go back, I would take God as lying between people and to be found there" (p.220) - and at the end, dying, apparently calls upon God for help as does Sammy.

The final chapter of the novel concerns the reviews of Jocelin's motives and his opinion of the human condition as he lies in semi-consciousness before death, in "some new kind of life" (p.217), where his thoughts seem to last a century or a second. The full meaning of humanity begins to come over him - people must be treated as people, not objects. Goody herself was only an unattainable sexual object and his spire points for ever to Berenice's hair in the sky.
Jocelin in his search for a pattern finds that he has moved from an apparent state of harmony to chaos. His disclosures, one after the other, like the gradual raising of the tower and the spire, constitute the structure of Jocelin's experience. To begin with, Jocelin had a sense of a stable world, of a world under control. He thought he knew his God and his men. But as the world gradually disintegrates, he admits, "Now - I know nothing at all" (p.223). People are committed, in the process of living, to exploiting each other and there is no source of appeal outside themselves: "There is no innocent work. God knows where God may be" (p.222). His pious complacency and his cherished sense of self-righteous isolation give way to a sense of humility, a sense of his own unworthiness.

As Jocelin lies dying, his mind is dominated by the image of "the apple tree" - a symbol of lost innocence. Jocelin's creation had led him from arrogant pride, through the pain of loss of innocence, to the final acknowledgement, "Now - I know nothing at all" (p.223). Human creativity is often "like the apple tree" - a movement from innocence, temptation, fall, and expulsion from Paradise. In realising our creative freedom, we, like Jocelin building his spire, refuse to recognize our animality, our finitude, which involves us in a prideful blindness to the ambiguous union in each of us, of egoism and spiritual vision. And so redemption can come only when we have reached the
point where we can say, "Now, I know nothing at all". Till then, we continue to cloak all our programs and crusades in the virtuous garment of divine inevitability.

As the priest gives him absolution to help him into heaven, Jocelin realises that heaven is nowhere unless he can clear himself with the people he has used, Roger and Goody, and is forgiven. He realises his error: "I traded a stone hammer for four people" (p.222), for Roger's wife, Rachael, and Pangall were part of his scheme too. Jocelin's final thought, as his sight clears for him to see the spire through the window, unites the amazing achievement with its confused and questionable origins. It "rushes upward to some point at the sky's end, and with a silent cry. It was slim as a girl, translucent" (p.223).

It reminds him of his delight in seeing an appletree in flower and his thoughts at the time that there were roots and branches to the trees besides the glorious flowers. Jocelin unites at the moment of extinction the two impulses of his life - the urge towards glory and a disregard of the sordid roots. The spire as a symbol of achievement survives and despite the motives behind its origin it is a beautiful thing "like the appletree".

The confirmation of God's existence comes finally in his vision of the appletree, before he dies: "His head swam with
the angels, and suddenly he understood there was more to the apple tree than one branch. It was there beyond the wall, bursting up with cloud and scatter, laying hold of the earth and the air, a fountain, a marvel, an applitree" (pp.204-5). But, the tree is an apple and must carry overtones of the Garden of Eden. The transformed apple tree is a perfect image for Golding's concept of salvation. Man as a child, lives alongside the apple tree in innocence; as an adult, he eats its fruit and falls into sin as he gains self-consciousness and knowledge. But knowledge is also the way forward to salvation; man must see that he is part of a macrocosm, that the tree touches earth and heaven. In this way the original sin may be transcended, the tree transformed.

Thus, the ending of *The Spire* is fine and explicit. Jocelin is stripped down to honesty, happy to shed his self-deception; but he realises how lonely a being he has become by creating his own isolation. Leighton Hodson says, *The Spire* is the finest symbolic expression of Golding's intention to make people understand their own humanity. Most of his novels he says share the twin themes of darkness in the heart of man and the idea that there is a "grace" or salvation to be found in our becoming aware of our condition. Of all the characters Jocelin comes nearest, as a grown man, to looking the darkness in the face
though he has avoided it long enough by various means. 17

Golding's artistic genius lies in presenting Jocelin's victorious self-awareness or the realisation of self-knowledge coinciding with his death. The part of the problem that Golding does not examine in these novels is how one is to behave when the state of self-awareness has been achieved. What counts is to understand now, perfection now. For Pincher it was too late, perhaps even for Sammy. For Jocelin it is worked out in time though confined to his final moments of life. Golding also implies that innocence and perfection are incompatible with the human condition but he implies equally that the urge, and compulsion to strive after them is our tragic fate.

Though the spire bends but does not fall is suggestive of morally ambiguous structure. It emphasizes man's vulnerability and involvement with evil even at the level of spiritual aspiration even though his final regeneration is through guilt and suffering. It is built on sin and blood; it is built on faith. It conveys the message that one can sink as low as one's aspiration is high, but out of the depths of degradation and suffering humility that leads to self-knowledge is born, just as the spire rises toward heaven from the weak, muddy, and murky foundations on earth. Thus, the gradual erection of the spire

17. *Golding*, pp.96, 98.
with tainted money and through unwholesome means and against technical odds and the fury of the elements is symbolic of the gradual evolution of Jocelin's self through guilt and suffering. One may conclude that the spire is human nature in both its heights and depths. Thus, redemption lies in each man's recognition of his place in the universal scheme. Golding defines this recognition as love. Only from the macrocosm universe can one see that the man is a microcosm of everything else.

V

The Pyramid

The Pyramid, like Free Fall is on the 'ignominy of growing up 'of the protagonist, says V.V.Subbarao. Both the protagonists, Oliver and Sammy graduate to a new awareness but the nature of their experiences, their modes of evaluation, their concerns and perceptions are quite different. The protagonist, Oliver, experiences normal feelings rather soberly; there are no complex spiritual crises like those of Pincher, Sammy or Jocelin. Oliver is scientifically oriented, but he apprehends imaginatively,

as he reviews his childhood and adolescence, the knowledge of men and matters. Oliver's self-awareness is a life-long and slow process rather than a momentary illumination.

This novel comprises of three episodes, the common link being the narrator-protagonist, himself who forms the chief cementing factor of the three episodes. The three episodes are confined to the small provincial town of Stillbourne and the action is set in the nineteen twenties, but extends right up to the sixties. The carefully delineated town, growing and changing like the characters with the passage of time links the three episodes together. Oliver plays a major role, acting and inter-acting with the various characters so that the novel appears to be concerned mainly with Oliver's growth and development from child to adult, advancing in self-knowledge and in moral awareness. The first and the third episodes focus on the motif of guilt and moral responsibility on the level of social intercourse, while the second one serves as an interlude which, in its own way contributes to the education of Oliver's final awareness which is an understanding of self.

The novel opens with the eighteen-year old Oliver, son of a doctor's dispenser, fancying himself in love with Imogen.  

19. One of the themes, Leighton Hodson feels, is Oliver's emotional maturity at the cost of other people (p.104), but as Medcalf points out, the book is "not a picture of Oliver's emotional development" p.38.
As he is seen playing the piano, it seems to him "to express, all the width and power of my own love, my own hopeless infatuation. But Imogen was engaged to be married that was the end." Knowing about Imogen's engagement with Norman Claymore, the proprietor of the Stilbourne Advertiser, is frustrated and desperate and wants to get on even without her. As he is very much obsessed by the unattainable figure of Imogen Grantley, he suddenly comes in contact with Evie Dabbacombe "the town crier's daughter ... from the tumbledown cottages of Chandler's close. But, of course, we had never spoken. Never met. Obviously" (p.13).

It is in this opening story, however, that the dominant note of the novel is struck; its concern with the divisiveness of class and, in direct consequence, the inability of the protagonist to see in Evie anything other than a sex object. Oliver looks down Evie with an adolescent lust and says "she (Imogen) made my pursuit of Evie ... urgent and inevitable" (p.42). And the curious circumstances in which he meets Evie prompt him to form a rather low opinion of Evie. He thinks she is "accessible" (p.51) and already experienced at such a young age in the art of love-making. He can't forget that Evie is his social inferior, just as Robert Ewan, his rival in love, is his

social superior. However, he is driven to Evie to satisfy his sexual urge; "In the conflict between social propriety and sexual attraction there was never much doubt which would win" (p.45).

