CHAPTER III
THEMES (11)
(1) **FREE FALL**

*Free Fall* is another novel of Golding's that has been somewhat puzzling to critics as well as common readers. It is, in a way, a corollary to *Pincher Martin*, the concern of both being with freedom and how human beings use it or benefit from it. The book has invited extravagant praise as well as some strongly adverse comment, which, it seems to me, it does not deserve. Undoubtedly *Free Fall* is a novel difficult to understand, and critics like Frederick R. Karl and James Gindin seem to agree with James Baker's statement that "the translation of incoherence into incoherence is bound to exasperate the reader."(1) Virginia Tiger, too, condemns the book in unambiguous terms: "*Free Fall* must be declared a dramatic failure."(2)

Golding has apparently attempted in the book to depict the 'cosmic chaos' — the patternlessness of life. Man is a pattern-making animal. As Hynes says, "Christianity is a pattern, Marxism is a pattern, scientific rationalism

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is a pattern. But experience itself is patternless.\(^{(3)}\)
The protagonist, Samuel Mountjoy, travels up and down his memory to give moral coherence to his experience. He is looking for a system that will include all his past experience. His past holds our attention and his present is 'sketchy and ambiguous'. He has come to believe, in middle age, that "Living is like nothing because it is everything."\(^{(4)}\)

In *Pincher Martin*, we have seen how man tries to impose his patterns on nature. In *Free Fall* Golding expands the same idea in more convincing detail to show how pattern-making man is overwhelmed by the patternlessness of life and experience. What was a motif in *Pincher Martin* is the theme here.

Samuel Mountjoy, a very successful artist whose paintings hang in the Tate Gallery, is not content with his success. He regrets the loss of freedom, for he had once been free and could choose any path that he liked. It was as real and inexplicable to him as "the taste of potatoes."\(^{(5)}\) "Then, there was no guilt but only the plush

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4 *Free Fall*, p.7.
and splatter of the fountain at the centre."(6) But somewhere on his way from Rotten Row, where he had lived in innocence as a boy, to Paradise Hill, where he now lives as a popular artist, he has lost freedom and his review of the past reveals the life he has led. He frequently repeats the question 'where?' and, as the first person narrative progresses, our concern shifts from 'where' to 'how'.

The first three chapters, arranged chronologically, show Mountjoy successively as an infant in Rotten Row, at school and in the hospital ward. He is the bastard son of a poor woman, who did any sort of menial work when work was available. In answer to Sammy's enquiries about his father, she provided him with all sorts of fathers ranging from a parson to the Prince of Wales. His mother was not as important an influence on him as the neighbour's daughter Evie. She surprised him with various miracle stories. She was a clever fantasist, ingenious at invention. Though they grew up underfed and scantily clothed, it was a period of immense happiness. The child was so innocent, he was capable of 'transnatural'knowledge. When the lodger who lived upstairs died, Sammy felt that the alarm clock had ceased ticking. His mother discovered

6 Free Fall, p.5.
that it was not the clock that had stopped but the heart of the lodger.

At school, Sammy engaged in adventurous trespasses, going to the extent of bullying the smaller boys for fagcords. The wickedest thing that he ever did, as a boy, was to venture to desecrate the altar of the parish church. Sammy recollects how he was challenged by Philip, a friend, to defile the altar.

"I would, then, see? I'd piss on it."

Giggle flap tremor, heart-thud. And so by dare upon dare in the autumn streets I found myself at last engaged to defile the high altar."

Leaving the initial idea, Sammy spits on the altar, and the parish verger punishes him with a big blow. The grown-up Sammy is acquitting the boy Sammy, even here of guilt. It was done in innocence, without conscious intention or deliberate planning. It was a period when his mind was immature, and he was no more than "eyes" and "curiosity". He belongs, as it were, with Lok (The Inheritors) before the coming of the homo sapiens. Sammy comments:

"I can love the child in the garden, on the airfield in Rotten Row, the tough little boy at school because he is not I. He is another person. If he had murdered I should feel no guilt, not even responsibility."(8)

7 Free Fall, p.59.
8 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
Though the child "trailed no clouds of glory" he was, "innocent of guilt, unconscious of innocence; happy, therefore, and unconscious of happiness."(9)

We next see Sammy "no longer free." having taken the decisive step. He is on a motor bike waiting for the traffic-light to change, in order to follow and trap Beatrice. Impatient of waiting, he jumps the red light 'pushing the bike along the pavement' for fifty yards. He gives his calculated move an air of accidental meeting and soon Beatrice, once his class fellow, now a training student in South London, is struggling under him. She was an obsession with him as he had failed to paint her face. By promising to marry and by threatening to go mad if she does not give in, he seduces her. But the girl is physically unresponsive, rendered frigid by her Catholic upbringing. Later, Sammy, who has now turned a communist, meets Taffy, another communist and they fall in love, live together and then get married, disregarding his promise to marry Beatrice.

After this, nothing significant happens to Sammy till the Second World War. When he was serving as a combat artist with the British army, he was arrested by the Gestapo and became a prisoner-of-war. He is

9 Free Fall, p.78.
interrogated by Dr. Halde, a psychiatrist, for information regarding the reported proposal for a large-scale escape. Dr. Halde skilfully employs one device after another to break Sammy down: "a friendly manner, sheerly rational appeals, temptations to every pleasure, a relativistic morality and finally the threat of torture."(10) But Sammy resolutely withstands both temptations and threats. Consequently he is locked up in a dark cell to be tortured by himself.

This torture cell gives us echoes of many similar cells of torture in literature — in Poe's 'The Pit and the Pendulum', in Orwell's 1984, in Golding's Pincher Martin and in Camus's The Fall. Yet, with all its literary connections, Sammy's cell is his own, private in every sense of the word. Halde was right in estimating that Sammy would torture himself to the point of breakdown and surrender. Sammy has exhibited, from his boyhood, an excessive fear of the dark. As Delbaere-Garant says, "The dark room in the rectory, a first metaphor for man's existential situation was only a foretaste of what Sammy was to experience in the cell."(11) Sammy, in the cell,


confronts himself and feels the presence of a bleeding male-organ. Terrified of the darkness, Sammy shouts for help and the door is immediately opened. Sammy's instinctive cry for help and the subsequent opening of the door are thematically relevant, for once we have seen him shutting another door on himself.

