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Delusion and Artistic Creativity: Some Reflexions on Reading 'The Spire' by William Golding

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This essay has no pretensions to literary criticism, nor is it an attempt to 'psychoanalyse' a book, or, through the book, its author. It is an attempt to use the material of a novel to further a psychoanalytic investigation into the origin and the nature of artistic endeavour. It is a continuation of a trend of thought I started in my paper 'A Psycho-Analytical Contribution to Aesthetics' (Segal, 1952). In particular, it is concerned with the shadowy area in which originate both the psychotic delusion and the artistic creation.

The Spire, a novel by William Golding (1964), is the story set in the Middle Ages, of the endeavours of Jocelin, Dean of the Cathedral, to build a 400-foot spire, as he has heard that this has been done in France. Despite the opposition of his chapter, and advice that such a spire cannot be built because the church has no foundations and the structure no strength, he is certain that he can translate his vision into reality. He has been vouchsafed a vision which convinces him that he has been chosen by God for this task. His conviction that he has been so chosen is also nourished by the fact that his promotion to his present position has been miraculously fast. He is supported by an angel, who 'warms his back'. Roger Mason is the only man capable of building such a spire, but he is, to begin with, doubtful, and later is completely opposed to the plan. Jocelin must compel him to do the building.

Apart from Jocelin, there are four main protagonists: Roger Mason and his wife Rachel, Pangall, an old servant of the cathedral, and his beautiful young wife, Goody. Jocelin compares them to the four pillars of the cathedral: 'My spire will stand on them as on the four pillars.' Pangall is old and crippled, Goody young and beautiful and Jocelin's favourite—his 'golden child'. He had arranged her marriage to Pangall, but the marriage is sterile because, as becomes clear later, of Pangall's impotence. Roger Mason is the powerful builder, Rachel his earthy counterpart; but that marriage too is sterile, as Rachel later confesses to Jocelin, because 'she always laughs at the crucial moment'.

When the novel starts, we are carried by Jocelin's exultation: he is full of power and conviction about his mission; he radiates a god-like patronizing love, which includes his enemies as well as his friends. But right from the start one can feel the underlying anxiety and tension, and his mood very quickly becomes irritable as his plans are opposed or his authority seems flouted.

He exults in his imagination of his cathedral. He contemplates the model:

The model was like 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 Chapel, where now the services would be held, was his head. And now also, springing, projecting, bursting, erupting from the heart of the building, there was its crown and majesty, the new spire. They don't know, he thought, they can't know until I tell them of my vision!

Four portraits of Jocelin are to adorn the four faces of the spire.

From the beginning of the book, he meets with opposition from his chapter, from Pangall and from Roger Mason. Pangall accuses him of ruining and defiling the cathedral, built by Pangall's fathers and forefathers, and he complains of the workmen's desecration of the cathedral and mockery of himself. Mason opposes the building of such a tall tower because, according to him, the structure of the cathedral has no strength to support it. But Jocelin ignores the chapter's and Pangall's

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complaints, as well as Mason's realistic warnings. He has noticed Mason's interest in Goody and realizes that this gives him power to hold the man. Guiltily but exultantly, he thinks, 'I've got him in a net'.

The story of the building and possibly final collapse of the spire is marked by several climaxes which make the underlying symbolism of the story clearer: the first climax comes when Roger Mason, having decided to dig to the foundation of the cathedral to gauge its strength, opens up a pit and slowly the cathedral starts filling with the stench of the dead. There is no foundation, and when the floors are removed, the subterranean waters start moving. And the earth creeps. There is a dramatic moment when the foundations begin to collapse. Pangall complains to Jocelin that he is the butt of the workmen's mockery. Just before the waters start moving, Jocelin gets a glimpse of the workmen chasing Pangall, one of them holding the model of the cathedral between his legs, with the spire 'sticking out obscenely'. He half sees Pangall pushed about and later disappearing into the pit. He also has a glimpse of Goody, part naked, covered by her flaming-red hair. But he immediately represses the sight, is unclear about what he has seen, and becomes confused. After the opening of the pit, Pangall disappears and Roger again begs to be let go. But Jocelin is more convinced than ever of his mission: if the cathedral has no foundations it is but further confirmation that it is miraculous. He also realizes that with Pangall's disappearance Roger is finally caught in the net. He sees Roger and Goody 'as in a tent'.