Just as Sammy resolves to possess the sweet, white body of Beatrice, so also Oliver is attracted by Evie the "local phenomenon" (p.16) whose charm seems to be designed to ensnare men, and he is drawn towards her "white femininity" (p.75). Like Sammy, Oliver seems to impose his will upon Evie and contrives to have secret meetings with her. He says that "I plotted fiercely, I played with extravagant bravura, determining that somehow I would get Evie to a place where I might wreck my wicked will" (p.56). Thus, Oliver's eventual seduction of Evie is the substance of the tale, but we are gradually made aware that Evie's background is more complex than Oliver could have imagined.

While Oliver is scheming to have her she is planning to seduce him on an exposed escarpment in full view of his father. For Oliver, when he confronts his father, the realization of what he has done is the end of innocence. Evie realizes that she can't hope to get what she wants - love, tenderness - from Oliver. He is selfish and looks upon her as a means of stilling his base passion, as a "hot bit of stuff through which I had achieved my deep calm" (p.75). Evie exclaims, "you wouldn't
care if I was dead. Nobody 'd care. That's all you want, just
my damned body, not me. Nobody wants me, just my damned body,
.... you never loved me, nobody never loved me. I wanted to be
loved, I wanted somebody to be kind to me" (pp.88-89). Shortly,
after this in response to his enquiry she tells Oliver that it
(sex) all started at the age of fifteen. Oliver, taking her to
be eighteen, considers her a woman already fallen.

But, it is only in the final part of the novel, that Oliver
realizes the truth of the matter. It culminates several years
later when Oliver is an Oxford undergraduate and Evie reproaches
him with his selfish exploitation of her young body. Her reproach
affects him deeply: "I stood, in shame and confusion, seeing for
the first time despite my anger a different picture of Evie in
her long-life struggle to be clean and sweet. It was as if this
object of frustration and desire had suddenly acquired the
attributes of a person rather than a thing; as if I might - as if
we might - have made something, music, perhaps to take the place
of the necessary, the inevitable battle" (p.111).

Evie exposes him in the pub and says, "It all began when
you raped me" (p.109). She also tells him that she was only
fifteen when Bobby has just been her "first sweet-heart" (p.107).
She also blames Oliver for his failure to outgrow class
prejudices: "You! Aren't you even going to grow up? This place -
you. You an' your mum and dad. Too good for people aren't you?
.... (p.110).
Thus Evie parts from Oliver, but not before she has contributed to his self-awareness. He makes his way home "to brood on this undiscovered person and her curious slip of the tongue" (p.111). He seems to have made a profoundly humanistic discovery about relationships through Evie, and perhaps to be in a position to develop now beyond the selfishness of adolescence towards a more mature attitude. A new picture of Evie emerges; she is no longer "Life's necessary, unspeakable object" (p.91), but a human being waging "a lifelong struggle to be clean and sweet. It was/if this object of frustration and desire had suddenly acquired the attributes of a person rather than a thing ...." (p.111).

Thus, the first section of the novel, contributes to the self-awareness of Oliver. All his assumptions and conjectures regarding Evie are unconfounded. At first he doesn't understand her and so referred to her as "This known, this detected, this fallen woman" (p.101), but gradually he begins to see her as a person who had her own problems though at first she had appeared as an object to be pursued and used. But towards the end, in the new light, he refers to her as "this undiscovered person" (p.111).

The second section of the book contributes to the further dispelling of Oliver's illusions. It relates the story of the
Stilbourne Operatic Society's performance of the *King of Hearts*, with a tone of comic exaggeration maintained till the end. Oliver is at Oxford doing chemistry. He has no time to indulge in his private vice of music and love. As he returns home at the end of his first term, he is forced to take part in the performance and is befriended by the professional producer, Evelyn de Tracy, a man of sensitivity and intelligence who is well aware of the phony social role he plays to earn his ten guineas. The producer, Evelyn de Tracy, is a 'camp' figure, exercising amusingly his authority on stage; but once away from it, he becomes a lonely and rather desperate figure.

We first focus this picture of De Tracy in a conversation with Oliver during an interval in rehearsals. Flattered by De Tracy's attention, Oliver is moved to give his views of Stilbourne: "Everything is wrong. Everything. There's no truth and there's no honesty .... the things we daren't mention, the people we don't meet" (p.147). And he speaks openly of his ambition with rhetorical force: "Evelyn I want the truth of things. But there's nowhere to find it" (p.148). De Tracy accepts the tacit invitation and promptly proceeds to give Oliver at least one instance of "the truth" about things. He takes out a number of photographs, in one of which he is dressed as a ballerina, "supported by a thick, young man .... they gazed
deep into each other's eyes" (p.149). For Oliver, the offered moment of "truth" is a moment of blank incomprehension; "I laughed until it hurt" (p.149). The critical edge of the story is much sharper than in the first one.

Returning to the theatre for the last act, Oliver listens to Imogen, now married to Norman Claymore, singing. The theatre brings Oliver face to face with Imogen, and through Evelyn's influence, realizes that she is an insensitive egoist. "She's a stupid, insensitive, vain woman. She has a neat face and just enough sense to keep smiling..." (pp.145-146). He advises Oliver, "Never let her know your calf-love. It would just go to feed her vanity" (p.146).

As Oliver watches Imogen with the new understanding given by Evelyn, he finds her indeed, "A stupid, insensitive, vain woman" (p.154). He realizes that her so-called perfections are much made of and now her deficiencies prominently noticeable. Her singing doesn't stir him as it has done in the past. As he listens to the Great Duet sung by Imogen and Claymore he feels; "They were two people whose ignorance and vanity made them suitable to, acceptable to no one, but each other. It was a spyhole into them, and ugly balm to my soul. I listened; and I was free" (p.154). Now, free from his infatuation, he rushes to thank Evelyn, but finds him quite drunk and can only help him
to the last bus. Thus, De Tracy becomes a way of focusing the hopeless pretentiousness of Stilbourne, its vanity, its petty conflicts, its atrophy of imagination. We recognise in De Tracy's situation something much bleaker than Evie's.

This part of the book reveals Golding in a surprisingly new light. It brings to light the comic side of life in SCS, "the jealousies and hatreds, meannesses and indignations" (p.114), which characterize the subterranean activities of its members come to the surface. The performance of 'The King of Hearts' turns out to be a grim and very funny parody of Art. "Art is a meeting point, but you can go too far" (p.114). And the class prejudice is very much evident here too and this can be seen when it comes to the question of accepting people like Evie, however talented they are.

The third section of the novel is a blend of the grotesque and the tragic. It is here in the third part of the novel we see the novel succeed. Although linked to the comic mode of the first two stories, it is closer in mood to tragic pathos. Loneliness and desolation find dramatic resonance, and Golding is much successful in his use of narrative voice. For the first time in *The Pyramid*, we have events seen through an adult eye. This final episode takes place after the war, when Oliver, now married and with two children, returns to Stilbourne in a new car.
It is an assessment in retrospect of Oliver's adolescent feelings towards his former music teacher Miss Cecilia Dawlish, a spinster so dominated by her father's harshness that she becomes ungracious and mannish. Oliver who visits her grave, undergoes all the experiences of his childhood, the trauma of the music lessons he received from her.

Miss Bounce lived all by herself "in a house empty of life except for the grinning piano" (p.165). She taught music as she inherited it from her father, as boredom and torture: "It is necessary to be cruel to musicians if they will not be cruel to themselves; and nothing is crueller than the position for playing the violin" (p.168). One can see here, how the violence of parental love can permanently influence the growing lives of Oliver, Evie and Bounce. Bounce was very severe and very critical of Oliver's playing. But Oliver, even then could see her limitations as a musician. As such, there was little he could hope to learn from Dawlish.

Though she is well-versed in music, she is spiritually dead. She is the creation of the sadistic teaching of a cold and unsympathetic father who has an eye for the absolute rather than people. This influenced her personality very much. And the unsympathetic attitude of the people around her contributed to
her sense of loneliness and misery. "She had become one of those cases on which Stilbourne turned its corporate back" (pp.207-208).

