

Freedom and the Inevitable Sin in William Golding's Free Fall

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*Freedom and the capacity to choose
are both man's glory and man's doom*⁽¹⁾

Human freedom is highly prized. It is something that people have regularly been willing to sacrifice their lives in order to secure hold on to. Yet, freedom brings with it responsibility and accountability before God. We are responsible for our actions precisely because they do not spring as Trevor Hart believes "out of the blue" utterly undetermined and accidental but "spring from what we are, by a kind of determination quite different from the chains of mechanical causation which determine the behaviour of material things; it is the determination of personal choice."⁽²⁾

Our choices as persons are affected by a great many things; things concerning the world in which we live, and those others internal to us as particular persons such as our temper, our nature and so on. We are free to choose evil or good but sooner or later we make a wrong choice which costs us our freedom.

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In this study, we shall use William Golding's novel Free Fall (1959) to shed light on the problem of choice and to explore the inner structure of human sinfulness. Our focus will be on sin (the fall) and personal responsibility. The novel is a confession. It is concerned with the question of how "grace or freedom of will has been lost"⁽³⁾.

Man is a moral creature and when he is in a state of free fall, he is, to use Golding's words, "without a system of values, without adherence to some, one might almost call codified morality, right or wrong ...(He is)

like a creature in space tumbling, no up, no down, just in free fall in the scientific sense"⁽⁴⁾. As a result, he stumbles over his morals without knowing they are there. He exploits people and then finds with this comes guilt and that he can not be free of right or wrong.

Sammy Mounjoy, the central character and first- person narrator of Golding's Free Fall is an artist captured by the Germans during the world war II. In his prison camp, he recalls his past freedom and his failure to use it to any good end. Sammy is trying now to describe his life searching back and forth in his memories so as to isolate the point of change in himself, to find the moment at which he lost the innocence of freedom and becomes guilty.

Mounjoy, who is now transformed by time and his sense of guilt and given significance by his crucial experience in a Nazi prison camp, seeks to review his past, to search for an explanation of what he already knows, to discover how to becomes his being:

"I want to understand. The grey faces peer over my shoulder. Nothing can expunge or exorcise them"⁽⁵⁾.

Sammy has become a successful painter, and he has other grounds as well for being happy. Nevertheless, he must not only acknowledge that he chose necessity rather than freedom but he must also recover the moment in which he did so. He tells us that he is looking for "the beginning of responsibility, the beginning of darkness, the point where I began" (p.47).

The fall is the loss of freedom and innocence and the acquirement' of consciousness of guilt, because one has acted consciously and feels responsible of his actions. Sammy's loss of free will is defined by James Grindin as "the moment in which, Sammy can be held responsible for his actions, can be judged for abandoning freedom and control to live out some terrifyingly selfish inner necessity."⁽⁶⁾ Sammy has, of his own free choice fallen. He sees as Golding says "the better path and chooses the worse."⁽⁷⁾

Using dreamlike narrative and flashbacks technique, Golding begins by having Sammy ask himself to locate the moment in which he lost his freedom. On the first page of the novel, he asks the question "When did I lose my freedom?" He knows that somewhere, sometime, he made a choice of freedom and lost his freedom. Afterwards he defines this freedom. "I had power to choose ... Free will cannot be debated but only experienced, like a colour or the taste of potatoes." (P.5) The lost quality of freedom is described as "a tangible element", like the "taste of potatoes", yet it stands as Axthelm Peter M. remarks, "for broader philosophical problems than Sammy admits, directing his confession towards a fuller consideration of the meaning of sin and guilt"⁽⁸⁾.

