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THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS IN THE FICTION OF WILLIAM GOLDING

The following paper strives to clarify the impact that Greek mythology had on the fiction of William Golding, a Nobel Prize winning author and thinker. Throughout this paper, we shall adhere chiefly, though not restrictively, to his first novel and masterpiece *Lord of the Flies*, expounding the mythological elements that Golding so masterfully ingrained into his writings so as to depict the fallen state of the ‘modern’ man. One of the most prominent myths we shall divert our attention to is the myth of Prometheus as well as its traces and allusions which can be unearthed in the novels *Pincher Martin* and *The Double Tongue*. Utilizing this myth, and many other myths and linguistic devices, Golding meticulously depicted man’s propensity towards evil. Golding had no illusions about man’s progression, and thus his novels focus their attention on the regression.

Keywords: Golding; mythology; Prometheus; scientific humanism; regression.

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Introduction

Not so many years ago, Sir William Gerald Golding, English author and novelist, wrote a veritable cornucopia of novels with such scintillating insight, that it was only a matter of time before someone recognized his literary genius. The overwhelming influence of mythological elements on Golding's writings is irrefutable, given that it is predominantly shrouded in obscurity inside his *magnum opus* entitled *Lord of the Flies*, but also well documented in his other works.

It is precisely for this reason that scrutinizing Golding without, at least to some degree, historical background might prove to be a Herculean task and would, as most pundits asseverate, yield discouraging results. Consequently, one must first inform oneself of the literary heritage that Golding belongs to and thereupon exploit the acquired erudition as a means to delve deep into the treasure vaults of his motifs and underlying themes that pervade his *oeuvre*. As Obaidi notes:

On the surface, Golding's fiction seems traditional in the sense that there is an authorial omniscient description and the book makes use of all its possible means to make the message clear to the reader. However, one can generally notice that the authorial point of view which has been conspicuous throughout the texture of any of his novels undergoes a sudden and radical change at the end (Obaidi, 2012, p. 2).

He concludes his perspicacious contention by saying that Golding, though he appears to abide by the Victorian devices and gimmicks, in actuality has his own technical devices and linguistic chicanery by means of which his ideas come to fruition. This is of paramount importance as to why Golding resists easy interpretation and broad generalization, unlike most of the English writers from his era.

On a slightly different note, it could be argued, perhaps even passionately, that Golding's war experiences and his disenchantment with our entire species may have contributed to the molding of his views as regards mankind's true nature. A thing that characterizes his writing is the fact that he relied heavily on putting his characters "into extreme situations, observe the evil they do and the sin they suffer, and do this in a mythmaker's style, well beyond the constraints of Christian morality" (Trahair, 1999, p. 159). A recurring theme in his opus is a man who is savage at heart, always reverting back to an evil side and primitive nature. This is, of course, plainly evident in *Lord of the Flies*, a novel fraught with pathos and knowledge of the human heart, when the boys give in to their animalistic instincts and start brutally savaging the island and themselves.

As a keen reader must construe, Golding, in order to portray our decrepit state and the inherent depravity of our species, at the point when the boys descend

into anarchy, furtively employs the said myths, which further buttress his prevailing themes and ideas.

Be that as it may, one must not assume any prior knowledge regarding these myths on behalf of the reader, which is why we shall set forth some of their key points that will later tie in and directly correlate with his work. We shall observe how the heroic world of the classical Greek literature, such as that depicted by Aeschylus where he celebrates Prometheus's audacity to steal fire from the Gods for our own benefit, exists no more, as it has been remodelled to do justice to the debased aspects of mankind that abided in Golding's mind. Again, this 'metamorphosis' of thought is indisputably attributable to the horrors of the two World Wars that appalled the minds of many in his day.