From the moment of the opening of the pit, Jocelin's folly becomes more apparent. His confusion increases. He spends more and more time up on the building's tower, watching the building of the spire. Somewhere on the tower Roger has his 'swallow's nest', in which

Goody visits him. Another climactic moment occurs when Jocelin overhears their intercourse and becomes acutely aware of his jealousy and his guilt.

Parallel to his angel, Jocelin has also his devil, and the devil which torments him with sexual feelings attains more power. He has a masturbatory fantasy in a state of semi-sleep, waking up from which he realizes with horror his sexual feelings towards Goody as well as his homosexual feelings towards the young sculptor who is engaged on his portrait. He feels his angel begins to exhaust him by recurring and increasing hotness in his back, and at times the angel becomes indistinguishable from the devil. He is occasionally threatened by the emergence of the memory of what he saw at the pit, but inevitably represses it again and becomes more confused. The structure of the spire begins to collapse, and another climax is reached, when Jocelin finds Goody in the throes of childbirth—red hair and red blood fusing in his mind—a dramatic childbirth which leads to the death of Goody and the child. His guilt at what he has done to Goody and Roger begins to break through, but more than ever it is important to finish the spire, to justify such sacrifice: 'This I have done for Him through love'. Roger works gloomily now on the spire, having nowhere else to go, but things progressively deteriorate: the cathedral is deserted, the workmen take part in devil-worship, the countryside is desolate, and the pillars of the cathedral begin to sing. Jocelin pins his hopes on the Nail from the Cross that was promised to him by the bishop; but when the bishop comes and offers him the Nail, his main business is a court of inquiry into Jocelin's fitness to continue as Dean.

Simultaneously he receives a visit from his aunt. The aunt has been the king's mistress, and it was largely her money that provided for the building of the spire. In exchange, she wanted to be buried in the cathedral; Jocelin manipulates for the money but refuses her request, as to him it would be defiling the cathedral. Now, however, she comes alarmed by reports about his health. The crucial moment in their conversation comes when he says, 'After I was chosen by God ...' And she laughs, saying, 'Who chose you—God? I chose you', and describes how after a particularly happy love-making, because they were happy and wanted to spread their happiness, she and the king decided to elevate him to his post. At that moment the basis of Jocelin's conviction is shaken: he has not been chosen by God but by this sinful, despised couple. From that moment a complete collapse sets in: his doubts and guilt break through and illness 'breaks his

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spine'; crippled by illness he crawls on all fours to Roger Mason to beg his forgiveness, but Roger, lying drunk and despairing in his digs, only curses him. In a semi-confused state, but with an awful clarity, he confesses that the pit, 'the cellarage knew it all'; it knew that he had made Goody marry Pangall because he knew of the man's impotence. He also knew that Pangall was murdered at the pit.

He is brought home and nursed physically and mentally by Father Adam, whom he always called Father Anonymous because of his humility. And it is only then that he describes the details of his vision, in which the spire represented his prayer reaching Heaven, to which Father Anonymous replies sadly, horrified, 'They never taught you to pray'.

a synopsis is always very unsatisfactory. For those who know the book it must seem a very thin account of the real thing. To those who have not read it, it does hardly convey the richness and complexity of the themes.