The hero of Free Fall begins to realize what man can be and what he has gradually made of himself through his own choices. His narration has no chronological order and "it walks as Frank Kermode observes through Sammy's life, career and romance"⁽⁹⁾

Sammy Mounjoy rejects all systems in his effort to understand himself and his world. "I have hung all systems on the wall like a row of useless hats. They do not fit" (P.6). He tries to trace his life through his individuality and his society. In his search for what he calls his proper hat or personality, Sammy communicates his present state of being in the very first paragraph of the novel:

I have walked by stalks''in the market- place where books, dog-eared and faded from their purple, have burst with a white hosanna. I have seen people crowned with a double crown, holding in either hand the crook and flail, the power and the glory- I have understood how the scar becomes a star, I have felt the flake of fire fall, miraculous and Pentecostal. My yesterdays walk with me. They keep step, they are grey faces that peer over my shoulder. I live on paradise Hill, ten minutes from the station, thirty seconds from the shops and the local. Yet I am a burning amateur torn by the irrational and incoherent, violently searching and self-condemned (P.5).

According to Axthelm Peter M., this opening paragraph is "a remarkable prelude to both the components and the overall significance of the hero's confession. (It) introduces the crucial problem of Sammy's condition. It is full of images of blazing light and revelation."⁽¹⁰⁾

Sammy Mounjoy has lived a peaceful childhood in Rotten Row but like Golding, "felt isolated at times"" Mounjoy recalls his mild, feckless mother, the absence of father, his stay at the ward, his adoption at the rectory, the combined influence of his two teachers,

Rowena Pringle and Nick Shales, and his falling in love with Beatrice Ifor at the local grammar school before he is ready to swoop down in free fall.

The initial chapters in the novel, are devoted to the time of freedom and innocence. A large part deals with Sammy's childhood in Rotten Row and his primary school. For the child Rotten Row is a paradise, "a world inside a world" (P.22). At this stage, the child Sammy is "innocent Adam before the fall Without knowledge of his father, he seems indeed "to be the first man mysteriously brought into the world."⁽¹²⁾ The lack of ancestor does not bother Sammy; he merely states the fact: "I was wound up. I tick. I exist... Why think of my dad then ? what does he matter ?" (p-10).

The "day in the park is a scene from Sammy's early childhood. With its sunlight, flowers and a sense of innocence and freedom, It is presented as a paradisiacal idyll. At this stage, the child Sammy is innocent and happy being shaped by external forces. He does not experience responsibility and choice because these relevant aspects are missing:

I was very small, and I was sitting on the stone surround of the pool and fountain in the centre of the park. There was bright sunlight, banks of red and blue flowers, green lawn. There was no guilt

but only the splash and splatter of the fountain at the centre. I could take whatever I would of these paths. There was nothing to draw me down more than the other. I danced down one for joy in the taste of potatoes. I was free. I had chosen, (pp.5-6).

The passage is important because it summarizes the happy state of guiltless childhood. The child still has the illusion that all things are possible at once "I could take whatever I would of these paths", that is why Sammy is free and enjoy "the taste of potatoes", Sammy's concrete image for freedom. It is only when he crosses the bridge to go over to Beatrice Ifor that he has one choice and he loses his freedom in the process.

Again and again Sammy focuses on his innocence and freedom without problems and sorrows in his early years as a child. "I crawled and tumbled in the narrow world of Rotten Row, empty as a soap bubble but with a rainbow of colour and excitement round me."(p. 17).The simile "empty as a soap bubble" indicates that he lives a life without problems while "colour and excitement round me" stands for happiness and lust of life.⁽¹³⁾

Mounjoy looks back on his adolescent years and tries to make the connection between his serene youth and his stormy adulthood.

"There is no connection between the uncommitted boy and the self-conscious fallen man."⁽¹⁴⁾

The incidents from Sammy's life are carefully presented "to create the archetype of the fall"⁽¹⁵⁾. Time plays an important part in Sammy's investigation for he tells his story "from the distance of a successful and fallen adulthood and uses memory as the organizing and selecting principle of his record"⁽¹⁶⁾.

In his attempt to find out the exact moment when he lost his freedom and thereby became one of the guilty, Sammy reviews all the main episodes of his life "Is this the point I am looking for?" he asks after being caught bullying his school mates for fag cards. The answer follows at once "No Not here" (P.52). "There?" he asks again after being hit on the ear by the verger for defiling the altar. "No, not there", he answers. (P.70).

Five times, after the accounts of the events in his youth, Sammy asks, "Here?". Each time he answers himself, "Not here".