She was taken up and looked after by Henry Williams, who started from nothing but a chauffeur in the thirties, and finds himself as a prosperous garage owner in the sixties. Oliver could notice the change in Bounce, after the arrival of Henry Williams into her life, who was responsible to dispel her gloom somewhat. It was not just the possession of a car that brought a new liveliness into her, but Henry indirectly revived the hopes and spirits long dead in her.

But Henry's achievement of success is shown to have been built on the exploitation of Miss Dawlish, who had loved Henry and helped him generously. Henry had used her to further his career, and commemorated her when dead with an impressive grave with the inscription, "Heaven is music" (p.213). Oliver had been taught the violin by her and now recalls what he knew of her. Scenes which had meant little to him earlier now suggest the depths of her sufferings over Henry. He recalls the bitterness of her reply when he had asked whether he should try to make a living by his music: "Don't be a musician, Kummer, my son: Go into the garage business if you want to make money. As for me,
I shall have to slave at music till I drop down dead" (p.193). Throughout the book music suggests values higher than materialism.

But Bounce gradually recoils into her shell of gloom and bitterness as she found that Henry minded his business more than her. Though Henry flourished in his business with her money, he paid her back as much as he took from her. But Bounce felt that she did not get what she expected from him - loving care and attention. Oliver remembers her moaning: "Oh Henry, Henry my dear! What's to become of me?" (p.195). "All I want is for you to need me, need me!" (p.188). Oliver's mother with her shrewed perception could understand the tragedy of Bounce. She tells Oliver, "Poor soul! .... All she want's is for him to put a little attention about her .... Money isn't everything. You'll find that out one day, Oliver" (pp.204-5). In the absence of love, Bounce grew bitter, cynical, and almost insane, and this breakdown drives her to self-exposure.

She becomes so cynical that her rejection of human kind is even more comprehensive: "D'you know, Kummer?" she says, "If I could save a child or a budgie from a burning house, I'd save the budgie" (p.212). And there is a spine-chilling quality about her final act when she burns everything that belonged to her former life, as if ensuring that these particular funerary objects would not accompany her on her last journey: the music
that was supposed, according to her father, to compensate for all earthly deprivation because "Heaven is Music", the photographs of him, even the beautifully polished pyramid of the metronome by whose steady beat she had vainly attempted to regulate her life.

There is one moment which reaches out towards fulfilment, when on his last visit to Bounce, Oliver feels his small daughter, Sophy, who was with him, nuzzling his trouser leg to avoid the strange woman: He says "I put my hand through her hair, feeling the fragility of her head and neck; and a great surge of love came over me, protection, compassion, and the fierce determination that she should never know such lost solemnity but be a fulfilled woman, a wife and mother" (p.212). The tragedy of Bounce was her failure to attain the status of a fulfilled woman - a wife and mother -- a psychological and a biological necessity for any woman, says V.V.Subbarao. 21

The story is told as part of a return journey to Stilbourne by Oliver, now a mature man and a father, as he stands before Bounce's grave. He honestly admits to himself: "I never liked you! Never!" (p.213). He developed this attitude because of the relationship he had with her as a pupil. He found little to

admire in her. Her gloomy and bitter temper, her severe limitations as music teacher produced a strong aversion in him, though he concealed it beneath his "ingratiating exterior" (p.188).

One of the major themes of the three episodes is the way in which the violence of parental love can permanently influence growing lives. This is evident in the case of Oliver, Evie and Bounce. Oliver's parents steer him relatively harmlessly from music to chemistry. But sergeant Babbacombe beats Evie into incest, and Mr. Dawlish punishes Bounce into a sterility which eventually drives her to breakdown and self-exposure. Both Evie and Bounce complain of a lack of loving care and attention and both become the victims of the Stilbourne society. For all the comedy of the central section, The Pyramid is an uncompromising and disturbing novel. In the life of the quiet town of Stilbourne, distress is much more obvious than fulfillment: Evie, Evelyn and Bounce are all victims of life, while the successes, Williams and the narrator, Oliver, are perhaps even more disturbing. Williams is impressed by Oliver's car; and Oliver recognises that:

"His attitude was typical of the deep thing lying in him, the reason for it all; tarmac, glass, concrete, machinery, the thrust not liked or enjoyed but recognised as inevitable, the god without mercy."
There was a tiny adjustment in his attitude
.... and I, my feet now firmly under control,
was accepting this deference" (p.159).

The social observation is accurate, but beneath it lies
a fatalistic view of human personality - "the thrust ....
recognised as inevitable". The power of Golding to disturb is
concentrated, however, on Oliver's recognition of his kinship
with Williams: "I would never pay more than a reasonable price"
(p.217). On the social level the typical materialist view is
says V.V.Subbarao: build your career, make your fortune, love
others so long as it does not interfere with, or stand in the
way of, self-interest. You even need to use other people as
steps in your climb to the apex of the social pyramid. Both
Henry and Oliver can't love selflessly and are not prepared to
do anything that might cost them worldly success. 22

Though, Oliver, of all the characters in the novel, seems
most aware of the need to climb the steps of the social pyramid,
Henry Williams, in his own quiet way, shows the most natural
talent for the task. It is apparent that Henry, does all this,
starting from the lowest point as little more than a Welsh
Vagrant, ends up owning William's Garage, William's showrooms,

22. Ibid., p.91.
William's farm machinery, and a large piece of stilbourne, without losing the essential kindliness of his nature.

Oliver realizes, at last as he takes leave of the prosperous Henry that the lesson of life is a wary compromise; "Suddenly I felt that if I might only lend .... my own power of choosing the future .... I would pay anything -- anything; but knew in the same instant that, like Henry, I would never pay more than a reasonable price" (p.217). Thus, Oliver has matured to the apex of a pyramid but at the same time that emotional development has meant a climb and a climb using other people as steps in a progression.23 Oliver, with this newly gained insight into his own nature, leaves Stilbourne in his "car of superior description" (p.217). And the truth expressed in the novel's epigraph comes from The Instructions of PtahHotep:

"If thou be among people, make for thyself love, the beginning and end of the heart".

But love, like everything else in Stilbourne society, is ambivalent; it can be torture as well as harmony, power as well as understanding. But neither Oliver nor Henry can either cultivate, understand, or receive the kind of love expressed in the epigraph. Thus, Oliver's self-awareness is a life-long and slow process rather than a momentary illumination.

In *Rites of Passage*, the entire story is presented by Edmund Talbot, the protagonist of the novel, in the form of a journal, addressed to his godfather. Edmund Talbot is a young aristocrat posted in Australia. He kept the journal for the entertainment of his godfather, a powerful aristocrat who has arranged for his appointment. We come to know a good deal about Talbot from his journal, which not only records facts and incidents but also reveals the nature of the narrator. The act of recording becomes a significant element in the search for understanding. The novel unfolds in the form of one journal inside another. Edmund Talbot and James Colley, like the barely educated Matty of *Darkness Visible* ('I have bought this book to write in and a biro because of what happened ....') confide their lives and themselves to their journals.

Talbot's patron has told Talbot to "hold nothing back. Let me live again through you". He has told Talbot that flattery is the key that unlocks all doors. Talbot attributes

24. William Golding, *Rites of Passage* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p.278. (All further references to this work appear in this text).
to him a translation of Racine into English verse, which "in the opinion of connoisseurs it equals and at some points surpasses the original!" (p.275). It is, of course, to his evaluation of his godfather's character that we owe Talbot's attitudes and manner of expression.