I have chosen only such elements of the narrative that will illustrate my own view of it. The cathedral obviously represents Jocelin himself. This is clear from his first seeing the model of the cathedral as a human body; and it is his own face that will adorn the spire. That the erect spire represents the penis and potency becomes even clearer when the workman pursuing Pagnall sticks the spire 'obscenely between his legs'. The sexual fantasies involved in the building of the spire are both clear and complex. Heterosexually the spire-penis is meant to reach Heaven-mother (after Goody's death Jocelin has a fantasy of the spire reaching Goody in heaven and she is confused in his mind with the Virgin Mary). Seen homosexually, the spire is an offering to God the Father. His relationship with God is felt in quite physical terms. The angel that warms his back, and becomes later indistinguishable from the devil, is felt as a sexual penetration by God. Towards the end, when the angel and devil fuse, he feels that the angel 'kicks him in the arse'. There is also a homosexual relationship in which he does not submit to God or the angel, but *is* God to another man. The sculptor who sculpts his face and follows him round is a dumb young man with a permanently open and humming mouth, and it is his face and mouth that get confused with Goody's genital in Jocelin's masturbation fantasy. The spire, however, represents not only his potency but also his omnipotence. He represents it to himself as an offering to God, but it is clear throughout that it is his own penis-spire that is to dominate the landscape, to reach heaven and to stand for ever as an object of universal admiration.

This building, of his own self and his own omnipotent potency, is done on the basis of the total destruction of his parents. He says himself, with anguish, 'How many people at that moment are built into this cathedral!' His parents are represented by the two sterile couples, Pangall and Goody, Roger and Rachel: in one couple the man is impotent; in the other, the woman. As his plan develops, he further destroys these couples, allowing for the murder of Pangall and the unfaithfulness of Roger. As Roger tells him, the four pillars are hollow: they cannot support his spire. The hollow pillars are the hollow, sterile marriages, representing what he has made in his fantasy of his parents' sexuality. But to build this spire he needs Roger's strength: to build his own potency he must reconstruct in his internal world a potent father and marriage; he brings Roger and Goody together to form a couple. This bringing of the sexual parents together is done, however, entirely under his control. They are in his 'tent'. He overcomes his extreme jealousy by acquiring control over their sexuality and gratifying his own desires by projective identification. He puts his heterosexual feelings into Roger and uses him to possess Goody, and his feminine feelings into Goody, through whom he imprisons and entraps Roger. He gets his own sexual satisfaction, like a voyeur, through watching them, controlling them, and identifying with them. Their union results in a baby, but this is not allowed: the baby dies and kills Goody in the process, and Jocelin thinks that it is his sudden appearance in Goody's room which brought about that death. The sexual parents, manipulated by Jocelin, are not allowed to build a baby: they are only allowed to build Jocelin's spire.

Jocelin's building of the spire is the building of a delusion—the delusion that the parents never had potency or creativity. (The 'cellarage', as he calls it, of the cathedral contains nothing but dead bodies.) If the cathedral is

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Jocelin, the cellarage is his unconscious, containing nothing but a fantasy of dead bodies ('the cellarage knew').

Wherever the signs of sexual potency are found they are destroyed anew, like Roger's and Goody's baby. Jocelin's aim is to be the only and wholly controlling partner of both father and mother, and only his spire is allowed intercourse with either. It pretends to be an offering to God, but it is only an offering to his own power. I said that the cathedral represented Jocelin himself, but this is only partly true. In fact the cathedral was there before him, as Pangall bitterly reminds him: it represents also the body of his mother and the potency of his father, which he ruthlessly destroys to create his own spire. The spire is supposed to be a completion of the cathedral, but in fact the cathedral is sacrificed to it. It represents a fantasy of taking over his mother's body and the sexual powers of his father to use them for his own needs, as he uses Roger and Goody.

This structure cannot be maintained for reasons of guilt and reasons of psychic and external reality. The basis of his structure is that there was no sex between the parents. When his aunt tells him how she and the king had chosen him, it represents to him the statement that he was not chosen by God but was born out of ordinary happy love-making between the sexual parents, as represented by the king and the aunt whom he condemns and despises. Confronted with this knowledge, he realizes that the whole foundation of his inner world, represented by the cathedral, was false. He has to admit that the sexual parents existed and that it is he in his own mind who has murdered them. The spire sways and threatens to collapse. Despair sets in, and the collapse of his omnipotent fantasy becomes the collapse of himself, as he had developed no other relation to his internal parents that he could turn to: 'they never taught him to pray'.