Greek influence

Being the first European civilization to generate convoluted literary art pieces, the insightfulness of the Greeks reverberates throughout millennia, having influenced myriad writers and astute thinkers thereof. A plethora of literary genres that we have today were engendered by the Greeks: novels, poems, dramas, etc. Therefore, it is only but natural why someone as enthralled with the Greek culture and tradition as Golding would come to revere it so feverishly and incorporate its diversified components into his work. Golding is the practitioner of the Greek, without a shadow of a doubt. This is, naturally, substantiated by Golding himself, who cited Euripides as one of his main literary influences, which copious discernible motifs from *The Bacchae* bolster. Hence, it should come as no surprise as to why *Lord of the Flies* utilizes irony as one of its central devices. In other words, if we cast our mind back to the novel's ending, we can plainly see the irony that is embodied in the naval officer. Furthermore, in one of his letters³, Golding asserts:

With regard to Greek, you are quite right that I go to that literature for its profound engagement with first and last things. But though a few years ago it was true I'd read little but Greek for twenty years, it's true no longer. The Greek is still there and I go back to it when I feel like that; now I must get in touch with the contemporary scene, and not necessarily the literary one; the scientific one perhaps (Bloom, 2010a, p. 64).

3 The letter in question is actually his response to James R. Baker who began correspondence with Golding in preparation for a book on his work in 1962 (Bloom, 2010a, p. 63).

It is also worth noting that Golding, besides teaching English, also taught Greek literature in translation back in the day, after abandoning the career path of a ‘scientist’ that his father had chosen for him. Later on, he would deride science more than anything in his work.

Circling back to the problem at hand, one of the most glaring classical elements in *Lord of the Flies* indubitably revolves around pagan rites and immolations that permeate the novel. The ‘offerings’ in the form of fruit, crazed pig-hunts, and entranced chanting are unmistakably redolent of the pagan world. The scene depicting Simon’s annihilation is the first thing that comes to mind. Aeschylus’s account of the death of Orpheus can be juxtaposed to this scene, as he was massacred in pretty much the same fashion. To make matters more intriguing, Orpheus was decapitated, and even though his head was not impaled on any spikes, it was still singing posthumously.

On a different, though not unrelated, note, the tragedies of Euripides illustrate the dissolution of society on account of the tragic foibles deeply embedded in the human nature — a man is unable to discern and come to terms with the irrational part of his being. In the same vein, it might be said, runs Golding’s novel. Being unable to grasp the true location of the devil apart from Simon, the littl’uns engage in brutal warfare that ends tragically. Dick argues that Euripides’ play *The Bacchae* is the source from which Golding’s philosophy as regards human condition originates (Bloom, 2010a, p. 63). Both works are “anthropological passion plays in which individuals — children in Golding, adults in Euripides — revert to savagery and murder during a frenzied ritual” (Dick, 1964). Furthermore, Dick lays bare the following parallel:

In *The Bacchae*, the polarity consists in the followers of Dionysus, and Pentheus⁴ who alone opposes the religion. Early in the novel, some of the marooned boys in whom the irrational instinct is paramount separate from the rest to become hunters. Their Dionysian character is subtly underscored by the fact that they were former choristers (Dick, 1964, p. 145).

Thus, the novel is quite indebted to the principles of Dionysian and Apollonian perspectives. Taking into consideration everything the God Dionysus represented, we would be remiss not to notice the correlation between him and the novel’s antagonist, Jack. We are referring, of course, to revelry, religious ecstasy,

4 Pentheus refused to succumb to religious worship of Dionysus, forbidding his people to do so as well, with the intention of upholding order and prosperity in his kingdom. Naturally, this infuriated Dionysus who ordered his brutal dismemberment and the disintegration of his land thereafter.

and, above all else, ritual madness. Apollo, on the other hand, was the God of the sun, and as such symbolizes clear, rational aspects of man. These traits are transparently exemplified by Ralph and Piggy.

Germane to the discussion at hand is the fact that Golding acquiesced to operating as moralist in his novel in the fashion of a person who adopted the doctrine of the original sin and the fallen man. However, shortly after the Second World War, he read almost exclusively Greek tragedies and history,⁵ the traces of which are ubiquitous throughout his opus. Whilst serving in the navy, reading and rereading Homer was one of Golding's favorite pastimes. To help us verify this statement, Golding professes: "If I really had to adopt literary parentage ... I should name thunderous great names like Euripides, and Sophocles, and perhaps even Herodotus. And I might go so far as to say that I have a profound admiration ... for Homer" (Reiff, 2010, p. 29). Many would concur that his absorption in Greek literature and mythology transformed him from a minor poet into an original novelist.