The nature of Talbot's journal, his conceptions and those of his audience, make the journal a distorted mirror in which we must seek the meaning of the narrative. The ancient ship in which Edmund Talbot is voyaging brings together people with a medley of systems, beliefs, and values. These are Robert James Colley, a country parson, Brocklebank, a portrait painter and his two doxies, Mr. Prettiman, "the notorious free thinker" (p.193), the good Lieutenant Summers, the "omniscient" (p.184), Wheeler, Talbot's staff and guide, the rogueish Billy Rogers; a party of emigrants, the farm animals, the captain and his crew. The journal which proceeds smoothly in the initial stages becomes, as the journey progresses, "deadly as a loaded gun" (p.184), as Talbot chances upon a letter written by Colley, which he transcribes it into the journal. In the end, it turns out to be more than what it was intended to be - not a mere entertainment, not a simple sea-yarn as Talbot says, but the relation of a bizarre human situation. Golding's novel occupies itself with what is perennial in the human condition, looking at man in relation not alone to his society, but to his universal situation.
Talbot, the protagonist, witnesses the game of survival and self-advancement played unscrupulously by the different inmates of the ship under the despotic rule of captain Anderson. *Rites of Passage*, at one level, affords Talbot an educative experience in the ways of the world. From a callow and priggish feudal that he was, he matures into a man with a sense of justice and moral responsibility. At another level, in understanding the meaning of Colley's death, Talbot is redeemed as a Christian, his passage to salvation becoming possible.

The one odd man out who does not fit into this culture-pattern is Reverend James Colley, the parson. While attempting to rescue the unruly people from the materialistic morass, he becomes a pitiless target of insane persecution by Anderson and his cohorts. The novel depicts, at a more significant level, the tragic fate of innocence entrapped in a social structure that has a cynical contempt for spiritual needs and moral values.

The death of Colley is the central event of the novel; its main drive is to show how a man could come to die of shame, and in true Golding fashion the fatally shaming details are withheld until the last pages. Golding, in an interview said that the character of Colley to embrace death was "an attempt to explain something that actually happened - it's an attempt to invent human circumstances where one can see that this kind
of thing can happen: that someone can be reduced to the point at which he would die of shame".  

Golding's concern in the novel is to show Talbot's search for self-knowledge and ultimately ends on the note of redemption. Golding, made this point clear in the same interview: "In this case, Talbot - the ego of the book - does grow up to some extent and becomes more aware, but I took heed of the fact that a man doesn't grow up overnight .... his change has to be partial; he becomes more aware of himself and of the people, but not totally aware. How much of it I actually believe word by word, I don't know. When I re-read the book the other day, it did seem to be a valid picture of the way a person develops. Talbot learned certain things, but not other things the onlooker feels he should have learned - just as we haven't in our lives.  

Talbot's portraits of his fellow passengers amounts to more than entertaining exaggerations. They are, in fact, grotesque pictures of the people who inhabit the little world of this ship. Colley is presented as a grotesque figure, like a beast, diminished in stature and dignity and his subsequent actions confirm the portrait of grotesqueness.


In the beginning, the voyage gains momentum as it concerns itself with the fortunes of Colley. Colley manages to attract the ill-will of one and all including Talbot on board the ship. He gets into trouble with Captain Anderson for violating standing orders. Apparently taking their cue from the captain, the sailors humiliate him during the traditional crossing-of-the-equator ceremony. Edmund Talbot, who is at the time confined to his cabin flirting with Miss Zenobia, a good looking and coquettish woman, has no idea of the parson's humiliation. Later, he sees Colley crossing the white line into the crew's quarters in full canonicals, and returning in a drunken state.

The parson parades himself half-naked on the deck, and pisses against the mast of the ship before the other passengers. The parson retires to his cabin never to come out. He lies in bed holding fast the ringbolt and wills himself to death. Talbot, who thinks that the parson has behaved in a beastly fashion, discovers on visiting Colley's cabin a long letter Colley has written to his sister. On reading the letter he discovers the humiliation suffered by Colley during the crossing-of-the-equator ceremony. The letter being incomplete, the subsequent fall of Colley remains unexplained.
However, the captain's inquiry following Colley's death seems to approach the truth by a series of gradual revelations. And also certain chance remarks by others bring to light new facts which convulse the understanding of Talbot, and enable him to grasp, to some extent, the significance of Colley's fall.

It was not the indignity of the 'badger bag' during which Colley was forcibly bathed in ordure, that had led him to bury his head in his pillow, never to raise it again. Colley in a moment of extreme anguish, rightly insisted, "what a man does defiles him, not what is done by others". (p.235). It was not that he had got "drunk as the butcher's boots" when he had gone amongst the crew "to deliver a rebuke" for the insult to his cloth. It was not for the renewed insult when his clerical dress, which he believed to be so much more authoritative than he was, was torn away. It was not that he had openly urinated in front of the passengers and crew. It was not even that his own latent homosexuality had been revealed to him. It was so the court finally agrees that some sailor or sailors unknown had "inflicted a criminal assault on the gentleman so that he died of it" (p.254).

First, let us see what has been done to him by others. From the beginning it is clear that the parson's stay on board the ship is not going to be a happy one. His presence evokes an
instinctive repulsion in others including Talbot. They seem to consider him a "bareheaded clown" rather than "a man of God" (p.228). The parson gets into trouble with Captain Anderson for violating standing orders. The awesome sea and the indifference of the fellow passengers accentuate his feelings of loneliness and have the effect of unsettling his wits, producing a "melancholy leading on to madness" (p.210).

Though he was abandoned by Talbot and the captain to many hostile influences around him, this unworldly parson blunders from folly to folly. This act reaches its climax in a mysterious event, thus appalling as to lead to Colley's death, as an act of self-will. Thus, the seamen and the other passengers subject Colley to great humiliation in the name of celebrating their passage across the equator. The rites which are usually observed in a jovial spirit turn out to be most cruel and brutal. It is an action of sheer insanity, utter irrationality. The parson feels as though he were being pursued by the Furies. He writes: "I had not harmed them. They had had their sport, their will with me .... nothing that men could do to each other can be compared with that snarling, lustful, storming appetite - " (p.238).

Talbot also learns from a chance overheard remark and from reading Colley's self-revelatory letter to his sister what had really happened on the fateful day. Colley, while scarcely
realising that he was doing so, had been living out a secret life centred on a handsome young sailor. He had initially concealed from himself his true interest in Billy Rogers by seeing him as a "sad scamp ... whose boyish heart" had "not yet been touched with grace" (p.227), and who yet might be saved for the Lord.

But as the voyage had progressed, the passenger's indifference and the captain's prohibitions had driven Colley deeper into himself. He had been increasingly confined to a kingdom of his own in the waist of the ship. There he had become more and more preoccupied with Billy Rogers. Perhaps he would have remained harmless had not loneliness and the fiery liquor with which he was tempted awakened in him the desires he hardly knew he possessed. He had followed his yearning "to kneel before him" (p.276), not to praise or pray but, when the opportunity was offered to commit fellatio.

And the shame of his public denial of everything he hoped to be had broken his heart. This was the knowledge that Talbot and Talbot alone possessed, and to a man who had always doubted Colley's religious convictions and seen him as just the other side of the coin from Zenobia - "the one in paint pretending devotion, the other with his book Surely pretending sanctity" - the knowledge might even have brought some satisfaction.
But Talbot had read Colley's long letter to his sister, and learned from it that Colley was no simple hypocrite. The loneliness created by his cloth and his class had told Colley "things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had, no conception till he took counsel with the great solitude - and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating". We also understand his essential innocence and fervid spirituality as he records in his letter.

As the voyage progresses, Colley finds himself increasingly excluded from the social world of the quarter-deck, quite at pains to comprehend why "a humble servant of the Church of England - which spreads its arms so wide in the charitable embrace of sinners" (p.199) should be ostracized by the ship's "gentry" (p.188). "The ladies and gentlemen at this end of the ship do not respond with any cheerful alacrity to my greetings", he writes, puzzling over their "indefinable indifference" (p.193).

Now let us note Colley's reactions to the shame he has suffered at the hands of others. As he broods over it all, he realizes it is not a personal insult. They have done his office wrong, dishonoured his cloth, and thereby God. Though God may forgive it, it is his duty to rebuke the offenders rather than suffer it in silence. He approaches the captain in the parson's
dress and finds him in a rather penitent mood. Chumbershum and Devere 1, the two officers in charge of the crossing-of-the-equator ceremony, apologise to him. Colley forgives all the people who were involved and watched the cruel drama of his persecution. He thinks the worst is over, and looks ahead with cheer and hope. He overcomes his despair, reasserts his faith in God, and finds a new delight in the sea and the creatures inhabiting it. He apprehends the harmony of the universe in a single vision. He says that "the power of Grace is infinite" (p.247) and, after all, he assures himself, his sufferings have a happy outcome.