Actually, Sammy Mounjoy has fallen because of Beatrice I for but when did the fall take place and what were its reasons. Golding carefully tracks the course of the entire relationship between Sammy and Beatrice, his insistence on claiming her despite her "initial equivocation" that seems much closer to indifference, her sacrificial submission, their marriage and Sammy's exploitation

of her for his career in that his paintings of her bring him his first artistic success; his infidelity with Taffy, the sexually liberated and pleasure loving daughter of a communist. Sammy concludes these episodes with the statement that he could not "here" locate his fall, his loss of innocence and freedom.

The hero of Free Fall, in one of his frequent reflection on his past that constitute the structure of flashbacks on which the novel is built, has finally located the origin of his guilt and his loss of freedom. Sammy recalls a half forgotten incident that took place right after his headmaster had given him this advice on his graduation day:

I'll tell you something which may be of value. I believe it to be true and powerful therefore dangerous. If you want something enough, you can always get it provided you are willing to make the appropriate sacrifice. Something, anything. But what you get is never quite what you thought; and sooner or later the sacrifice is always regretted (p.235).

Impressed by their conversation, Sammy, instead of going back to the rectory, had gone out of the town to the forest and the river where a swim had given him an extraordinary impression of

freedom, "the waters had healed me and there was the taste of potatoes in my mouth (p.236). Out of the water, Sammy asks himself:

What is important to you?

"Beatrice Ifor".

She thinks you depraved already. She dislikes you, "If I want something enough I can always get it provided I am willing to make the appropriate sacrifice

What will you sacrifice?

"Every thing"

Here? (P. 236).

After the final perception of the moment in which Mounjoy lost his freedom, he repeats his question, it is followed by profound silence.

Sammy's answers are the beginning of his fall; they are as Thomas Strasser suggests, "anticipant for all future fall Which is free because it is a voluntary decision, an act of free choice"⁽¹⁷⁾. Sammy's Free Fall is managed out of free will and "occurs here within the budding grove".⁽¹⁸⁾

Immediately after the episode of the river, we find Sammy on

a bridge "over a skein of railway lines among the smoky huddles of South London". He has made his final resolution and is no longer free:

And even by the time I was on the bike by the traffic light, I was no longer free ... I had left my freedom behind me (P.79).

Once Sammy crossed the bridge, he does not feel free any longer. Instead he is "lost", "caught", "trapped" (p.81). He has passed as J. Delbaere Garant remarks, "from innocence to guilt, from childhood to sex conscious adulthood, from the timeless world in which all things seemed possible at once to the space -and time-bound world of a fallen man"⁽¹⁹⁾.

Sammy's Mounjoy wants to seduce Beatrice and imagines he can convince her of his love. "Help me" he cries. "I have gone mad. I want to be you" (P. 105). Beatrice is reluctant to his demands. Exasperated by the girl's quiet indifference, Sammy forces her to pay attention to him by seducing her but he losses his freedom in the process:

Once a human being has lost freedom there is no end "' to the coils of cruelty. I must I must I must. They said the dammed in hell were forced to torture the innocent. But I know now that life is

perhaps more terrible than that innocent medieval misconceptions. We are forced here and now to torture each other. We can watch ourselves becoming automata; feel only terror as our alienated arms lift the instruments of their passion towards those we love. Those who lose freedom can watch themselves forced helplessly to do this in the day-light until who is torturing who? The obsession drove me at her (p. 115).

Little by little Beatrice becomes the "victim" and Sammy her "executioner". He comes to see Beatrice as "a white body" (P. 121), a creature with doglike faithfulness and a parasitic "ivy" (p. 122). The relationship becomes purely sexual and more and more meaningless:

There was that long history of my agony over her, my hell-real as anything in life could be real the descent we were now to embark upon and at my hands was one I was powerless to control or stop. What had been love on my part, passionate and reverent, what was to be triumphant sharing, a fusion, the penetration of a secret, raising of my life to the enigmatic and holy level of hers became a desperately shoddy and cruel attempt to force a

response from her somehow. Step by step we descended the path of sexual exploitation until the projected sharing had become an infliction", (pp. 122-3)

Sammy Mounjoy leaves Beatrice as soon as he has achieved what he wanted. His recollection of her conquest and destruction are marked by recurrent statements that he is powerless to stay with her, and most important powerless to choose good or evil.