To further reinforce Golding's connection with the classical world, as well as his preoccupation with that world, Baker contends that "in *The Bacchae* Golding the classicist found another version of the fall of man, and it is clearly more useful to him than its Biblical counterpart" (Baker, 1988, p. 23). Giving slight edge to mythology, in this case, seems only but appropriate with respect to the novel, especially when we take into account the following:

(...) the ritual of *The Bacchae* provides something else not found in the Biblical account of the fall. The hunt on the Golding's island emerges spontaneously out of childish play, but it comes to serve as a key to the psychology underlying adult conflicts and, of course, as an effective symbol for the bloody game we have played throughout our history (Baker, 1988, p. 23).

By imposing any semblance of balance and order upon their own decadent nature, viz. resisting the Dionysian character⁶ of their entity, the boys commit the error and sin of Pentheus, having carnage, guilt, and absolute vanquishment of reason as the consequences of their actions. It could be stipulated that Golding has successfully managed to "trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature," and portray the disenchantment with the failing democracy by relying on the parable of the play in question (Straub, 2011).

5 Baker argues that "such statements contributed to his identity as philosophical antiquarian and served to condition his reception by critics and millions of readers (Baker, 2000, p. 313).

6 For the ancient Greeks, as Reiff points out, resisting Dionysus was disastrous because it meant resisting a central part of a person's own savage inner self (Reiff, 2010, p. 86).

Although Golding inadvertently divulges his belief in God through his writing, it is quite evident that his vision is not that of a Christian monotheist. Rather, it is more closely interlinked with that of the ancient Greeks, in whose literature he is so profoundly steeped. Baker points out “that critics have too readily categorized Golding as being indebted to Christian sources and appearing as a Christian moralist. Instead, he suggests, Golding satirizes both the Christian and rationalist viewpoints” (Bloom, 2010a, p. 96).

Additionally, Golding’s work frequently echoes the thought of ancient Greek philosophers, in particular Heraclitus, who considered fire as the most fundamental element. In Golding, however, fire has a dichotomous function, which the novel’s denouement validates.

The traces of classical influence can also be found in his only play *The Brass Butterfly*, where Golding “satirizes the ancient Greek scientist Phanocles, a brilliant but dangerously destructive inventor who specializes in explosive devices” (Baker, 2000, p. 314). Baker likens the aforementioned scientist to Piggy by posing a rather stimulating question: “was Piggy, the precocious protoscientist of *Lord of the Flies*, first in this series of negative and satirical portraits?” (Baker, 2000, p. 314) Of course, later we shall elaborate, in greater detail, this idea of a protoscientist and its relation to the myth of Prometheus.

In his book, *The Modern Allegories of William Golding*, Dickinson provides us with a remarkable insight apropos Golding’s writings and their astonishing resonance of classical literature. In brief:

In each novel, the protagonist’s search to understand the nature of evil (often identical with his own nature) is manifested in a symbolic journey, central to the theme. For all their realistic detail, those symbolic landscapes of hell that occur repeatedly in Golding’s fiction are reminiscent of the settings for the underworld journeys so prominent in Greek and Roman narrative allegory (Dickinson, 1990, p. 2).

On the other hand, albeit Golding’s distinctive style reflects the mindset of ancient writers and mythmakers, the personal linguistic idiosyncrasies and philosophical stances that are made manifest in his work represent the fruits of his own intellectual toil despite the similarities and inspiration he sapped from ancient cultures. Bearing this in mind, let us now draw the most striking parallel between Golding’s world and that of the ancient Greeks – the myth of the Titan Prometheus.

The Myth of Prometheus in *Lord of the Flies*

In the ancient world, Prometheus⁷ was celebrated as the champion of human race, the bringer of fire, the protoscientist, and a great humanitarian. However, this laudatory representation has purposely undergone a paradigm-shifting modification at the hands of various writers, most notably, though not always transparently, William Golding and, obviously, Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Roughly two thousand years after Aeschylus, Shelley comes up with his own version of *Prometheus* and depicts him as a symbol of suffering and affliction. It is worth noting that Shelley was at odds with the previous representation of Prometheus, which is why he took it upon himself to render his own visualization of the suffering Titan to the literary world. That Shelley disagreed with the ancient Greek dramatist's views is verifiable by the epigraph of his play, which he uses ironically. Furthermore, in his preface, Shelley postulates:

The *Prometheus Unbound* of Aeschylus supposed the reconciliation of Jupiter with his victim as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis... Had I framed my story on this model, I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus... But, in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind (Shelley, 2002, p. 225).

