



Evil in aspiration: A study of William Golding's the spire

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to illustrate the fundamental issue that evil is in aspiration and human being can go at any extent to achieve his aspiration. The present researcher seeks to illuminate this process, mainly from the perspective of psychoanalysis. *The Spire* (1964) represents a world of the dead, a world of undermined from within by an inner darkness, a sad, sick stinking world in which man's fall comes as natural consequences of his own faulty action i.e. aspiration. It is a complex study in human willfulness. It lays emphasis on the dominance of evil as well as the unintelligibility of the human egoism, symbolized in the erection of tall spire at the insistence of the Dean of a medieval cathedral, Jocelin, amid opposition from several quarters. Disregarding all opposition, he proceeds with the task of erecting the steeple on unsafe shallow foundations. The Dean has had a vision of four-hundred-foot-tall steeple erected supposedly to glorify God. But, it is his own act of glorification. And, as it rises higher and higher, there is an increase in people's dread that it may surely topple down.

Keywords: aspiration, glorification, evil, civilization, darkness

Introduction

William Golding emerges as a serious critic of his age whose utopias have often become dystopias. He is also a writer engaged with earlier mythologies, stories and fables, and his novels betray a nightmarish intensity and poetic symbolism that encapsulate past and present. His fictions express his anxiety concerning his process of religious belief as well as the act of writing. He explores man's inner will and the changing contexts. He constantly brings both religion and science to bear upon the term "civilization". He was greatly influenced by a great master of the time 'Freud' who was exploring the darker zone of human mind.

The Spire describes the story of Jocelin, Dean of an English cathedral who thinks that he has been obsessed by a divine vision to build a four-hundred-foot spire on the already existing church. The vision as he believes, descends from God and he is also the messenger of God on the Earth. He commissions the construction of the spire. This instruction of the addition of the new spire brings a general opposition. He is confronted with acrimonious protest by the chancellor of the cathedral, Pangall, the impotent caretaker, for he believes that they will suffer a lot of loss both spiritual and pecuniary. This sense of apprehension is also shared by his lifelong friend and confessor, Anselm, who disapproves of the construction of the spire. Even though, he ignores the opposition and the advice and continues his visionary dream for, "They don't know, they can't know until I tell them of my vision" (Golding 8).

On the day of work, Roger Mason, the master builder, finds the foundation inadequate and warns of the pillars being unable to support such a massive spire for one reason that the church is floating over a patch of swampy ground. In an attempt to persuade the master builder, Jocelin reassures him that building the shaft is 'the highest prayer', that they are both chosen for the job. He is directed by the will of God that

he is blessed with the presence of angel whose warmth he always feels at his back. But, in reality it was not the will of God, it was the aspiration and foolishness of Jocelin.

Sacrifice is interwoven throughout *The Spire* with revelation and vision; and, as the novel progresses, we witness the appalling personal price Jocelin is prepared to pay as well as price he inflicts upon the innocent. Nothing deters Jocelin from fulfilling his aspiration, no matter how massive costs and sacrifices are. Neglecting his spiritual duties, he pursues the work relentlessly to be completed in spite of his tubercular spine. This is for the urge of his egoistical nature for self glory. He sacrifices everything for the sake of his doomed divine dream: "Cost what you like" (TS 35). He knows the master builder has an affair with Pangall's young wife, Goody, but he ignores such a relationship lest he should lose the services of the master builder: "she will keep him here" (TS 64). Though, at first he is repulsed to have known of their love affair as he bears sexual intention to Goody.

He also forces the master builder and army of workmen to proceed with the construction of the monument through illegal means. Building the spire has brought pain and disorder into human lives. Pangall is made a butt by the pagan workmen. Later he is kidnapped and murdered by the workmen as a sacrifice to ward off any impending disaster. Goody dies in child birth of adulterous relationship with Jocelin abets. A workman slips off the scaffolding and dies. The town has suffered the ill-mannered behavior by the pagan workmen that riot and disrupt the peacefulness of the town and the cathedral itself.

He is funded corrupt money from a Lady Alison, formerly mistress to the king who looks for a tomb for herself in the church. The money he uses is particularly tainted. It is Lady Alison's generosity towards his nephew, Jocelin that makes the spire financially possible; and she had earned the money

through her whoring in high places. The whole city knows 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. Certainly, the folly has its price, wherever the guilt lies.