Sammy, going out of school, framing his own morality, had shut the door on Moses and Jehovah. Shutting them out, he had locked himself inside. What makes him shut the door on Moses and Jehovah is crucial to his loss of freedom. Halde's locking him up turns out to be a blessing in disguise since it "leads to Sammy's eventual release into a new consciousness of the divine."(12)

If we want to examine what led to Sammy's eventual loss of freedom, we have to go back to his school-days. Beatrice becomes an obsession with him in his adolescence. He was first attracted towards her by his strange inability to paint her face. He could catch her body pretty well but when it came to her face it eluded him. He feels a compulsion to capture her by drawing her; and failing in this, he wishes to do so through love and lust.

Two of his school teachers, whom he calls his 'spiritual parents', are more than incidental in his

formative period. In spite of his natural leaning towards religion, Sammy was repelled by his religious teacher Miss Rowena Pringle. Though she reveals a world of miracle and love to him and in spite of her religious vocation and temperament, she was an irritating spinster who could not help torturing the boys. Nick Shales, the science teacher, was a sharp contrast to her. He rejects the spirit behind creation. "If there were problems, nevertheless they must contain their own solution" (13), he believed. He was a rationalist, but he won the students through love and friendship while Miss Pringle vitiated her teaching by "what she was." (14)

These two words — the rationalist’s world of science and the miraculous world of religion — existed side by side without a bridge to connect them. Sammy was won over by Nick Shales, not so much through his rationalist philosophy as through his personal charm. These two were, perhaps, the greatest influences on Sammy. He admits:

"These two people, Nick Shales and Rowena Pringle, loom larger behind me as I get older. Mine is the responsibility but they are part reasons for my shape, they had and have a finger in my pie." (15)

13 *Free Fall*, p. 212.
But the influence of Nick Shale's behaviour became the decisive one for him:

"Understanding came to me. His law spread. I saw it holding good at all times and in all places. That cool allaying rippled outward.... For an instant out of time, the two worlds existed side by side. The one I inhabited by nature, the world of miracle drew me strongly. To give up the burning bush, the water from the rock, the spittle on the eyes was to give up a portion of myself, a dark and inward and fruitful portion. Yet looking at me from the bush was the fat and freckled face of Miss Pringle. The other world, the cool and reasonable was home to the friendly face of Nick Shales..... Miss Pringle vitiated her teaching. She failed to convince, not by what she said but by what she was. Nick persuaded me to his natural scientific universe by what he was, not by what he said. I hung for an instant between two pictures of the universe; then the ripple passed over the burning bush and I ran towards my friend. In that a door closed behind me. I slammed it shut on Moses and Jehovah. I was not to knock on that door again, until in a Nazi prison camp lay huddled against it half crazed with terror and despair." (16)

But Sammy's fall was not here. His embrace of rationalism, like Nick Shales's was in itself harmless.

But his extension of the philosophy to a relativistic morality was necessitated by his own lust. The headmaster's words at Sammy's leaving school are powerful, and they help to speed up the crisis. The headmaster tells him:

"If you want something enough, you can always get it provided you are willing to make the

16 Free Fall, pp.216-17.
appropriate sacrifice. Something, anything. But what you get is never quite what you thought; and sooner or later the sacrifice is always regretted."(17)

He absorbs reading the first part of the advice and ignores the warning contained in the second. Leaving school, Sammy questions himself:

"What is important to you?"(18)

The answer was already clear — the white unseen body of Beatrice Ifor. What was he willing to sacrifice for her?

"Everything."(19)

It was here that he lost his freedom. By applying himself totally to this single aim he made further choice impossible for himself. His decision to sacrifice everything was not without a philosophical basis to back it up. Immensely influenced by Nick Shales the man, Sammy embraces his rationalism and "develops Nick's rationalism into a relativistic morality."(20) Convinced of his on intelligence he decides:

"There is no spirit, no absolute. Therefore right and wrong are a parliamentary decision.....

17 *Free Fall*, p.235.
19 *Ibid*.
But why should Samuel Mountjoy, sitting by his well, go with a majority decision? Why should not Sammy's good be what Sammy decides? Mine was an amoral, a savage place in which man was trapped without hope, to enjoy what he could while it was going."(21)

By opting for rationalism so completely, he shut the door on Moses, Jehovah and Christ — the world of the spirit. For a person who devises his own morality to suit his convenience, there is no shrinking from anything. He can make a full commitment unhesitatingly. Like Faustus, who sacrificed his soul for worldly pleasures, Sammy sets himself after an innocent girl, wrecking her and making himself miserable.

Golding seems to suggest here that, if man is his ultimate law-maker, his prospects of happiness are bleak. There were two reasons obviously responsible for the unsatisfactory relationship of Sammy and Beatrice. The girl was physically frigid, sexually inhibited by her Catholic background. Sammy too, however, should be blamed for the situation. He was trying to impose his will, his pattern on a creature totally different from him. The relationship is, in a way, a parallel to the Paul-Miriam relationship in Sons and Lovers. Immediately after Sammy deserted her, she goes to pieces, and is reduced to a state of idiocy. We see her later in a mental assylum.

21 Free Fall, p. 226.
Free Fall was published three years after Camus published The Fall in 1956. More than what is suggested by the titles, the books have many things in common which cannot be overlooked. Both deal with man's loss of freedom. But it is not difficult to see that Camus and Golding differ in their conclusions. Jean Baptiste Clamence, Camus's protagonist, confesses his guilt, and his confessions bring forth similar confessions from the auditors and gains ascendancy by advocating universal guilt. Camus dramatizes man's helplessness in this absurd world. Clamence declares:

"I am for any theory that refuses to grant man innocence and for any practice that treats him as guilty." (22)

He does not spare even Christ of blame and guilt. Our position in the universe is absurd, if we are all guilty and if there is no way of salvation, he argues. But Golding seems to reverse this existential tenet. The absurd situation is created by man himself, by shutting away God. We are guilty, because we make the wrong choice. If one chooses to be one's ultimate arbiter, one cannot escape blame and guilt.