Burying the hatchet, that is to say the reconciliation between the two mythical figures, in Shelley's opinion, was never a viable option, owing to the fact that Jove is 'the Oppressor of mankind.' What is more, Shelly even likens Prometheus to Milton's Satan, of course with a far more favorable disposition towards the benevolent Titan⁸. On top of that, Shelley is more focused on and concerned with Prometheus's suffering and portrays his fate as far more lamentable than Aeschylus ever intended.

Be that as it may, after the degeneration of Victorian social mores and two atrocious World Wars, it became increasingly difficult for writers and poets to maintain and uphold this image of a heroic figure⁹. The literature of the early twentieth century is imbued with a sense of frustration and disillusionment, especially in the works of T. S. Eliot, Yeats, Conrad, and even Golding, who was, at the very least, the most religious of these authors, though not in a convention-

7 His name, when roughly translated, signifies 'forethought.'

8 Shelley posits that "Prometheus is a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandizement" (Shelley, 2002, p. 226).

al way. A plethora of Christian ideas, symbols, and motifs pervade his novels, though he has incorporated a far greater deal of recurring mythical motifs into his work, which effectively complement and elucidate his complex themes, crucial to understanding his literary intentions. Amidst that throng, the figure of Prometheus stands out. In the 'contemporary' world, as Golding subtly implies, there are no heroes, which, in stark contrast to the ancient world, serves the purpose of underscoring our fallen state (Bloom, 2010a, p. 63).

One must courteously give credence to the fact that whenever Golding forces his characters out of their shells so as to tackle something they do not fathom, even without being purposely incapacitated, they are never able cope with it. Therefore, his world is bleak and desolate. A reader, no matter how prudent, might spend their entire lifetime in search of a single speck of light with no success whatsoever. With the intention of accentuating the magnitude of human suffering, he has summoned the myth of Prometheus to his aid like a true literary warlock. Unlike the imposed suffering of the mythical Prometheus who forfeited everything for humanity's sake, ordinary men are devoid of self-awareness, which is why their endeavours frequently end tragically, both for themselves as well as their fellow men.

But who exactly is Golding's Prometheus? In *Lord of the Flies* we can, by relying on the elimination method, freely dismiss Jack and Roger as Promethean figures, as they never display any wisdom or selflessness. With Ralph, who represents democracy, out of the way as well, the only major characters we are left with are Simon and Piggy. Undoubtedly, Simon exhibits a profound relationship with the natural world, hence describing him as 'scientific' would be rather nonsensical. In the end, the only one we're left with is the figure of cowering Piggy. Thus, by gradually allotting Promethean traits to one of his most relatable characters, Golding is purposefully slow-walking us to an epiphany of our modern Prometheus.

Piggy, Ralph's assistant and advisor, though Ralph seldom heeds his premonitions and warnings, is the Prometheus of the modern world. Despite being the most intelligent of the boys, he is ultimately killed, without ever being able to tone down the savagery of his companions by relying solely on his intellect. He is oftentimes characterized as fat, asthmatic, short-sighted, and is as such useless to the group, for he brings nothing valuable to the table⁹. His only powerful

9 Here we can, for example, call to mind the depiction of Eliot's Prufrock and his inability to amount to anything significant, as well as function properly, in the contemporary world. Additionally, Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim can also be brought to the reader's attention, being one of the most unheroic figures of the 20th century literature.

weapon is his rhetoric, to which other boys turn a deaf ear one too many times. Hence, it is only appropriate to choose him as the most unheroic figure to outline the decrepit state of the world that Golding's characters inhabit, and consequently our own world.