Roger cohorts in his folly who is a practical man, but his bitter experience leads him to suicide attempt. He is reluctant to be involved in the folly of building the spire too high but he is dragged down into perversity. Jocelin is aware of the evil as the spire is "a diagram of the folly they don't know about" (SP 128). Further, Roger is enmeshed in Jocelin's connivance with Goody. He too, has responsibility in the murder of Pangall for what both Goody and Roger face each other "in anguish and appeal, in acknowledgement of consent and defeat" (SP 90).

Professor Boyd observes that, "one might almost say that Jocelin with his arrows of love plays Cupid to Roger and Goody... he allows the house of God to become an unruly house, that he himself becomes a pimp for the sake of the spire" (Boyd 94). Jocelin uses Roger as his tool and leads himself to his guilt. He is an outraged keeper of God's house and not only desecrates the church but also enjoys the sin of illicit love. Jocelin watches Goody ashamed of her desertion but he thinks that he has other important business than to help her and goes on to justify that, "I am like a flower that is bearing fruit... leaves dropping, everything dying but the swelling fruit" (SP 97). He is all set to sacrifice human lives for the fruit of the spire. His aspiration turns into sexuality; "the burgeoning sexual desire that may be attributable to the disease of the spine he mistakes for the ministrations of an angel" (Boyd 95).

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 the cathedral. Roger becomes more and more afraid to heights. He hardly attends to his duties.

As the tower grows taller and taller, Jocelin 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 of a foul smell. The cellarage beneath the building stinks, the workman dirty the cathedral, they sing filthy songs, they quarrel and murder, Roger Mason fornicates in this holy house, a worker falls from the scaffolding and dies, Goody Pangall dies in childbirth, Roger Mason takes to drink.

Jocelin feels that he may be able to hold up the spire by sheer force of will. But will is rather a Satanic quality. Jocelin is ready to offer himself: "my will is in the pillars and the high wall. I offered myself; and I am learning" (TS 97). Jocelin's progress in the building of the spire is by no means simple matter of his sinking a pit into a pit of sin. He rises as he sinks. He learns humility; he can say to himself: "I am not very intelligent" (TS 140). He goes among the lowly tradesman, share their work and their fears. In order to escape the pressure of anxiety, he involves himself more and more in the physical work of the cathedral. He climbs the stair and becomes the one among the workers.

The consequences of the construction of the spire bring Jocelin horror and distress. Recognizing that his 'guardian

angel' is a devil in disguise that whitens the black and beautify the ugly at one end and tortures his spine at the other end, Jocelin gradually becomes aware of his deep darkness of heart. He discovers his guilt holding himself responsible for the deaths and suffering of others. As he lies dying of his tubercular spine, the spire stand high. "The spire does not topple, only Jocelin has fallen" (Oldsey 130).

Evil in aspiration may be seen in various ways in the novel. There is anger in Jocelin's argument with Anselm, the Sacrist; there is envy Roger's involvement with Goody Pangall; there is covetousness of Pangall's wife: there is lust for her. Desire for Goody, desire for self glorification these cupidities are at the root of much evil in Jocelin's aspiration. His aspiration dominates the scene throughout the novel and alienated him from humanity. He not only ignored his duties but also condoned adultery in the Cathedral tacitly. He had not seen people as people but they were simply tools and instruments for his purpose. Anything was acceptable for him if it helped him in the construction of the spire.

The building of the spire educates Jocelin about himself also. Jocelin feels that his aspiration is a deception because he sacrifices everything to achieve his aspiration. As he realizes that there is a lesson at every level in the spire's growth. He learns that his aspiration and his church partake of the sin of the world which he observes from the tower. He learns the vital lesson that 'beast is within' him, but the shock of this sudden end to innocence breaks him. His innocent faith and guilty ambitions and desires also leave the spire, magnificent through imperfect, as their memorial.

Thus, we can conclude that the novel depicts the story of a man whose aspiration passes all measures. He is a man of will and the power of the will leads to evil and misery. It is the power to destroy but it also 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 costs at which it has been achieved is immense and, indeed, preposterous. Truly as Hilda Spear says, "the glory of the cathedral has been built on human ruin (Spear 33).

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