Samuel Mountjoy is certainly guilty of choosing a relativistic morality. Together with his selfishness,

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22 The Fall, p.78.
his concern for himself, the relativistic morality leads to the destruction of another — Beatrice. For a person who refuses the "spirit behind creation" absolute morality sounds foolish and unacceptable. But, shut up in the Nazi Prison Camp, he experiences a different order. He torments himself, confronted with his own darkness. Man becomes a different creature when he gets an opportunity to encounter himself. Virginia Tiger comments about this situation that the "ego atavistically confronts its psychic darkness."(23) From his childhood, he has shown an irrational fear of the dark. The boy in the rectory cannot sleep for a second without the light on. The same irrational fear is discernible in the boys of Lord of the Flies and in Pincher Martin (Pincher Martin). We have ample evidence for the fact that Sammy was tormented by his own past deeds. Otherwise he had no business to see a bleeding male organ in the cell. We learn, later, that the cell is a cupboard for keeping things, and nothing was in it except a small piece of wet cloth, probably deliberately left there by Dr. Halde. Sammy's reaction is a by-product of his affair with Beatrice. By now, he has seen, through his experience of both pre-war and war-time life, that his rationalism was wrong, that his choice of rationalism was

irrational. He is guilty as a result of this free fall. Golding seems to make it explicit that man falls freely, that is, as a result of his own choice.

Free Fall deals with man's position in the universe. Is he to accept modern rationalism or is he to accept man's limitations, acknowledging the miraculous, mysterious nature of the world? By accepting Nick Shale's rationalism, Sammy had forsaken 'the spirit behind creation'. If we dismiss the existence of spirit, there is nothing like an absolute morality because if man is his own law-maker, he has no guide except his own imperfect judgement. In such a condition man's conduct is not good or bad, by any absolute standard, it is something discovered or got away with:

"And of course, here Nick's universe of cause and effect, his soulless universe, fitted like a glove. I was more intelligent than Nick. I saw that if man is the highest, is his own creator, then good and evil is decided by majority vote. Conduct is not good or bad, but discovered or got away with."(24)

Sammy, in his intellectual pride, decides to close the door on Moses and Jehovah. The decision to trap and wreck Beatrice was taken in this state of mind.

But what happens to him when he is locked up in a dark cell? Certainly, he has nothing else to encounter.

24 Free Fall, p.218.
there except darkness and himself. He encounters his own past deeds and decisions, and feels that a male organ is bleeding. Convinced of his sexual excesses with Beatrice, he feels guilty. His experience of life — without as well as within the cell — has taught him that it does not fit into any rationally explicable pattern. Nick's theory that every problem contains its own solution is challenged and dismissed, and he experiences an awareness of the spirit, something beyond himself and the shut doors open with his instinctive cry for help, because when someone cries for help, he recognises that help from outside is possible.

Despite his realization of the patternlessness of life, we have at least two conflicting patterns as experienced by Sammy. These two patterns, that is, the rational and the religious, stand apart without a bridge to connect them. The imagery of the bridge is significant in Free Fall as in The Fall. In the middle of Free Fall we see Sammy crossing a bridge and — symbolically — the road after the bridge is sloping down. Sammy's fall is from this bridge. Jean Baptiste Clamence's fall, too, is associated with a bridge. There, indeed, a woman literally falls from a bridge and he leaves her struggling in the water, without even telling anyone. Though the falls
look similar in many ways, they differ in the essence. Clamence's fall is necessitated by his nature, by his lack of clemency, his inability to enter into the life of others. But Sammy fell through a decision of his. He experiences evil before he sets about to trap Beatrice. He says:

"At the moment I was deciding that right and wrong were nominal and relative, I felt, I saw the beauty of holiness and tasted evil in my mouth like the taste of vomit."(25)

Nick's opinion of sex fits in very well with regard to Sammy. Nick tells him at school:

"...... if the Devil had invented man he couldn't have played him a dirtier, wickeder, a more shameful trick than when he gave him sex!"(26)

After he is released from the Nazi Prison Camp, Sammy meets Beatrice at a mental asylum. He meets her, perhaps in order to atone for his sin. The scene has invited sharp reactions from critics. Sammy feels that he has been responsible for her plight. But Dr. Enticott remarks:

"You probably tipped her over. But perhaps she would have tipped over anyway. Perhaps she would have tipped over a year earlier if you hadn't been there to give her something to think about. You may have given her an

25 Free Fall, p.226.
26 Ibid., p.231.
The statement sounds paradoxical, and James Gindin blames Golding for the scene, because it "both exaggerates and palliates the structure of the novel." (28)

It seems that the criticism is rather extreme, though the scene at this point is rather obviously designed to serve the theme. An occasion has been provided for a dialogue where such things could be said. The doctor's diagnosis of possibilities seems meant to indicate that we cannot really understand anything truly. Sammy's seduction was not meant to do any good but quite possibly it may have resulted in some good to Beatrice. (Conversely, an action designed to do good and apparently so, could well have resulted in harm.) The moral, perhaps, is that the world is mysterious if only because there are too many incalculables, too many things we do not know. Rationalism is not enough.

The doctor's statement that perhaps Sammy gave her an extra year of sanity fits in well into the scheme of the novel. It is not intended at diminishing the responsibility of Sammy. Because the novel's concern is not simply 'cause and effect'. The incident is one among the many experiences

27 *Free Fall*, p. 248.

Sammy has had. We have seen how Beatrice responds to Sammy. It is not an incident like the 'Faust-Heinretta' incident in Faust. There is always an element of mystery around her. We have seen Beatrice's answers to Sammy's question: She was never certain of anything. 'Yes' or 'No' was beyond her. All that she could say was "May be". The scene, in fact, emphasizes the insufficiency of human understanding. Man's capacity to understand and put the world into a particular pattern is very limited. Later, we see Sammy also reaching the same stage and giving the same answer that Beatrice had given. To many of Dr. Halde's questions Sammy answers: "May be." And, there is no reason to believe that the last sentence of the novel is there accidentally. The Nazi commandant tells Sammy, releasing him from the prison:

"The Herr Doctor does not know about peoples."

It is true of Sammy as well.

Pattern making man is baffled by the patternlessness of life. There are different patterns. But none of them fits well into life and experience. Both Nick's rationalism and Pringle's spiritualism are true. Both worlds exist side by side. Sammy tells us frankly that none of the hats fits completely:

"I have hung all systems on the wall like a row of

29 Free Fall, p.253.
useless hats. They do not fit. They come from outside, they are suggested patterns, some dull and some of great beauty. But I have lived enough of my life to require a pattern that fits over everything I know, and where shall I find it? 