However, one must not readily overlook his qualities. For example, his thick spectacles are a means by which fire on the island is lighted¹⁰. He represents the scientific, rational side of civilization and is the voice of sanity on the gloomy island. He incessantly reiterates the growing need for rules, regulations and civilized demeanor, entreating others to keep looking for a way to return home. Irrespective of the fact that he is usually the center of social derision, as Golding puts it, he never wavers in his intentions and is always striving to help his friends, though seldom, if ever, physically. Piggy is, at times, quite reminiscent of Socrates, who meandered the streets of Athens trying to wake his fellow Athenians from their slumber by posing questions about the meaning of life. His benign intentions notwithstanding, Piggy accepts his grim fate, pretty much like Prometheus, whilst making an effort to inculcate reason into his delirious cohorts.

Nevertheless, a modern Prometheus cannot help but be imperfect. Being despised by Jack and his loyal army of relentless huntsmen, Piggy is incapable of confronting them openly, but still has the nerve to implore for a share in the meal he did not participate in acquiring. There is no denying that he is clever, but his ingenuity is contaminated with apprehension, avarice and irresponsibility. As mentioned, he persistently refuses to admit his partaking in the death of Simon, using his distorted vision caused by his broken spectacles as an excuse, and rapidly reiterating the following soliloquy of reassurance:

“It was an accident,” said Piggy suddenly, “that’s what it was. An accident.” His voice shrilled again. “Coming in the dark — he hadn’t no business crawling like that out of the dark. He was batty. He asked for it.” He gesticulated widely again. “It was an accident” (Golding, 2010, p. 173).

Moreover, it never actually dawns on Piggy that his good sense and intellect are the main motives as to why the hunters, with Jack as their overlord, loathe him. When darkness engulfs the world and a shadow is cast on its inhabitants¹²

10 Not just in figurative, but also in literal sense — he never hunts or catches anything, he never goes on any expeditions, and he is never taken seriously. He just sits there, relying on everyone else’s support and bosses everyone around, though no one pays any attention to whatever he says.

11 The element of fire, of course, brings him in direct correlation with Prometheus and is the most obvious parallel between the two.

who deliberately commit evil without fear of consequence, modern Prometheus cannot survive, try as he might.

Emotional sterility is caused by Piggy's reliance on logic and reason. Be that as it may, this is, by no means, a desirable characteristic, for Piggy cannot rely solely on logic if he is ever to cope with the difficulties that threaten his very existence. Sadly, though not surprisingly, Piggy is blinded, by having his spectacles stolen from him, which in turn relegates his stature of a venerable intellectual in a society. Shortly thereafter, he is murdered in a manner most savage. In the entire novel, Piggy, with his scientific notions and attitudes, is perhaps the most mature person on the ominous island¹³.

In stark contrast to the bristling energy of Jack, who deliberately jettisons the constraints of propriety, makes everyone cringe in terror, and is enmeshed in an inexorable pursuit of supremacy, the diligently-crafted character of Piggy strives to emulate the influence as well as significance of intellectual endeavour in society, struggling to enact rationality as the principle of order; nonetheless, time and again his ideas and designs fall short of the mark. Regardless of the fact that Ralph is perhaps his only, for lack of a better word, ally, even in his makeshift society there is no place for someone like Piggy, someone who will probably weigh you down on account of his physical shortcomings. In other words, deadweight must be discarded if one is to forge ahead without impediments.

However, the fact that his spectacles provide the means by which society kindles its fires is, by no means, his only Prometheus-like quality. Perhaps the most striking parallel between the two 'scientists' is their audacity and daring to put forward an idea of moving the signal fire from the mountain. Nevertheless, in *Lord of the Flies*, Piggy's idea is actually agreed upon by everyone on the island:

"So we'll have the fire down here," said Ralph. He looked about him. "We can build it just here between the bathing pool and the platform. Of course—" He broke off, frowning, thinking the thing out, unconsciously tugging at the stub of a nail with his teeth. "Of course the smoke won't show so much, not be seen so far away. But we needn't go near, near the—" The others nodded in perfect comprehension. There would be no need to go near. "We'll build the fire now" (Golding, 2010, p. 142).

12 This is brought about, of course, by the extinguishment of the signal fire, signifying the boys' slow descent into madness.