Colley, armed with faith, dons his full canonicals and determines that he will go before the men and demand an apology, not for the affront to himself, but for the affront to the 'cloth'. The captain and the officers attempt to dissuade him by suggesting the possibility of further danger; Colley persists, however, claiming to have a powerful shield in the garb that he is wearing, "those ornaments of the Spiritual Man" (p.244). Mr. Colley goes forward among the emigrants and common sailors; he emerges sometime later without his clerical robes, with his wig at a disgraceful tilt and in a loose canvas garment, that barely covers him:
Surely his frame was not one that could afford him any pleasure! His skull now the wig no longer covered it was seen to be small and narrow. His legs had no calves; .... He turned to his right, walked slowly and carefully to the bulwark and pissed against it. (p.117)

This scene has been viewed by most of the passengers and his crew. After it is over, Colley retires to his stateroom and to his bunk where he clasps an iron ring bolt set in the side of the ship and remains immobile until his death.

The guilt Colley has discovered at the centre of his being weighs him down so much that he wills himself to death. Talbot reports after visiting Colley:

It was then I perceived without seeing - I know, but had no real means of knowing - There had been a time when he had awakened in physical anguish which had quickly passed into a mental one. He lay like that in deepening pain, deepening consciousness, widening memory, his whole being turning more and more from the world till he could desire nothing but death. (p.156)

At this point, V.V.Subbarao states Colley's condition as "a tragic tale that raises the fundamental question of what man is. It demonstrates the vulnerability of man and the gradual
disintegration of his central being in the face of the forces of chaos and disorder. Alone and vulnerable, man readily capitulates to the forces of chaos within." 27

Further he argues that Colley's encounter with the seamen is the encounter with his own self. The crossing of the white line "into the great unknown part of the ship" (p.109) is symbolic of the plunge into the vortex of the dark, into the hidden recesses of the self. It is a dive into the chaos of his own soul. His canonical dress symbolizes his prideful will. His act of taking rum with the sailors in a spirit of reconciliation is suggestive of his acquiescence in evil. It is a surrender to the dark impulses in his psyche. 28

In Colley's letter to his sister, we find that Colley is governed by an ego-ideal, that of the responsible man of God. He suffers from a kind of pride that Jocelin in The Spire experiences. In both the cases, egoism takes the form of religious fervour. The erection of the spire by Jocelin, and the attempt of Colley to establish order and bring "the poor ignorant people in the front end of the ship .... to repentance"


28. Ibid., p.115.
(p.244), are the outward expression of their hubristic aspiration. Colley loves to think of "my kingdoms" (p.209), "my calling and the degree consequent on it" (p.214), "the prerogative of my cloth and consequent station in our society" (p.210). He tells the captain, "I defend MY MASTER'S Honour as you would defend the king's" (p.243). He enters into a compact with the sailors, a compact made in the spirit of his ideal, and it leads to the terrible revelation of his own murky depths. His tragedy like that of Jocelin, underlines the gap between man's conscious intention and its realization in action, the ironic affinity between the projected ideal and the guilty act.

Talbot described Anderson as "the king or emperor of our floating society with prerogatives of justice and mercy" (p.144). There was, however, no hope of any justice or mercy to a parson under his anti-church regime. Colley's fall from Anderson's grace was a damnation without pardon or reprieve doomed to end in humiliation and death. None among the ship's passengers relished the idea of a parson conducting regular religious service. Colley did not appear relevant to the social context. No body seemed to need him. No tears were shed at his funeral and none, apart from the narrator, was really bothered to know about the tragic circumstances of his death.
Colley falls not because of Talbot's own "unwitting conduct" or "someone else's deliberately criminal behaviour" (p.259) as Talbot supposes; not because he has violated the standing orders or failed to observe the rituals of social class, but because of the division within. He fails to unite, as it were, the antagonistic elements within the self - the sensual and the spiritual - into a higher reality. The awareness of the dichotomy within throws him into the abyss of despair.

The question that arises here is whether Colley is a "man of God" or just "a bare-headed clown" (p.228). Colley towards the end of his letter, writes as one who has overcome the travails of his existence and apprehended the harmony of life in a single vision. But that is closely followed by his fall from grace. As William Boyd points out, Golding appears to be deconstructing Coleridge. The moment when the Ancient Mariner is filled with universal love is also the moment of his atonement; it frees him from guilt. The guilty mariner is freed of the albatross. But here is an ironic reversal in that the innocent Colley, in the hour of his enlightenment, is led to his fall from grace and to an awareness of guilt. William Boyd observes, "Colley re-enacting the Mariner's part with a more

literal accuracy goes on from this point to assume an albatross which leads to his squalid end. Thus, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, "the symbolic voyage par excellence" is here inverted by Golding.

It is through Talbot, that the genuineness of Colley's experience and the reality of his sense of shame are exposed and communicated to the readers. But considering his own role in "Colley's drama" (p.264), his responses though possible, are not probable. There is no involvement on the part of Talbot in the woes and despair of Colley. Though Talbot judged the parson by his external appearance he cannot understand the significance of the parson's experience.

Colley is humble and gentle to the point of obsequiousness and conducts himself as a part of the hierarchian establishment. He is the victim of a vengeful persecution of the captain for allegedly violating his 'Standing Orders' which appear to form an integral and important part of the rites of passage. His movement is restricted; he becomes an object of cruel jokes and is publicly humiliated. He tries to control his anger and bitterness by following the Biblical injunction of non-resistance.


to evil and by adopting the other cheek philosophy. "I have been brought to see that the insult to me was as nothing and no more than an invitation to turn the other cheek". It is at this point that the parson shows signs of a new awareness in his confrontation with evil. He says, "I must put my own house in order and learn all over again - but there is no end to the lesson - to forgive!" (p.240).

There is an undertone of irritation and impatience at the endless forgiveness offered to tormentors in history, who refuse every time to learn a lesson. There is an unmistakable note of anger against the cult of submitting passively to the insults inflicted by evil:

The true insult however is to my cloth - and through it to the great army of which I am the last and littlest soldier. My master himself has been insulted and though he may forgive it, I have a duty to deliver a rebuke rather than suffer that in silence. (pp.240-41)

Accordingly, Colley makes bold to reprimand the captain and other officers for ill-treating him and on hearing their expression of regrets, he freely forgives them and prays for them. When Colley proceeded to make the common passengers realise their wrong, the exercise proved fatal; it cost him
his honour and life; liquor was forced down his throat, he was
stripped naked and was sexually debauched by a crew member. All
this was adroitly inspired and engineered by Anderson and his
gang. Colley could not survive the trauma of public ignominy
and thus died of utter shame.

The fact of the matter, however, was that Colley was not
guilty of the offence. Adverting to the indignities inflicted
on him on an earlier occasion, Colley wrote in his diary:
"what is man does defile him, not what is done by others. My
shame has been inflicted on me" (p.235). It could not be the
shame and guilt that killed him. He died, a hapless victim of
a cruel joke, a castaway left in the cold without medicine and
without care.

Originally, Talbot had mistaken Colley for the ship's
chaplain and had unthinkingly observed to Cumbershum that "it was
fortunate we had a chaplain to perform all the other rites, from
the first to the last". This is the first occasion on which the
word 'rite' is used in the novel, and has reference to the
Christian ceremonies that accompany important human events.
But, the second time it occurs to describe not a Christian
ceremony, but the complicated set of procedures demanded for the
naval exercise known as 'shooting the sun'.
Colley through his letter - a sensitive, though at times sentimental, piece of writing - is beginning to establish his identity independent of Talbot's judgement which is coloured by the prejudices and predilections of his class, he seems to be, as we come to the end of the novel, assuming a central role. We are shown what has been done to the parson; but the more important part of his disgrace - his self-degradation and the anguish it has entailed - is only hinted at. We are like Talbot in the end, left with the task of gathering the clues spread over the book and constructing for ourselves the lamentable story of Colley's fall. Still, we feel that there is no sufficient material for a fuller understanding of the motives and events that shape the fate of Colley. This suggests that the fate of man is incomprehensible and mysteriously made: "Life is a formless business .... Literature is much amiss in forcing a form on it". (p.265).