That Marxist hat in the middle of the row, did I ever think it would last me a lifetime? What is wrong with the Christian biretta that I hardly wore at all? Nick's rationalist hat kept the rain out, seemed impregnable plate-armour, dull and decent. It looks small now and rather silly, a bowler like all bowlers, very formal, very complete, very ignorant."

Where does Golding differ from Camus? Supposing that Camus wrote Golding's book, Camus would perhaps have left Sammy terrified in the dark. Golding goes further and suggests that the modern man's prospect of salvation is not altogether closed. As soon as he realizes that help can be sought from outside, the door opens. The door remains shut on those who look for help from within. So the novel ends with the protagonist's realization that the world is miraculous and mysterious in spite of its apparent rationalism, and that man is a limited creature who can achieve his salvation only through religion. Pincher Martin (Pincher Martin) ends by refusing God. He sees God as a projection of the self and denies the otherness of the universe. Samuel Mountjoy ends his narration with the acceptance of the complexity of life which is predominantly miraculous. He shows us how 'a scar becomes a star'.

30 Free Fall, p.6.
Finally, Sammy composes two speeches to be delivered to his spiritual parents. His dissatisfaction with Nick Shales is reflected in his accusation that he "did not choose ...... rationalism rationally."(31) His letter to Rowena Pringle is more accusing in nature:

"You lost your freedom somewhere and after that you had to do to me what you did .......... The consequence was perhaps Beatrice in the looney bin, our joint work...... Do you not see how our imperfections force us to torture each other? The innocent and the wicked live in the same world.... But we are neither the innocent nor the wicked. We are the guilty. We fall down. We crawl on hands and knees. We weep and tear each other."(32)

Both these speeches remain undelivered — Nick Shales was dying and Rowena Pringle 'paralysed' him with her love and enthusiasm for her old student who is now a popular artist. As Sammy finds forgiveness impossible from Beatrice, Sammy's offer of forgiveness to Miss Pringle never reaches her. Golding, is, perhaps, making the point that forgiveness is almost impossible. Our only freedom is to fall; the rest is out of our hands.

_Free Fall_ deals, at length, with the two views of

31 Free Fall, p.250.
32 Ibid., p.251.
life — the religious and the rational. Golding's unhappiness seems to be with the separateness of these two worlds. Modern man's spiritual problems seem to emanate from the lack of a bridge that connects the spiritual with the rational. Critics seem to be interested in giving a two-layer meaning for the title as well. The religious explanation is simple and obvious. It alludes to Adam's freedom of choice. E.C. Bufkin comments:

"Golding has shown clearly in Fincher Martin and Free Fall that man is born free but that a wrong use of his freedom causes man to lose it." (33)

Sammy made a choice that ended the possibility of choice. And as Hynes says, "Golding seems to propose that the beginning of guilt is the end of freedom." (34)

At the scientific level:

"Golding's imagination seems to have been engaged by this idea of man falling freely and endlessly through space as a scientific conception of man's place in the universe." (35).


34 Samuel Hynes, William Golding, op. cit., p.36.

35 Ibid.
H. S. Babb argues that Golding wants to present Sammy's existence as a riddle and that "The riddle is reflected in the book's title itself, which refers Sammy's fall both to the scientific universe of physics and to the theological world of the Bible." (36)

"I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members." — St. Paul.

Golding’s last 'serious' novel, *The Spire*, reveals the artist at his best. It is rich in symbolism and dense in its structure. At the immediate narrative level, it tells the story of the building of the Barchester tower. Golding's Barchester tower resembles, in every detail, the Salisbury tower, the tallest steeple in England, rising four hundred feet from the marshy land. People call the tower a miracle since it does not have a proper foundation. As Samuel Hynes says:

"The tower of Salisbury is said to be built on faith as it is built on marshland without sufficient foundations to support a structure of such weight."(1)

Jocelin, the Dean of Barchester Cathedral, begins the task of construction with the conviction that he has been chosen by God to do God's work. We see him in a state of 'maniac joy and excitement' at the opening. For him it

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is a day of days for he has waited long for the construction to begin. In spite of all the opposition from the Cathedral Chapter, he has won the permission of the Lord Chancellor. But Roger Mason, the master builder, opposes the tower on the ground that the Cathedral is not strong enough to support such a tall tower. Jocelin, for one, cannot be dissuaded by such arguments because he has a 'singleness of purpose' which is based on a Vision.

Pits dug on the sides of the Cathedral reveal, rather, the absence of foundation. Against all theories of construction, Roger Mason is urged on. Roger Mason makes a last appeal to abandon the plan on the ground that the pillars are thin and they cannot bear so much weight. The following conversation illustrates the difference in their attitudes:

"Do they seem thick and strong to you, father?"

"Immensely."

"But see how thin they are for their length."

"It is their beauty."

"They support nothing but the roof; and they were never intended to bear much more than their own weight."

"Nevertheless they must be strong." (2)

2 The Spire, p. 41.
Both reason and nature oppose the construction in vain.
With the coming of the rains, the pits begin to stink,
filling the Cathedral with a foul smell. The workmen sing
filthy songs defiling the sanctity of the house. Jocelin
quarrels with Father Anselm, and starts realising what the
cost would be. He realises that the Chapter has lost its
old harmony, and his long friendship with Father Anselm is
under a strain. He tells himself:

"I didn't think how much you would cost up there,
the four hundred feet of you. I thought you
would cost no more than money. But still, cost
what you like."(3)

The money he uses is particularly tainted. It is Lady
Alison's generosity towards her nephew Jocelin that makes
the spire financially possible; and she had earned the
money through her whoring in high places. The whole town
knows that Jocelin has been using bad money for the tower.
But Jocelin believes that bad money put to good use is no
longer bad. It is 'tavern talk' that the spire is
Jocelin's Folly. But Jocelin, in turn, believes that it
is God's Folly. God, sometimes, asks people to do things
which make no sense at all. And one must do them, like
Abraham who never questioned the right and wrong of His
order to sacrifice his son.

3  The Spire, p. 35.
The building costs much more than this. The services are disturbed by the sound and the dirt of construction. As the tower progresses, the pillars start singing. With the pillars singing fewer and fewer people assemble to praise the Lord, till the services are totally disrupted. Jocelin witnesses Goody Pangall, the sacristan's wife, and Roger Mason being 'trapped in a net'. He could have stopped it, had he not tried to benefit from it. It was welcome to him as it would detain Roger. As Goody's pregnancy advances, Jocelin begins to feel agony. Pangall is no more to be seen, and Jocelin refuses to accept the reality of what has happened, even in his own conscious mind. He never permits what is in his subconscious to come to the surface. He pretends to believe that the mistletoe berry that sticks to his shoe has fallen from the wood of the roofing. Reality, even when presented stark naked, fails to make a dent on him.