13 When Ralph gets a childish notion that his father, who is a navy officer, will come and rescue them, Piggy begs to differ and tells him that all the adults are probably dead on account of the atomic bomb: "Didn't you hear what the pilot said? About the atom bomb? They're all dead" (Golding, 2011, p. 9).

On the contrary, not only is his mythical pendant scolded for his daring to suggest such a thing, but severely punished by Zeus when he transgresses by breaking the Olympian decree.

To strengthen the mythical motif of Prometheus, Golding has dubbed the second chapter of his book 'Fire on the Mountain.' In the novel, fire symbolizes the boys' waning relationship with civilization and rules. But, and Golding knew this perfectly well, when the fire goes out, just the way it did, every notion of civilization and propriety goes out the window. The critical juncture in the book is when the boys completely dispose of their desire to be rescued and give way to their brutish instincts precisely at the moment when the fire gets extinguished. It is at this point in time that Golding's language, as well as the heinousness of the boys' acts, intensifies piecemeal.

Ironically enough, at the end of the novel fire has a totally different function. Reshaping the myth of Prometheus, Golding turns fire against humankind, showing its destructive nature if not used properly. The fact that Prometheus, upon stealing the element of fire from the Gods, went to the beachside, can also be one of those things that vaguely connect Golding's novel to the ancient myth.

However, as Shelley conceives, Prometheus "is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (Shelley, 2002, p. 226). The modern Prometheus is no such thing, for Piggy is not the paragon of virtue or perfection, but serves the sole purpose of underscoring the mere limitations of rationality and reason, as well as the improbability of a hero-like figure in the contemporary world¹⁴.

Be that as it may, Piggy is not the only inept Prometheus of the topsy-turvy world that Golding's characters inhabit. There is a veritable abundance of analogous caricatures whose stature is intentionally diminished by their inability to come to terms with the defects and weaknesses inherent to human nature.

"Prometheuses of the confused, modern world"

That Golding was thoroughly engrossed in the controversial aspects of human nature is made evident by his work, which usually gyrates around such subject matter. Nonetheless, his focus is not only on the redeeming properties of it, but also on its perverse side. According to his views, the fallen state of man is inter-

¹⁴ We can even liken Piggy's myopia to Prometheus's forethought — whereas Piggy, without his glasses, is unable to see in front of his nose, Prometheus can see 'far' into the future thanks to his gift.

twined with his unbearable suffering, in that the flawed nature of man incites him to transgress and sin, which in turn leads to suffering. The characters in his work suffer without ever comprehending why, but even those that do seem helpless and cannot do anything about it.

Furthermore, Hynes astutely points out the fact that “a central theme of Golding’s novels is that the sufferings of human beings arise from their lack of understanding of their own nature and the world around them. And these men are the Prometheuses of the confused, modern world” (Bloom, 2010b, p. 64).

In his second novel *The Inheritors* there are no discernible Promethean figures, though there is that everlasting struggle between knowledge and ‘simplicity’ that springs forth from our harmony with the natural world. Here, Golding concentrates on the destructive properties of knowledge, as the existence of an already established tribe of Neanderthals hangs in the balance when a tribe of ‘superior’ species, Homo-sapiens, ushers in a new era of reason and intellect. Golding demonstrates how man with extensive knowledge has a propensity for destruction, not creation. George Steiner, French-born American author, in his book *Nostalgia for the Absolute*, gives the following explicit statement, whilst lambasting the man of intellect and rationality:

Having existed, as it were, outside history, having abided by primordial social and mental usages, possessing a profound intimacy with plant and with animal, primitive men did embody a more natural condition. Their cultural divorce from nature had of course occurred hundreds and thousands of years ago, but it was less drastic than that of the white man: to be precise, their cultural modes, their rituals, myths, taboos, techniques of food-gathering, were calculated to assuage nature, to comfort her, to live with her, to make the break between nature and culture less savage, less dominant¹⁵ (Steiner, 1997, p. 31–32).