Described in that way, one could see the book as a case-history of a manic delusion and its collapse. But of course a good novel is never just that. It describes universal problems that can be seen from many angles. I think that in the author's mind the goal was to illustrate problems of true and false faith, as exemplified by Jocelin and Father Anonymous. But, as in every work of art, the novel contains also the story of its own creation and it expresses the problems, conflicts and doubts about the author's own creativity. The agonizing question that the artist poses himself is: 'Is my work a creation or a delusion?' The story of Jocelin can be seen as exposing the common roots of delusion and artistic creativity and the differences between them. Why was Jocelin's spire a delusion and not a great artistic creation? Is it accidental that it is going to collapse? What did Jocelin have in common with the artist? And in what way did he differ? Jocelin exclaims at one point, 'There is no innocent work'. Is the artist's work different from Jocelin's? I agree with him that there is no innocent work, and the artist's work, in particular, has one of its roots in destructiveness.

Adrian Stokes, in his book *The Invitation in Art* (1965), emphasizes that at the beginning of every artistic creation is an act of aggression: the sculptor has to break and chip the stone, the painter and the writer feel that they defile the white canvas or paper with the first stroke of the brush or pen; and from that moment they feel committed to the restoration represented by completing the work of art. In 1952, in 'A Psycho-Analytical Contribution to Aesthetics', I put forward the theory that the artist's work is a way of working through the depressive position—that stage of development when the infant begins to relate to his mother and soon to other people in his environment as to whole and separate persons, in contrast with an earlier stage, where no such clear perception exists. Confronted with the wholeness and separateness of the parents, the infant, and later the child, experiences the impact of his own ambivalence towards them. In that he experiences separation, jealousy and envy, he hates them and in his mind attacks them. As at that early stage of development the infant feels his wishes and fantasies to be omnipotent, he feels that the parents thus attacked become fragmented and destroyed, and he introjects them as such into his internal world. This is one aspect of the infant's 'cellarage'. But in that he also loves his parents and needs them, this destruction brings about feelings of mourning, loss, guilt and a longing to undo the damage

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done and to restore in his mind the parents to their original state, reparative impulses come into play. When the child becomes aware of the parental intercourse and fertility, the reparation involves restoring to them in his mind their full sexual potency and fertility. It is in this situation, in the 'cellarage', that are rooted the creative urges. The artist in particular is concerned with the task of creating a whole new world as a means of symbolic restoration of his internal world and his internal family. It is clear that the artist and the creator of the delusion are close to one another in the vividness of their feeling of the destruction of their whole inner world and their need to create a complete world anew. The artist's compulsion to create may at times be as overriding and ruthless as Jocelin's. There is a beautiful description of this aspect of creativity in Patrick White's *The Vivisector* (1970). His mother says of the young painter, 'You were born with a knife in your hand, or rather in your eyes.'

The artist, whatever his medium may be, creates an illusion, but at times it comes close to a delusion; his created world becomes to him so real, as in the famous story about Dumas, who rushed out of a room sobbing, 'I have killed my Porthos', when he was describing the death of his hero. So both the artist and the person suffering from a delusion start with a common cellarage: the destruction of the parental couple in their fantasy and their internal world; and both have the overriding need to recreate a destroyed and lost structure.

Here, however, the similarity ends and the differences begin. Jocelin does not aim, in his creation, at restoring any objects: what he is creating is an ideal picture of himself, including an omnipotent potency, at the expense of the parental figures. He seems to be serving God, but it is his spire, standing for a part of his own body, which is to reach heaven omnipotently. He bears an extraordinary resemblance to a patient I have in analysis who has a monodelusion and has created in his mind an extraordinarily complex delusional system centring on his supposed 'mission', but who in real life has achieved nothing (Segal, 1972). The artist, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with the restoration of his objects. Proust, for instance, says that a book, like memory, is 'a vast graveyard where on most of the tombstones one can read no more the faded names'. To him, writing a book is bringing this lost world of loved objects back to life: 'I had to recapture from the shade that which I had felt, to re-convert it into its psychic equivalent, but the way to do it, the only one I could see, what was it but to create a work of art.' Jocelin has some awareness of where he went wrong in his creation, when, towards the end of the book, he says, 'But what is heaven if I can't reach it, holding them each by the hand?' He refers to Roger and Goody, destroyed by him and standing for his