In order to escape the pressure of anxiety, he involves himself more and more in the physical work of the Cathedral. He climbs the stairs and becomes one among the workers. And he became part of the crew. "He began to lay his hand to a rope, or his weight to the end of a crow." So the workers, "called him 'Father' but they treated him joculatorily, like a child."(4)

4 The Spire, p. 153.
As the days pass, his obsession with the work is too great to permit his performance of his clerical duties. Throughout the Lent, he preaches but finds it difficult to repent or pray. With his relations with Father Anselm strained, he never goes to confession. Thus the spiritual leader becomes a physical force.

As the spire rises bit by bit, the workers become more and more panicky. Jocelin suppresses the revolt of the workers, and he knows that he has to urge Roger up stone by stone. The pillars bend and sing. The service stops altogether. The pillars were the only things that sang in the Cathedral. Most of the workers desert. Goody dies of a miscarriage. Roger becomes more and more afraid of heights. He hardly attends to his duties.

Ever since the beginning of the construction of the tower Jocelin had felt its weight on his spine. The warmth at his back seemed to him to indicate the presence of an angel sent by God to fortify him. But, later he feels that the angel has been joined by a devil to torment him, so that it has been a race all along between an angel and a devil.

Moreover, Goody has been haunting him ever since her death. Her red hair and white flesh are difficult to put
away from his mind. So that night after night "Satan seizes him by the loins and works on it." (5)

Having received complaints, both from the clergy and the laity, the Visitor comes from Rome. Interrogated by the Visitor, Jocelin is forced to admit some of the facts he had deliberately kept out of his mind. Till then he had known that people considered him mad, but had given no particular thought to it. Now he admits:

"Perhaps I am." (6) He realizes that the answers to some of the questions are inexplicable. Fumbling, he answers about the interruption of the service:

"It's true. How true it is. So true." (7)

But he does not admit that the Cathedral had remained idle without its spiritual function.

"I was there, all the time. It was a kind of service. I was there, and they were there, adding glory to the house." (8)

The Visitor learns that the workers that Jocelin

5 The Spire, p.138.
6 The Spire, p.163.
7 Ibid., p.165.
8 Ibid.
refers to as "they", are "Murderers, cutthroats, rowdies, brawlers, rapers, notorious fornicators, sodomites, or worse." But Jocelin is not ready to give in. If they are not good people, they are 'bold' at least.

He learns that simplicity is a deception, because everything seemed so simple at first — a Vision and its concretizing.

As the tower grows taller and taller, he becomes more and more aware of the filth. Filth comes from all directions, and he is struggling at the centre trying to avoid it. Even the Cathedral is capable of sending up a foul smell. The cellars beneath the building stinks, the workmen dirty the Cathedral, they sing filthy songs, they quarrel and murder, Roger Mason fornicates in the holy house, a worker falls from the scaffolding and dies, Goody Pangall dies in childbirth, Roger Mason takes to drink.

The spinal tuberculosis that he has been suffering from since the beginning worsens, and sleep becomes harder and harder. Lying in his bed, sleepless, he is incessantly haunted by Goody Pangall. Parallel to his plight, a big storm rages and the townspeople run in panic to the Dean

9 The Spire, p.167.
for protection. But the Dean is totally obsessed with the spire. When it is reported:

"The city's being destroyed!"

he shouts at them:

"What's happened to the spire?" (10)

The spire has alienated him from humanity. Not only that, he has ignored his duties, he has condoned adultery in the Cathedral tacitly. Adopting a most impious attitude of expediency, he had let the end justify the means. Anything was acceptable if it helped in the construction of the tower. In a literal sense, the zeal of God's house had eaten him up.

When the storm rages, his fear is only that the spire might fall. Disregarding the fierce storm, he climbs the stairs and fixes the Nail on top of the tower. The Nail has been sent by the bishop from the Holy Father. Jocelin hopes that with the Holy Nail the spire can be saved. Miraculously, the spire outlives the storm. But, Jocelin falls from the tower and injures his back. He feels that he has defeated the devils in the race by fixing the Nail on the tower. But he never had a moment's rest. He was

10 The Spire, p.173.
awake and asleep at the same time. And all the time,

"She came towards him naked in her red hair."

Hearing of his plight, Lady Alison comes to see him. She gives her the greatest shock of all. He who had thought all his life that at least his vision was true, confronts the reality:

"Listen nephew. I chose you. No. Listen, and I'll tell you something. It wasn't at Windsor but a hunting lodge. We were lying on the bed together —"

"I'd pleased him and he wanted to give me a present, though I had everything in the world I wanted for myself........ I was happy and therefore generous." (12)

Father Anselm reveals some more of the truth to Jocelin, how he had become the Dean 'skipping up through purely nominal steps'.

These revelations shock him and compel him to face the truth which he had been evading all through the years. He is no more the old Jocelin having known that what he had considered a divine call was all planned at the adulterous bed of the King and Lady Alison — both his promotion and the money were the result of a 'post-coital whim'.

11 The Spire, p. 178.
12 Ibid., p. 184.
Pride yields to humility. And Jocelin seeks forgiveness first from Father Anselm and then from Roger Mason. But forgiveness is hard to come by. From Father Anselm he begs forgiveness not for what he did but for what he is:

"I beg you. No forgiveness for this or that, for this candle or that insult. Forgive me for being what I am." (13)

Though Father Anselm says that he forgives him, we know the state of his mind.

With Roger, Jocelin is more humble. He cannot but face the reality now. The single-willed, all-very-certain Jocelin is all doubt now. If, in the beginning he knew everything, now he admits:

"I know nothing. What's a man's mind Roger? Is it the whole building, cellars and all?" (14)

Now he knows that evil is not 'out yonder there' but down here and within. Man's mind is the Cathedral, he comes to believe, with the foundations on stinking dirt. Now he realizes that deep down in his heart, he had evil intentions about Goody, his 'daughter-in-God'. He had deliberately arranged the marriage, knowing that Pangall was impotent so that her virginity, her purity, would be preserved for

13 *The Spire*, p.203.
the 'Father-in-God'. This feeling of guilt haunts him, waking and asleep.