It is Colley's misfortune not to understand or heed the ancient customs of the sea. He is also the representative of the Christian rites that the Pagan seamen have rejected. As a result he is cast in the role of scapegoat in that other notorious rite of passage, the crossing-the-line ceremony. He being dragged out of his cabin before King Neptune for judgement and subsequent humiliation may be compared to the persecution and murder of Pangall in The Spire.
Talbot is shocked at his own responses to certain situations. He plans Colley's fall in social terms. Talbot plans to drop a letter addressed to Miss Zenobia in the parson's room, and bring him to disgrace. He later realizes with a sense of shame how similar his plan is to that of the captain's father related by Deverel. Both have exercised the privilege of their position without shouldering its "responsibilities" (p.267). Talbot now learns to apply to life the concepts of justice and duty. This knowledge should serve well in his task ahead.

Thus, Talbot's knowledge of men and women is found to be woefully inadequate. He thought he could manipulate things, even the captain. He believed that the captain could be motivated by self-interest. But later the captain is seen in the new light. The captain, who is behind the persecution of Colley is himself a victim of social pride and prejudice, as Daverel's 'jest' reveals. His dislike for the parson is determined by the circumstances of his birth, although he has, as Talbot says, greater reason to hate the lord than a parson.

Colley's letter to his sister serves as an eye-opener to Talbot. It reveals his own "omissions" and the captain's "commissions" (p.185). He realizes that Colley is in a way more sinned against than sinning. But that is not all. The facts that come to light at each action and the subsequent
revelations convulse Talbot's understanding even though he fails to fully grasp the significance and implications of his fall. However, for a man who mistakes shamelessness for candour, it is a good lesson to learn that a man can die of shame. He says, "In the not too ample volume of man's knowledge of Man, let this sentence be inserted. Men can die of shame" (p.278).

By necessity Talbot concealed the true significance of Colley's death; he tells his patron that he will write a letter to Colley's sister that "it will be lies from beginning to end" (p.277). The illumination that "men can die of shame" - a death which purges Colley - can only be revealed by the full story, but this is the story that neither his sister nor the members of the ship's company are prepared to understand. Talbot's letter to her will be a piece with the illusions of literature to which he has objected earlier in the narrative.

The concluding lines from Talbot's journal identify man as a creature of the grotesque; they read as follows:

"With lack of sleep and too much understanding I grow a little crazy, I think, like all men at sea who live too close to each other and too close thereby to all that is monstrous under the sun and moon" (p.278). As Talbot, towards the end, reconstructs the Colley drama, it leads him to a comprehension
of the hidden truth about the darker side in human nature. The knowledge that he has thus gained is his rite of passage.

VII

Close Quarters

Close Quarters (1987) is the sequel to Rites of Passage, the second part of a projected trilogy whose final volume, to judge from Talbot's postscript, must already be written. This novel continues the story of the voyage of a ship full of emigrants bound for Australia in 1813. The cast of characters are the same as in Rites of Passage, with the omission only of the unfortunate James Colley whose self-immolation at the end of that book had such a chastening effect on Talbot, the priggish narrator.

In this novel, Golding successfully conveys the aimlessness and restlessness of sea-life, the urgent need for love and companionship. Rites of Passage ends with the parson's story, but the ship is still somewhere in the middle of the south Atlantic, and all this time the ship has made very little progress, partly because of her extremely dirty bottom. And Cumbershum and Deverel want Summers to ask the Captain to steer for the River Plate to clean her.
Indeed, there could be more than one sequel, for the ship makes very little progress in the present hook, having been stuck in the doldrums, hampered by a luxuriant growth of weed, and stalled by a horrifying accident. However, we can be sure, as the narrator himself tells us, that he at least survived the voyage. Certainly the journal he wrote for his patron, and a second journal, now before us, this time written for his own use and even with a view to publication, have come through.

The first volume "was a journal that became a story by accident", this one becomes a story by accident or rather by negligence, when the ship is taken back, in a freshening breeze with the loss of fore and main topsails and other damage. The accident happened because, Deverel, the officer of the watch went below for a drink and left in his place a stupid midshipman. The helmsmen might have seen what was happening and prevented it, but only at the risk of a flogging, since they would have had to change course without an order. In this ensuing turmoil Talbot helps the captain haul on a rope until he is knocked out by a loose sheet. Deverel is put under open arrest and forbidden to drink: the ship can now make little sail and in any case a few days later she is becalmed in a fog. Human failure, rancour, ambition and

Before that happens, another ship appears vaguely and, since that they may well drift together, there is the likelihood of a battle. Talbot, now recovered, volunteers to help serve one of the six guns; but he is too tall for the gun deck and in running the piece out he strikes his head cruelly on a beam. He then goes up into the open air and takes a cutlass, feeling uneasy. The other ship, still veiled, is heard to run out her guns. She looms up, huge, and fires, but fires a signal gun: she turns out to be a friend, HMS Alcyone, a fast British frigate, and she announces Bonaparte's abdication and the end of the war.

The ships are drawn together in the doldrums, there is much cheering, and great sociability. The ship's companies make a city in the waste, steal from one another, dine together, hold a ball, the seamen parodying the dances of their betters. A ball is arranged, but before it the captain of the Alcyone, Sir Henry Somerset, and his wife invite Talbot to dinner; he is still somewhat dazed from bangs on the head and heavy doses of the ship's panacea, a tincture of opium, but he goes and he is instantly enraptured by Miss Chumley, an orphan, Lady Somerset is taking out to India. Golding's hero falls into the rapturous expressions
of love that are amusing to the onlooker: "I cannot tell why tears came to my eyes! A grown man, a sane, really rather calculating man, a political creature to have water spring up behind his eyelids ...." (p.95).

They get along very well, and on returning to his ship Talbot, still very strange, takes over Colley's cabin to leave his for her. They get on even better at the ball in spite of some trouble from Deverel, drunk in defiance of orders, and they part with something like an understanding.

A little later Deverel, behaving outrageously, is put in irons; and Talbot, also out of his wits, but not from drink, tries to take passage in the Alcyone. He is put to bed; and the ships part; and when quite a long time later he comes to himself he finds the disabled seventy-four rolling very heavily in rough weather. He goes on deck and finds her shipping green seas; he is rescued from these by a new officer, Benêt, from the Alcyone, a handsome golden-haired young man. Then going below to see Deverel, the guilty officer, (who is silently exchanged for a handsome young fellow who has been having to do with the wife of the frigate's captain), finds the middle-aged gunner, alone but for a senile midshipman, and with great truth and sincerity the gunner tells him that although he has some qualities, he knows nothing - he is an objectionable young puppy. Benêt becomes an
important figure in the continuing story. But all these developments are related to the greater chain of causes, as well as to the development of the obvious metaphor: a white line that separates the classes until, in extremity, it is washed away; the banker-like purser continues to calculate risk and profit.

From this time on it is a history of heavy weather, appalling discomfort, hard times and very little progress in these vague southern waters. (They never see land and only this one other ship; most of the time they might be sailing in a dream tinged with nightmare), and of rivalry between the conscientious, earnest, religious Summers and the Captain's new favourite Benét; of increasing difficulties with weed; shortage of food and fuel; increasing danger.

Talbot is nevertheless much concerned with his loss - eager to talk about Miss Chumley with Benét (a poetical officer, attached to Lady Somerset) - tormented with suspicion and jealousy of Deverel, now with her.