Unlike his previous novel, however, Golding’s third and most formidable novel entitled *Pincher Martin* could not have been more inspired by the mythical Prometheus than it, in actuality, was. In this iteration, Golding has effectively portrayed a man — though he is devoid of human-like distinctiveness and often likened to an animal¹⁶ — as the most, to use the words of Jonathan Swift, grotesque “vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth”

15 In one section of his book, Steiner propounds that “no primitive peoples have ever come to study us. This is, on the one hand, a disinterested, intellectually inspired impulse. It is one of our glories. But it is, on the other, part and parcel of exploitation. No native community survives intact after the anthropologist’s visit. The Western obsession with inquiry, with analysis, with the classification of all living forms, is itself a mode of subjugation, of psychological and technical mastery” (Steiner 1997, p. 32–33).

(Swift, 1972, p. 173). Nevertheless, he has more Promethean qualities than any other character Golding forged in the smithy of his vivid imagination.

Christopher Martin, later Pincher Martin, has been a literary figure frowned upon by people from all areas of life. Initially, a desire builds up within the reader to identify with Pincher upon perusing the opening pages of the novel, but the novel itself denies the reader such an opportunity, insofar as it becomes more and more obvious that Golding's character is, in fact, an unscrupulous, egotistical, and greedy man, who is the main culprit for his own woes. Initially, the readers are led to believe that this is just another story about man's struggle against the ruthless sea. However, as the plotline starts to unfold, it dawns on us that the story does not take place in the physical world, but in Pincher's consciousness.

In a continuous sequence of enlightening flashbacks, Pincher's character becomes a stark contrast to the mythic Prometheus. Despite the fact that Pincher dismisses the thought of him being a hero, it is not long before he proclaims "I am Atlas. I am Prometheus" (Golding, 1988, p. 164). This exclamation facilitates the search for the parallels between Golding's work and that of the ancient writers, of course. Superficially, Pincher does share a lot of intriguing features as those owned by the mythic Prometheus, primarily because both of them are bound to a rock, with no real possibility of escaping their comeuppance for disobeying a divine entity. Also, both of them strongly oppose natural forces and undergo a thoroughly unpleasant prolonged suffering. However, the 'positive' similarities end there, for Golding now invokes irony to his aid so as to discredit any hero-like qualities that Pincher might be accredited with.

Whereas Prometheus, for humanity's sake, confronts an egotistical God who begrudges fire to mortals, wanting to decimate them when they start complaining of winter and frost, Martin's defiance exists for the sole purpose of personal gain, as his ego is inflated to the size of a mountain. It is true that both of them are extremely intelligent, but Prometheus uses his smarts to deceive Zeus and succour humanity, whilst Pincher steals¹⁷ merely for his own benefit. Last, but not least, Prometheus emerges victorious at the end of his bitter anguish, whereas Pincher, convulsing in his death throes, succumbs to both the spiritual and corporeal defeat.

Pincher Martin never deigns any apologies or regrets for his mind-appalling actions, and at the end utters the words so foul that even the most impious her-

16 At the end of the novel his hands are attributed claw-like characteristics and start tearing at him piece by piece.

17 As if to do justice to the transformation of his name from Christopher Martin to 'Pincher' Martin (one who pinches or steals).

etic would not dare, on his best day, to even think of. He cries out: "I shit on your Heaven" (Golding, 1988, p. 200).

Though he frequently compares himself to either Prometheus or Ajax, he never displays any enviable ingenuity like his mythic 'counterparts.' He swallows sea food with difficulty for sustenance, he builds himself a makeshift shelter, fends off an attack of food poisoning, and even, as Prometheus who made men out of clay, creates a 'Dwarf' that resembles an old woman so that someone will be able to spot him. But all these accomplishments, albeit a product of "a tremendous expenditure of will and a strenuous exertion of mind," never amount to anything more than simple, elementary animal achievements, failing to demonstrate any kind of superiority of his humanity (Dickinson, 1990, p. 45).

It is plain as day that Golding has little to no sympathy, nor does he display an atom of empathy, for his character: "In fact, I went out of my way to damn Pincher as much as I could by making him the nastiest type I could think of, and I was very interested to see how critics all over the place said, 'Well yes, we are like that'" (Baker, 1988, p. 37). Dickinson, whilst commenting on the novel, clarifies:

The novel is a parody ... of the Prometheus-Zeus tension, except that in it one finds an antihero and anti-God. Even the most practiced blasphemer never answers the Deity with, 'I shit on your heaven!'; and no Supreme Being, despite his abhorrence of a moral vacuum like Christopher Martin, replies with the annihilation of a soul a problem that should puzzle even the most liberal theologians. Golding, then, has turned a mythic theme of human endurance into a twentieth-century allegory of humanity's fallen state (Dickinson, 1990, p. 57).