"I sacrificed her too. Deliberately .... so after she died, she haunted me; she bewitched me. To have prayer blinded by hair...."(15)

he tells Roger:

"I killed her as surely as if I'd cut her throat."(16)

Not only that, we now learn that he had tacitly witnessed the ritual murder of Pangall. Almost for two years he had pretended to believe that he did not know what had happened to Pangall. But the mistletoe berry haunts him. Though he tries to tell himself that it was fallen from the wood of the roofing, deep down he knows that it declared the killing of Pangall. The confusion is chaos now and he says to Roger:

"I need three tongues to say three things at once."(17)

He confesses, not to his confessor, but to Roger:

"I thought I was doing a great work; and all I was doing was bringing ruin and breeding hate."(18)

15 The Spire, p.214.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p.209.
And later,

"I injure everyone I touch, particularly those I love. Now I've come in pain and shame, to ask you to forgive me." (19)

It is deeply tragic when he acknowledges that he had traded four people for a stone hammer, realising the futility of the spire.

Neither the newfound humility nor his repentance gets forgiveness from Roger. All he has to say is:

"May you be cursed right through hell." (20)

Shouting, "You stinking corpse." (21) Roger pushes him out. Outside, an irate crowd was waiting. They assaulted him and soon he was in the filthy gutter with no clothes on him. There, the dim awareness of filth is sharpened.

"Here I show what I am." (22)

Back in his room he talks less and less frequently. But his mind was never at ease. He seldom listens to what people

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., p.215.
22 Ibid., p.216.
says; but once he hears:

"It is a wasting, a consumption of the back and spine — "(23)

The witchcraft of the woman never left him.

"He looked up experimentally to see if at this late hour the witchcraft had left him; and there was a tangle of hair, blazing among the stars; and the great club of his spire lifted towards it."(24)

And the suspicion that he was not chosen by God, but moved by the witchcraft of a woman deepens. Now his only concern is:

"Has it fallen yet?" (25)

And the answer is invariably the same.

"Not yet." (26)

Father Adam comes to give him absolution, and he sees the tremor of Jocelin's lips which he takes for "God! God! God!: And so, " of the charity to which he had access, he laid the host on the dead man's tongue."(27)

23 The Spire, p.218.
24 Ibid., p.221.
25 Ibid., p.218.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p.223.
The Spire tells the story of a man whose zeal 'passes all measure'. He is a man of will and the power of the will is ambivalent — neither wholly good nor wholly bad. It is the power to create as well as to destroy. It achieves a splendid spire which was impossible in ordinary conditions. The spire, certainly, symbolizes spiritual aspiration. The Cathedral is glorified. But the tragic hiatus is that it has killed four people. The human cost at which it has been achieved is immense and, indeed, preposterous. The services of the Cathedral were disrupted for about two years. Pangall is ritually sacrificed. It brings the destruction of Goody and Roger and his wife. The harmony of the Cathedral Chapter is broken. Old friendships end. The people desert the Cathedral and they call the tower Jocelin's Folly. The theme of sacrifice for bigger things is not rare in literature. At least two of Gelding's contemporaries — Dorothy L. Sayers and T.S. Eliot — dramatized this theme. William of Sens (The Zeal of Thy House) admits:

"At my age one learns that sometimes one has to damn one's soul for the sake of the work."(28)

He ultimately realizes that the end alone is not what matters but the means too matter. He who believed

that the craftsman's truth lies in the craft comes to believe:

"Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it."(29)

In the reckless enthusiasm people forget everything else. People are not seen as people but instruments for their purpose. The theme of using other people as instruments is beautifully dramatized in Ibsen's The Master Builder. Selness (The Master Builder) achieves greatness at the expense not only of his wife but his assistant Ragnar Brevik and a young girl Kaja Fosli. In his stubborn will to conquer everyone, he forgets what unhappiness he brings to the people around him. When Jocelin encounters certain harsh facts, he tries to avoid looking at them. Consequently, he does not look at people but looks through them. His singleness of purpose tells him:

"Cost what it may."(30)

He understands that Goody and Roger are in an inescapable net. He could have averted Goody's tragedy, had he tackled the relationship with more human consideration and less fear

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29 Dorothy L. Sayers, The Zeal of Thy House, op. cit., p.311.

30 The Spire, p.35.
of Roger's running away. He was not so much concerned about Goody as about the Cathedral spire. So he found it convenient to detain Roger.

Jocelin believes, when the work starts, that he is doing His Father's work. The Cathedral is a stone bible, and the rising spire is the prayer that comes out. The belief that he is chosen to do God's work is a 'Christian naivete'. The command of God is felt as an urge from within his heart. Once when he was kneeling for prayer he felt it there. He differs from many other visionaries who see Visions in their dreams. The desire that he knew was springing from his heart attains the proportions of a compulsion which he cannot resist. As Weintraub and Oldsey observe:

"The compulsion to drive on is stronger than any inhibitions brought on by thoughts of the consequences."(31)

The Vision made concrete loses a good deal of its glory, and has its cruel human cost. Jocelin had thought that it would be simple. What was needed was to fill the spire with stone and wood and iron. But he learns, through experience, that the simplicity was a deception. He is shocked by "the realization that there is a tragic hiatus between spiritual

vision and human earthly actualization."(32) In the beginning, "The spire was there..... sketched in his head with simple geometric lines."(33) But later he confesses to the Visitor that there are not words enough to explain the complications. He gives his realization the analogy of a tree:

"A single shoot at first, then clinging tendrils, then branches, then at last a riotous confusion."(34)

The pain of knowing was too much for him, as it was for Lok (The Inheritors); it robs him of peaceful sleep. Sleeping and waking were one and the same for him:

"He tried to deze but could not tell which was sleeping and which waking since both were the same nightmare. He tried to think of other things, only to find that the spire was so firmly based in his head there was nothing else to think of."(35)

Part of the realization is that he has brought immense unhappiness to others. At one stage he acknowledges:

"I traded four people for a stone hammer."(36)

33 The Spire, p.139.
34 Ibid., p.168.
36 Ibid., p. 208.
He confesses to Roger:

"I thought I was doing a great work; and all I
was doing was bringing ruin and breeding hate."(37)

And later he feels agony and regrets:

"I injure everyone I touch, particularly those
I love."(38)

He had not seen people as people. They were simply instruments
for his purpose. Ibsen has elaborated this theme in *The
Master Builder*. In order to achieve greatness, Solness
sacrifices the happiness of his wife and an engaged young
couple. Jocelin becomes aware of the human cost after the
confused scene at the crossways. He tries to ignore the
incident. But at the bottom of his mind, at the sub-conscious
level, he cannot repress the memory of what happened.