Golding pictures the ship as a tightly rigged analogy for the human condition. A deck is never just a deck, a hull never merely a hull. From bowsprit to poop and from bilge-pump to crow's-nest, it becomes a living organism, a precarious
embodiment of the uneasy relationship between human craft and the elements of nature. Twigs have been seen to sprout from the unseasoned timber down below. Talbot experiences a strange sensation while walking on deck in his bare feet. "It was true, good God! The planking was alive! There was a creeping and almost muscular movement". (p.226)

In the various manoeuvres to clean the ship, ambitious young Benét proposes the use of a dragrope of his own devising: Summers is against it, but the captain consents; it catches something and a huge weed-covered object towers up and then slides away, sinking, a piece of the hull, not vital but horrible to see. The vessel is now so frail that it may only be this parasitic growth which holds its fragile carcase together. In Talbot's nightmares, when the draglines are lowered over the side they trawl up a writhing accusatory mass of sea-monsters, Leviathans and severed heads.

More mysteriously, two ghosts haunt the novel, though often resolving themselves into one. The first is the ghost of Colley, hovering over the narrative as the ship lies becalmed on the ocean and green slime covers the hull like a disease. "Perhaps", Talbot speculates, "it was the unappeased 'larva' of Colley creeping about the ship like a filthy smell which was the 'motus' of our idiotic decline into phantasy" (p.220).
The other is the ghost of literature itself. Colley is clearly Golding's albatross, and throughout the novel muffled resonances from The Ancient Mariner, from Moby-Dick and from innumerable other sea-faring years and mysteries turn this ship into a floating echo-chamber.

Shortly after this Talbot goes to his cabin, once Colley's and looking through the louvre in the door sees his elderly servant Wheeler, lost overboard and returned by a miracle from the clutches of Death, standing there with a peaceful look on his face and something like a brass goblet raised to his lips. It is a blunderbuss and with it he blows his head to pieces: Talbot, spattered by brains, reaches the deck and then faints away.

The cabin is uninhabitable and Summers gives him another in the wardroom, in spite of his intense jealousy of Talbot's friendship with Benét and his assumption that Talbot, having promised his patronage, is now withdrawing it. There is a full, emotional explanation and they are friends again. "Hesitantly I held out my hand; and like the generous-hearted Englishman that he is, he seized it with both his own in a thrilling and manly grip 'Edmund'! 'My dear fellow!'" (p.270). Here the book ends, with the ship not far from foundering, and with Talbot's manuscript enclosed in a firkin for survival, together with a
postscript saying that his heart is filled with an ambition to launch into volume three and to become a published writer.

In a distinctly flippant postscript, we are informed by Talbot that he has indeed reached safe shores. With a certain sheepishness, he confesses to the desire of seeing his memoirs (originally written for a mysterious "noble godfather", who it is hinted, has been instrumental in getting Talbot his prestigious assignment) published: "... I now find myself no more or less than a common writer with all the ambitions if not all the failings of that breed" (p.280).

VIII

Fire Down Below

Fire Down Below (1989), the concluding volume of the trilogy, makes what its narrator, Edmund Talbot, called at the end of Close Quarters "the three splendid volumes of Talbot's Voyage or The Ends of the Earth" (p.281) - that is, Rites of Passage with Close Quarters and Fire Down Below themselves - into William Golding's most genial, most various and most harmoniously structured novel. Thus, Golding's sea trilogy which begins with Rites of Passage and concludes with the recently published
Fire Down Below — is on the last stretch of its voyage from England to the Antipodes, and it is most astonishing of the three, not least because of its ostensibly dissonant ending. We have seen, how Young Edmund Talbot, who boarded the ship in Rites of Passage, too aware of his privileged social status, undergoes a cathartic change. He has witnessed the humiliation of Mr. Colley, a fellow-passenger and a cleric, whose subsequent death imparted two important lessons: that men can will themselves to die out of unbearable shame, and that appearances and class are invalid as the measure of a man. The last lesson, gained by reading Colley's journal, is particularly painful, for it introduces Talbot to the torments of guilt.

In Close Quarters, our interest moved to the crippling of the ship by the folly of an officer and a midshipman; to its meeting with another ship, the Alcyone, from which it gained a better officer, Lieutenant Benét; to Talbot's falling in love with Marion Chumley whom the Alcyone carried to him and from him: to Benét's ingenious experiments in improving the sailing of the ship, and the monstrous results; and to the also monstrous suicide of Talbot's servant Wheeler.

These events created the world of Fire Down Below. The ship is still in much the same wretched condition, unable to set sail on the fore or mizzen because not only did she lose
topmasts, but, as Summers explains to Talbot, showing him the vessel from the maintop, the step which holds the heel of the foremost is split and the mast can bear no pressure, "Mr. Talbot here is by way of thinking he would like to learn everything there is to know about a ship". 

Many of the people are in a bad way - Brettiman, now engaged to Miss Granham, has been seriously injured by a fall during heavy weather, and Miss Brocklebank, the ship's tart, is confined to bed in what was Talbot's cabin. The rivalry between the plodding Summers and the dashing Benêt has reached such a pitch that Benêt can say to Talbot: "you are of the first lieutenant's party, are you not?" (p.20). It is made worse by Benêt's plan for securing the split step with bars of red-hot iron which, contracting as they cool, will draw the wood together with immense force; this will make not only the foremost but also the counter balancing mizzen usable once more. Summers is against it because of the danger of fire down below: the bars are to go through four feet of timber and the glow in the heart may burst into flame long after the operation.

Thus, the ship's dangers increase as it reaches the Antarctic, and Benêt's ingenuity responds to but perhaps increases them; tension grows between him and the second-in-

command, Talbot's good and pious friend Lieutenant Summers.

Talbot, supported by Summer's intuitive kindness, faces the memories of Colley and Wheeler in the cabin which he had inherited from them and the memory of Marion Chumley everywhere.

He nearly adds to the deaths for which he feels responsible that of Mr. Brettiman, the radical philosopher; and nearly, also, is converted to Mr. Brettiman's philosophy. The ship is as much foreground as background to these events as storms drive it, still partly crippled, towards the polar ice.

Thus, one of the most delicately achieved themes of this third volume is the way in which Talbot portrays, without ever properly understanding it, the co-operation of captain Anderson's authority, Lieutenant Benet's brilliant technical intelligence and Lieutenant Summers's religiously inspired duty, with the strength, skill and discipline of the crew, in the management of the vessel. Even in the imminent destruction of the ship he fails to see that his own well-meant advice is a hindrance and a danger, and, in his pique that the hierarchy of a ship cuts across the hierarchies of the land, refuses to recognise that Anderson "is a good captain". Stephen Medcalf says: Fifteen years ago Golding had in mind to write about a successful mutiny on a ship, and the gradual breakdown of the substituted order; he has found a subtler way of presenting the relation of order to energy. 34

At length the ship reaches the cold green waters of the forties; they prepare for heavy weather and for the repair of the foremast's step - charcoal has to be made to heat the iron, a slow process. And at about the same time Talbot decides to go back to his cabin, partly out of a sense of duty; it must not be said in Sydney that he was haunted out of it. His servant observes that the place attracts suicides, and that Wheeler had always regarded suicide as an ultimate refuge. In the cabin - refurbished but essentially unchanged, with Colley's ringbolt still in place - Talbot has a horrible night in which a voice, his own says: "You could have saved us" (p.63).

The next day Miss Granham takes him to Prettiman, who is asleep, heavily drugged. Prettiman utters the frightful cry of pain that Talbot has often heard before, and slowly comes to his senses. He wishes Talbot and Oldmeadow the Army Officer to be witnesses when he and Miss Granham are married by the Captain: Prettiman is sure he is dying and the witnesses are to ensure that his widow is not cheated out of his fortune. Talbot is also to hold a document in which Prettiman states that he has had carnal knowledge of Miss Granham, so that there can be no question of non-consummation. Prettiman, by the way, is no longer the silly little rationalist, eager to shoot albatrosses and prevent people from throwing salt over their shoulders, of the earlier volumes, but a very much more considerable figure.
Summer suggests that Talbot should take the middle watch with him, acting as his midshipman, and at midnight Talbot goes on deck. He learns that their position is far from certain, and that Summers likes to rely on one method of finding the longitude, Benêt on another, more advanced. It is an extraordinarily beautiful night, the watch by the jeer-capstan singing gently; Talbot tells Summers how desperately he is in love, and they talk about Miss Chumley. At 4 a.m. the watch ends; Talbot goes below and, in spite of the cabin, sleeps soundly, realising only much later that Summers had arranged all this out of kindness.