sexual parents, whom he never restored in his internal reality. From this difference, restoring the object rather than the self, follow the crucial differences between the artist's and the psychotic's relation to his creation and the means which he employs. To begin with, the creative artistic process lessens the guilt of the original destructiveness by real creation. When the artist in Patrick White's book is asked why he painted a cruel portrait of his crippled sister, he answers, 'I had my painterly reasons: these come first, of course. Then I think I wanted to make amends—in the only way I ever knew—for some of my enormities'. This answer expresses both the original attack and the amends, as does the picture itself in its cruelty and its beauty. This aspect of attack and amends recurs constantly in *The Vivisector*. For instance, the painter's mistress dies in an accident, probably due to his cruelty, and for years after her features reappear in various forms in his work.

The delusion-formation, on the other hand, perpetuates the guilt by repeating the crime, as in Jocelin's case his repetitive destruction of the parental sexual couple and their child.

Also, in that the work of art primarily represents the object and not the self, the artist can visualize a separation between himself and the completed work. He can finish it and move on to the next one. It is an important part of overcoming the depressive anxieties and completing the reparation, to allow the object to be separate once again. This enables the artist to have a certain objective detachment from his work and a critical attitude to it. He is never completely identified with it. Very important

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consequences follow from this: unlike Jocelin, he does not become confused: in allowing the object to become separate he allows differentiation between his internal world and the external world, and is therefore aware of what is fantasy and what is reality. In that way his work is not only not confused with him, it is also not completely identified and not confused with his fantasy objects. He can see it as a symbol, and as a symbol it can be used for communication (Segal, 1957).

To Jocelin the cathedral and the spire are him. The artist is aware that his creations symbolize aspects of his internal world: they are neither him nor entirely his internal objects. This enables the artist to have a reality-sense. If the artist succeeds and Jocelin fails, it is because the artist, as we know, is a supreme artisan: he does not confuse his wishes and his fantasies with realities: he has a reality-appreciation of his material, which Jocelin completely lacks. Where Jocelin relies on infantile omnipotent and magic, the holy Nail from the Cross, the artist relies on his reality-sense, and by reality-sense I mean reality-sense in relation naturally to the external world, but also and primarily in relation to his own psychic world. Where Jocelin aims at maintaining an unconscious delusion that he is the source of omnipotence, the artist seeks to restore an internal truth. Jocelin, in his view of himself as chosen by God, is as blind to his own nature and his inner realities as he is to the material realities of the cathedral. When he feels threatened by the emergence from repression of the memory of what happened at the pit, the murder of Pangall, he flees up the tower, where he recovers peace. His creation is an escape from realities, external and internal. The artist, on the other hand, is always in search of the psychic truth: he explores the world externally, and even more internally, searches for the understanding of the cellarage, as Golding is doing in his book.

What is the difference between Jocelin, and William Golding who wrote the book? Jocelin must represent something of the author, in the sense in which Flaubert said, 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi'. The cellarage which represents Jocelin's unconscious must be well known to the author, who can describe it with such feeling and depth. Yet Jocelin is clearly not all that there is to his author: the author must have fully encompassed and overcome that part of himself represented by Jocelin and seen it fully related to all his objects, past and present. Jocelin is but one part of Golding—it is the cathedral as a whole and the novel as a whole, which represents the author's internal world and its conflicts; Mason, the artisan and potent man in particular, represents both a potent internal father and the potent part of the artist in the artisan. Father Anonymous represents the humility with which the artist views himself in relation to his task. Jocelin is wholly narcissistic; his creator is obviously aware of the reality of human relationships and capable of reintegrating what has been split and destroyed in the act of writing his book.

Where Jocelin's spire will soon collapse, William Golding's cathedral and spire stand complete, containing and bringing to life a whole new world in which we can become engrossed. But the theme itself which William Golding chose is significant: the collapse of his work is always a threat of which the artist is aware. And here Golding describes a particular threat which must be experienced by every artist. Artists are often accused of being narcissistic, which is a great misconception, but the particular kind of omnipotent narcissism represented by Jocelin must be a temptation that they probably have always to struggle with and to overcome.

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