"He scuffled his foot irritably and as now so
often seemed to happen, the berry and the twig
could not be forgotten, but set off a whole
train of memories and worries and associations."(39)

because it was associated with the ritual murder of Pangall.
And at once:

"He had an instant vision of the spire warping
and branching and sprouting and the terror of
that had him on his feet."(40)

37 *The Spire*, p.209.
38 Ibid., p.211.
39 Ibid., p.95.
40 Ibid.
The building of the spire is very complicated now. He tells himself:

"I never knew how much it would cost......... I tried to draw a few simple lines in the sky; and now my will has to support a whole world up there, before I can do it."(41)

There is adequate evidence in the novel to support the idea that the spire symbolises sublimated eros. It is a phallic symbol. Right from the beginning, the physical analogy is made evident. The model of the Cathedral spire suggested a man lying on his back:

"The nave was his legs placed together, the transepts on either side were his arms outspread. The Choir was his body and the Lady Chappel where now the services would be held was his head..... there was its crown and majesty, the new spire."(42)

Dean Jocelin (3) is highly-sexed person whose evil impulses well up from the cellarge like the foul smell from the pits dug on the sides of the Cathedral. Even before the construction was planned, the subconscious ramifications of sex were present. Otherwise he had no business to marry Goody, his daughter-in-God, to Pangall, knowing that he was impotent.

41 The Spire, pp.95-96.
42 Ibid., p.8.
As James Baker puts it:

".... he arranged her marriage to the impotent Pangall as a means of preserving her virginity."(43)

His tragedy consists primarily in his discovery of his repressed sexuality. Later, when he tries to pray, her red hair blinds his vision. Waking and asleep, he is haunted by her red hair and her white flesh. So he suspects that he was moved not by 'Vision' but by 'witchcraft.' All through his life he had thought that the quick promotions were a 'divine call' — God choosing him to do His work. When Lady Alison and Father Anselm reveal its true nature, the root of it lying in Alison's adultery with the King, he is shocked into discovering more painfull realities — his own spiritual adultery with Goody. As James C. Livingston comments:

"Jocelin's anguish is ....... tormented with the thought that, like the Cathedral his vision may be rooted in a dark forbidding cellarage."(44)

His disgust for Alison is the result of the belief that the body has defiled the spire. It is easy to forget

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how much more deeply his mind has defiled it. Experience brings him face to face with reality and he starts to learn of the buried impulses in the cellarge of his mind. When he is asleep:

"Satan was given leave to torment him seizing him by the loins, so that it became indeed an unruly member."(45)

The awareness of his own evil makes him terrified. At one stage, he groaned out of his terror —

"I am bewitched". (46)

The feeling that he was not guided by pure vision intensifies, and he tells himself:

"It's witchcraft, isn't it? It must be witchcraft."(47)

Later he confesses to Father Adam:

"It must be witchcraft; otherwise how could she and he come so flatly between me and heaven?"(48)

Sexual defilement is all pervasive in the novel. Lady Alison has a liaison with the King which provides Jocelin

45 The Spire, p. 138.  
46 Ibid., p.156.  
47 Ibid., p.186.  
48 Ibid., p.196.
with enough money. Goody is seduced by Roger Mason. Dean Jocelin too has been harbouring impure thoughts about her. Even the bishop who sent the nail through the Holy Father is connected with Alison. The loud ringing laughter of Alison at the mention of Walter is enough for us to understand the purity of the bishop. She calls him by his first name — 'Walter'. The nail was Jocelin's last hope. At least 'It' would be pure — he thought. We do not know for certain, if Jocelin understood it or not. However he was hoping against hope. His faith in the nail reminds us of 'Young Goodman Brown' — a tale by Hawthorne. Goodman Brown believes that at least the "good old man, our minister at Salem" is a good man, even if his father and grandfather and governor and members of the council are not good. This statement invites immediately a terrible laughter from the fellow-traveller. But, immediately afterwards he goes to beg forgiveness of Roger. He had used Roger for God's work much against Roger's will. It ruined Roger's happiness as well as his reputation. He knew pretty well that the spire would not stand since it was against all principles of construction. As the steeple rose higher and higher, he became more and more panicky. Like Solness, (The Master Builder) he exhibits a fear of heights. Solness seldom climbed as high as he could construct. Roger stops attending to his duties and gets the
work done through his deputy, Jehan. Dean Jocelin too knew now that the spire would fall. What hope is there when the construction is founded on a stinking cellar? Initially he had believed that the building would stand because it was going to be a diagram of faith, and it was easy then to maintain faith, resisting reason. But once he knows that deep down in his own mind he has evil impulses that he had not understood at first, faith gives way to doubt, and the suspicion of 'witchcraft' replaces the confidence in the 'Vision'. The spire which was supposed to be the diagram of the highest prayer is nothing more than an erected phallus. In Pincher Martin and Free Fall Golding had suggested that a phallus is a sword ready to annihilate personalities. In The Spire he has explored this idea and presents, in every sense artistically, how even the suppressed phallic impulses cause destruction to others. The spire symbolises sublimated eros. Solness too sublimated his erotic feelings to the construction of tall towers. We detest the architect who was moved by erotic feelings for a young girl of ten. Solness detained Kaja Foali too. When Hilda Wangal reappears, he is moved by emotions beyond his control. Urged by her he climbs the top of the tower in a wreathing ceremony and falls to his death. Jocelin too climbs the tower to fix the Nail, another ritual to propitiate God,
and falls from the tower. William of Sens, (*The Zeal of Thy House*) too, falls to death from the construction. All these three protagonists are simultaneously heroic and villainous. In their abilities to construct better and higher than all others, they are heroic. In their readiness to destroy others, they are villainous. They are all guilty of, "The eldest sin of all, Pride."*(49)* The desire to be considered 'an exception' is very strong in them. And in that they are guilty of provincialism — to be "away from the centre of things, limited in vision and scope."*(50)*