Then there is Prettiman's marriage with Miss Granham in white, looking very well - ceremony conducted barbarously by the captain: Talbot is nevertheless much moved and he lies on his bunk in tears. Waking he hears a metallic hammering far below, understands that the hot-iron operation is proceeding (the sea is perfectly calm), and goes down into the hold. He is not allowed to go forward at first but he does hear and see something of it, and when the captain and Summers go, Benêt says, he may have a look. Talbot is immensely impressed by the vast bulk and vast power, but Benêt is engaged on a poem and Talbot cannot induce him to talk about Miss Chumley. He goes to see Summers, who is very low, having been savaged by the captain for 'obstructing' the ingenious and apparently successful Benêt: Talbot tries to comfort him and promises his godfather's support.
Talbot's voyage at the level of seamanship means that he continues what he began in *Close Quarters*, to find how the metaphors for living are drawn from voyaging - "taken aback", "oil on troubled waters" (p.135) - come into their full force when they have been experienced in their literal origin. At the deeper level of understanding the nature and beauty of the ship's way and life in the waters, it means that Talbot has learnt what he began in *Rites of Passage* by reading Colley's journal, to describe with the admiration of a romantic poet the sea and the ship that, to begin with, merely disgusted him.

From the beginning, Talbot had loved Shakespeare and the Greek poets; falling in love with Marion Chumley brought him in *Close Quarters* out of enlightened superiority to think that there are experiences for which they provide the only words. Now, in a really brilliant piece of intertextuality, a swapping of quotations between Pindar's description of the Fortunate Islands and Voltaire's of Eldorado enables him as no philosophizing, or perhaps any other form of experience could have done, to see that the irascible and earnest Mr. Prettiman is not - or not only - a danger to society but an infectiously inspired visionary.

Prettiman is in fact a Neo-platonist and tries to persuade Talbot to recognize what he has already intuitively described, in a still and lovely nightpiece about a middle watch shared with
Charles Summers, when the duty watch sings, that the stars provide "the gesture, the evidence, the plain statement there, the music - as they used to say, the cry, the absolute" (p.219).

Then, Prettiman certainly recognises the absolute, but only by an equation which neither the sense of God in Pincher Martin, nor indeed modernism, accepts - "We, a fire down below here - sparks of the Absolute - matching the fire up there - out there" (p.219).

With sail now set on all three masts and with a fair wind, the ship makes seven or eight knots on her eastward journey, which is just as well, her provisions having run so low; but Summers remains deeply depressed; indeed, he pays less and less attention to Talbot during the middle watch and eventually Talbot says "Silence I can endure, Charles. But an averted face - what have I done?" "You have done nothing. I have been shamed, that is all" (p.132). Yet the next day he is better. He wakes Talbot and leads him on deck. The real forties wind that he foretold has come, and when they reach the quarterdeck it is so strong that Talbot cannot get his eyes to close entirely, while on the poop everything is shattered water, spray and air inextricably combined. Nothing can be seen except for some jelly-like sacks that the hands heave over the rail when Summers has pricked them - sacks
that ooze oil to prevent the enormous following seas from breaking over them with such fury.

But oil or not, the ship is flung about, and as the storm goes on and on and on everyone suffers, particularly Prettiman. There is nothing for Talbot to do and he drinks a good deal; so presumably does Benêt. At any rate they get into a drunken quarrel outside Prettiman’s cabin—Prettiman has been crying out in great pain these many days—and eventually they thrust their way in, each claiming he has had the idea that Prettiman should be turned with his head to the bows. In his agony the poor man agrees. Talbot puts an arm under him, stumbles, pushed by Benêt, and falls on his legs; Prettiman faints; his wife says: “You have killed him” (p.147).

Then over-coming all the hazards, the ship finally reaches its destination, Sidney Cove. Here the denouement plays itself out. On Talbot’s recommendation, his friend Summers gets command on the now decommissioned ship. No sooner has this happened than the physical fire down below erupts, burning the ship and killing Summers, who is all goodness but ultimately a small moral force in the story. Talbot learns that his influential godfather and patron had died. His own prospects, therefore seem unpromising.
Stephen Medcalf says, the binding theme of Talbot's voyage is the making of Talbot's soul - or perhaps the better word is character - so much so that one might call Rites of Passage, where he was shaken again, the Inferno of the trilogy; Close Quarters, where he is first consistently presented as having the grace to feel ashamed and where he meets his Beatrice, the Purgatorio; and Fire Down Below, where he learns to look at the stars and which is the happiest of Colding's twelve novels, the Paradiso.  

Further, he compares Talbot's Voyage to Dante's Comedy. He says, if the trilogy is a Commedia it is a secular and even a comic Commedia. He thinks of The Spire, which is closer to Dante, as a parallel to Talbot's Voyage, partly because the transformation of imagination by technical necessity is continually brought before one's mind, but also because of the growing self-knowledge of the principal character, Talbot.  

Talbot echoes, at the end of the book, one of Jocelin's nightmares - "I think there has been death in my hands" - and in both cases, but rather more in Talbot's than in Jocelin's, the honesty of this recognition is marred by a self-importance which

35. Ibid., p.263.
36. Ibid., p.268.
in its turn is shed. At the end of *Rites of Passage*, moreover, Talbot, like Jocelin at the beginning of *The Spire*, heard a conversation critical of his most cherished illusion about himself, and believed it must concern someone else. But Jocelin's illusion was about his sanctity, Talbot's about his wit.

Thus, the dominant note of *Fire Down Below*, indeed, is not taking anything— not all the terrors, deaths, the beauty and poetry—too seriously. But for Talbot, the voyage will remain the most important part of his education and his life, and concludes that, "the world must be served, must it not?" Of the three people who in *Fire Down Below* point him to ways transcending common sense, Summers the Methodist departs, following his command, like Matty in *Darkness Visible*, in a blaze of fire which may have been smouldering in the ship for many weeks of its adventures, and provides an alternative meaning to Mr. Prettiman's for the book's title—the question, Does that fire down below create or destroy? surfaces in one form or another throughout Mr. Golding's writing. The answer, always subtly suggested, is that it does both; such are the inherent ironies and contradictions of the human condition. Golding's God is neither a judge nor an avenger, but a balancer of symmetry. In the end, Mr. Prettiman himself vanishes into the desert to find or create the Ideal City, leaving Talbot haunted by the dream only that he might have gone too; while Marion
Chumley proves to be the most charming of advocates for not going too deeply into things, or even in quest of cities (to visit the Holy Land, she remarks, "would be too painfully effecting for a young person to contemplate" - an irony).

Thus, Golding's exquisite sea trilogy is without doubt Golding's crowning literary achievement - a richer, more varied, and mellower masterpiece than "Lord of the Flies" which established him as one of the great writers of the time.

IX

Conclusion

Thus, in this chapter, a detailed analysis of the meaning of search for self-knowledge and awareness being the first step towards resolution and redemption are discussed with reference to the novels - Pincher Martin, Free Fall, The Spire, The Pyramid, and the trilogy comprising of Rites of Passage, Close Quarters and Fire Down Below. In Pincher Martin, we have seen how Martin struggles on the rock for survival against all odds, with his education, intelligence and will and how they fail him to bring salvation. It is also shown how at the end, God succeeds in breaking the grip of the claws (Pincher reduced to the lobster claws) and how Martin's resolution will break and he will submit
to God but dies. In *Free Fall*, it is shown how there is a progression from the old Sammy to the new. It is also shown how Sammy seeks and finds a pattern of meaning in his life by means of the tool of self-awareness provided by his visionary experience. In *The Spire*, it is shown how Golding allows Jocelin his victorious self-awareness but he exists in an age removed from our own and his self-knowledge coincides with his death. In *The Pyramid*, it is shown how Oliver’s self-awareness is a life-long and slow process rather than a momentary illumination. In the trilogy, it is shown how the principle character, Talbot, is constantly engaged in the process of gaining self-knowledge, about the people around him and about himself.