Without freedom, there can be no morality. Sammy's condition is a result of the loss of freedom and innocence, the destruction of innocence outside himself.

Beatrice Ifor, "the fascinating and irresistible girl" as Peter M., describes her "whose very being the fervent school boy wanted so much to penetrate and share, is found in an insane asylum"⁽²⁰⁾. She is an image of a betrayed woman, of helpless innocence.

When Sammy Mounjoy becomes a prisoner, his "residual sexual guilt" over Beatrice is exploited by his interrogator Dr. Halde, a cultured but ruthless Nazi psychologist. Halde locks Sammy in his own personal hell, a completely dark room, turns out to be a water closet. Within the darkness of this closet "every form of self-torture is visited upon Sammy"⁽²¹⁾.

Mounjoy is humiliated in the prison cell. He cries out for help "not with hope of an ear but as accepting a shut door, darkness and a shut sky" (P. 184). He knows that there is no help to expect from without and that there is no judge other than himself. But squeezed as J. Delbaere Garant believes, "between past and future in the uncomfortable cell of his predicament, Sammy understands that his situation is common to all"⁽²²⁾.

Through this recognition, his soul is purified and his vision is enlarged. Mounjoy has fundamentally changed: "the very thing of crying changed the thing cried" (p. 184). It does not provide him with a solution "All the hats he has tried must still remain on the wall....He remains as he began: uncertain, unsatisfied....His universe is still measureless and unpredictable, but at least he is more fully alive in it"⁽²³⁾.

As Sammy leaves the prison cell, his "new commitment to the future strips him of both the comforting self-delusion and the suffering of his past"⁽²⁴⁾. He describes himself as a man resurrected:

I walked between the huts a man resurrected ... I was visited by the flake of fire, miraculous and Pentecostal, and fire transmuted me, once and forever" (pp. 186-88)

Sammy is ready for confessing: "The eyes of Sammy turned and looked where Haled [his interrogator] had directed them ... the eyes of Sammy were turned in on myself with that same stripped and dead objectivity" (p. 190).

Sammy Mounjoy has finally understood the price of freedom in the anguished encounter with his own nature. He also understands the need for communication and feels that the rejected harmony is due to substance which modern man has rejected as useless and old-fashioned:

This substance was a kind of vital morality, not the relationship of a man to remote posterity not even to social system, but the relationship of individual to individual man-once an irrelevance but now seen to be the forge in which all change, all value, all life is beaten out into good or a bad shape (p. 189)

Golding does not spare Sammy from the effects of his error-tive denial of freedom and the "fall". He sees him as Peter M. Axthelm points out "an image of fallen man, unable to undo his sin; but he has suffered for it and sees a hope of redemption"⁽²⁵⁾

Sammy Mounjoy emerges from the cell with some portion of victory. He has profited from his fall. He wants to see his former

teacher Nick Shales "to do him good" (p.250) and miss Pringle to extend sympathy. He also wants to help Beatrice Ifor who has been committed to a mental institution. The full horror of sin is revealed to Sammy when he saw what Beatrice has been reduced to; a clumsy brainless body, the epitome of his rejection of the spiritual dimension. He faints at this discovery and admits later: "Yes it is all my fault" (P.246).

In the course of the novel, the hero of Free Fall arrives at an answer to the question of when he lost his freedom. Having gained insight into his earlier sins and their consequences, Sammy Mounjoy turns his back on the past and look to the future. He is not at the end of life. He has still time to use "the new mode of knowing" which IHalde had given and to apply his newly discovered "vital morality" to the reconstruction of the meaning of life.