We are made aware of Jocelin's pride right from the beginning not only in his 'maniac joy' but in statements like:

"Lift up your heads, O Ye Gates!"*(51)*

The dumb artist, carving four heads of Jocelin in stone, catches the essence of Jocelin's nature. He pictures Jocelin's soul as:

"...the hunter, the rapacious eagle in flight, the blind intensity of the madman."*(52)*

49 *The Zeal of Thy House*, op.cit., p.335.
50 *The Spire*, p.181.
51 Ibid., p.9.
"The visionary sees in this image the grandeur and sweep of the Holy Spirit, the open mouth of an angel singing hosannas and hallelujahs." (53)

People around him know that he is 'proud' and 'ignorant'. But Jocelin thinks that he is a Saint. He wants to be one with Abraham and Hosea. In a tone of acceptance he asks the dumb artist:

"Don't you think you might strain my humility by making an angel of me?" (54)

He loves to think of himself as resembling the Holy Spirit. Until he realizes the folly of his Vision he knows no humility. He simply believes that he has been singled out by God in a manner that ordinary people cannot understand. When the people call the spire 'Jocelin's Folly', Jocelin tries to trap Roger with the argument:

"The folly isn't mine. It's God's Folly." (55)

Certainly, the folly has its price, wherever the guilt lies. If William of Sens is redeemed by his repentance, both Selness and Jocelin die unredeemed. The realization

53 James Baker, op.cit., p.82.

54 The Spire, p.24.

55 Ibid., p.121.
that we are guilty is not enough for repentance, though it constitutes the first step towards it. It needs, more than anything else, the humility to acknowledge one's limitation. William of Sens admits, at last:

"I am not
The only architect in the world —
there are others
Will do the work as well, better perhaps." (56)

And he is accepted by the angel as a sheep that had wandered for a while and then came back.

The principal lesson that Jocelin has learnt from the construction is that for man there are no simple acts and that, in his ignorance, he cannot foresee all the consequences. The ultimate realization is:

"There is no innocent work. God knows where God may be." (57)

It is not possible for him to know exactly what God wants. He can only hope, foolishly:

"There ought to be some mode of life where all love is good, where one love can't compete with another but adds to it." (58)

56 The Zeal of Thy House, p. 337.
57 The Spire, p. 222.
58 The Spire, p. 214.
What is this novel about, in addition to being the story of a man misled by pride and zeal into sin? Though different in his object which is apparently virtuous, Jocelin has something of Ahab and something of Faustus in him. The novel does convey the moral, as it were, that without humility, piety itself can become a species of impiety, that under the semblance of good, often evil lies concealed and that even God cannot be served at the cost of human beings. We may perhaps read something more into this story. Golding, from what we have seen so far of his work, seems to be highly conscious, like Hawthorne, of the principle of evil ever lurking beneath the best of surfaces, the 'subtle demonisms of life and thought'. Evil, then, is inescapable, not only for some people like Jocelin but for everyone. Such a comment on life seems to be implied in this novel.
The Pyramid consists of three vignettes from the life of a growing boy becoming aware of the nature of life through his experiences. The narrative tone is here lowered from the "high seriousness" to the tragi-comic. As Leighton Hodson observes, "This particular blend of the grotesque and the saddening appears to be the newest development in Golding's style."(1)

In the first episode, eighteen-year-old Oliver, the narrator, is initiated into the complexity of sex through his affair with the "local phenomenon", Evie Babbacombe, the Town Crier's daughter. The loveless affair that appears, at first, thrilling to him, later becomes detestable as he discovers her to be a nymphomaniac. Her ugly dependance on sex becomes more and more overt, when she returns from London after a brief stay there. When Oliver has learnt that she has had physical relationship with a number of men, he thinks in disgust, lying by her side, in the woods:

"I looked away from her, down at the town made brighter by the shade under the alders, it was full of colour, and placid...... and there below were my parents, standing side by side.....All at once, I had a tremendous feeling of thereeness and

hereness, of separate worlds, they....... clean in
that coloured picture; here, this object, on an
earth that smelt of decay, with picked bones and
natural cruelty— life's lavatory."(2)

Her moral ugliness has been presented symbolically
through the welts on her thighs. We wonder what caused
them but they do symbolize her moral state. It seems that
her capacity for tender love was early destroyed by her
stern father who had punished her physically on many
occasions.

The second episode reminds us of Bottom episode in
A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Stilbourne Operatic Society
performs a crude drama in which Oliver is bullied by his
mother into participating. During the rehearsal and the
final staging, he discourses the town's dishonesty and meanness.
He cries out in disgust:

"Everything's wrong. Everything. There's no truth
and there's no honesty. My God!"(3)

The third story is a blend of the grotesque and the
tragic. It is concerned with Miss Bounce, Oliver's music
teacher, who has become a loveless and graceless person

2 The Pyramid, p.91.
3 Ibid., p.147.
through her father's harshness. He makes her "devoted" to music, and the reality of her physical existence is suppressed. Later she becomes very much disturbed and does almost anything for affection and attention. She stands in sharp contrast to Evie who used sexuality to excess. Golding is definitely making the point that sex, like everything else, is unwholesome when perverted to excess or repressed to excess.

The Spire also advocates the idea that a total commitment to anything is contrary to the laws of nature. There are many things to be reconciled simultaneously. The monomaniac adherence to one leads to the neglect of the others, and it generates unhappiness and tragedy. Pay one must, but no more than a reasonable price.

Oliver returns from her grave deeply moved by the cruelty and wrong choice of Miss Bounce. He asserts:

"I never liked you! Never!"(4)

The title does not readily offer a clue to the understanding of the inter-relationship of the three parts of the novel. They are united by the fact of having a common protagonist-narrator and a common location. Is it called The Pyramid because a pyramid has three sides, like different

4 The Pyramid, p.213.
aspects of a person? But this does not appear tenable. Virginia Tiger's own hesitant interpretation of the title as referring possibly to the stratification of social classes does not sound convincing. The title may possibly even suggest the rising of the protagonist's disgust to a sharp point for each of his experiences or observations brings to light some ugliness of life. The emphasis seems primarily psychological — how did certain events — strike the mind of the protagonist narrator? — and not philosophical in the sense of being a comment on life as such. There isn't anything even like a narrative thread to connect the three parts or a clearly identifiable thematic bond holding them together. As a novel, it is somewhat less satisfying than the others thematically as well as technically.