Notes

- 1- J.Delbaere Garant (1976), Time as a Structural Device in Golding's Free Fall", English Studies , vol.57, No.4, p.359.
- 2- Trevor Hart. (1995), "Sinlessness and moral responsibility: A problem in Christology", The Scottish Journal of Technology. Vol.48, No.1, p.48.
- 3- Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub (1971). The Art of William Golding (New York : Harcourt Brace and World Inc.), p. 105.
- 4- James R.Baker (1982), "An Interview with William Golding" Twentieth Century Literature, vol.28, No, 2, P.133.
- 5- William Golding (1959), Free Fall (London: Faber and Faber), p.7 Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will be given in the text.
- 6- James Gindin (1988), William Golding (London : Macmillian publishers LTD.), p.44.
- 7- James R. Baker (1982), "An Interview with William Golding", Twentieth Century Literature, vol.28, No,2, P.145.
- 8- Peter M. Axthelm (1967), The Modern Confessional Novel (New Haven : Yale University Press), p. 112.

9- Frank Kermode (2004), "William Golding's Free Fall".

Available at: <http://www.william-golding.co.uk/wfreefall.html>.

10- Peter M. Axthelm (1967), The Modern Confessional Novel (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 112.

11- Daryl Houston, "Golding's Themes".

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<http://www.unc.edu/~dhouston/writings/prose/golding.html>.

12- Inger Aarseth (1975), "Golding's Journey to Hell: An Examination of prefigurations and Archetypal pattern in Free Fall", English Studies, vol.56, No.4, p.326.

13- Thomas Strasser (2002) "Images, similes, metaphors in William Golding Free Fall"

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14- James R. Baker, William Golding : A critical study (New York : St. Martin's press, 1965), p.60.

15- Inger Aarseth (1975), "Golding's Journey to Hell: An Examination of prefigurations and Archetypal pattern in Free Fall", English Studies, vol. 56, No.4, p.325.

16- J. Delbaere Garant (1976), Time as a Structural Device in Golding's Free Fall", English Studies, vol.57, No.4, p.353.

- 17- Thomas Strasser (2002) "Images , similes, metaphors in William Golding Free Fall".
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- 18- Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub (1971). The Art of William Golding (New York: Harcourt Brace and World Inc.), p. 115.
- 19- J. Delbaere Garant (1976), Time as a Structural Device in Golding's Free Fall", English studies, vol.56, No.4, p.357.
- 20- Peter M. Axthelm (1967), The Modern Confessional Novel (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 123.
- 21- Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub (1971). The Art of William Golding (New York: Harcourt Brace and World Inc.), p. 115
- 22- J. Delbaere Garant (1976), Time as a Structural Device in Golding's Free Fall", English Studies. vol.57, No.4. p.360.
- 23- Clive Pemberton (1969), William Golding (London: Longmans Green & Co. LTD.), p.20.
- 24- Peter M. Axthelm (1967), The Modern Confessional Novel (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 121.
- 25-Ibid, P.98.

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ملخص

الحرية والخطيئة المتأصلة في رواية ويلم كولدنج السقوط الحر

د. نهلة يونس^(*)

يعتقد الكاتب الانكليزي William Golding (1911-1993) أن الشر متأصل في النفس البشرية وهذا يؤثر على اختيارات الإنسان في الحياة فالإنسان حر في أن يختار ما هو خير أو شر لكنه عاجلاً أم آجلاً سيقع في الاختيار الخاطئ وهذا يكلفه حريته.

هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لإلقاء الضوء على حرية الاختيار ومسؤولية الفرد والتي قد تؤدي إلى الوقوع في الخطيئة (The Fall) وكما جسدها Golding في رواية "Free Fall" فبطل الرواية Sammy Mounjoy فنان مشهور وقع في الخطيئة بسبب اختياراته وبعد القبض عليه من قبل الألمان أثناء الحرب العالمية الثانية يدخل في مواجهة مع نفسه ليتعرف على الأسباب التي أوصلته إلى ما هو عليه. وبسبب تأنيب الضمير والإحساس بالذنب يحدث تحول في حياته فيفهم نفسه ويتوصل إلى استنتاجات مهمة عن طبيعة النفس البشرية.

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