It is not difficult to discern the kind of anthropological implications that the figure of Pincher Martin has on human society as a whole. Once again, as in *Lord of the Flies*, it is quite noticeable that Golding strives to deride and diminish such characters as Pincher Martin and Piggy, who try to defend themselves from the vicissitudes of life by relying solely on their intellect and reason. In Golding's opinion, this is not an option when he thrusts a terrible choice upon his characters. He shows us that they desperately need qualities such as love, faith, compassion, empathy, altruism, and so forth.

The ultimate message of this novel, as well as most of his work in general, seems to be that in the modern world, there is no place for a figure like Prometheus, a hero who will suffer for our own sake and benefit, and later be redeemed for his selfless acts.

After *Pincher Martin* and *Lord of the Flies*, Golding stopped, as it were, integrating the image of a mythic hero in his novels to the same extent; yet, there are certain characters that encapsulate those crucial Promethean traits in his subse-

quent work. For instance, his play *The Brass Butterfly* provides us with an appealing persona in the form of Phanocles, a precocious scientist and inventor, who bestows a cornucopia of gifts and gadgets to the Roman Emperor, which ought to, in the long run, yield positive results as regards technological advancement, and consequently provoke helpful alterations in how we carry out mundane tasks. All of this, of course, resonates the Promethean struggle to assist humankind and bring about positive changes in the world by giving them the gift of fire. However, Phanocles appears oblivious to the disastrous consequences that may arise from such gifts as gunpowder, which Roman militia frowns upon for fear it might render its services obsolete, on top of being extremely dangerous. Instead, he focuses solely on the good side of technological advancement and prosperity, unaware of the, to slightly take the words of Erich Fromm out of context, 'infinitely malleable' human nature (Fromm, 1971, p. 15).

It may be argued that Golding was trying to imply that people were far from prepared for everything that technology had to offer them. As backing to this statement, we may refer to the research and development of chemical weaponry used during both World Wars, for instead of using technology in a helpful way, modern man set out to obliterate whatever virgin soil was left to be found in his falling world. Therefore, Golding makes us contemplate our own survival, and the survival of a hero-like figure, in an apocalyptic world that encourages evil and where its inhabitants are unhealthily obsessed with finding the most potent means for exterminating rather than helping one another.

The final Promethean figure of Golding's oeuvre can be exhumed in his posthumous novel entitled *The Double Tongue*, which he was not able to finish due to his untimely death. The novel itself is set during the Roman rule in Greece. In other words, Golding ventures two thousand years into the past to relate his story. Ionides, one of the characters, is Apollo's high priest at the oracle of Delphi. However, his friends call him Ion, which is of great importance to the reader insofar as the ancient myths portray Ion as the son and priest of the god Apollo. Nevertheless, Golding subverts the conventional expectations and creates a character which, unlike his namesake, rejects the notion of a deity and is virtually an atheist. He bears a striking similarity to Piggy and Pincher in that he seeks something his intellect cannot provide him with. However, his sympathy for his slave makes him far more likeable than Pincher ever was. Still, even though Pincher seems more self-centered of the two, a contemporary reader accepts Pincher as a modern Prometheus more readily, inasmuch as his actions, no matter how grotesque, have become quite common in the world of today. In the same vein, it may be said, suffering millions in today's times are incapable of

comprehending the reasons behind their continued suffering and affliction that modern lifestyle has incurred upon them.

As set forth by numerous remarkable thinkers and writers, modern men and women, irrespective of their intellectual evolution and progress, have shut their feelings and themselves in the purgatories of their own making, afraid of one another, and thus identifying often with Prometheus in their suffering, being punished severely for their knowledge and ambition. This, of course, buttresses the veracity as to why the figure of the suffering Titan has been a source of great inspiration for writers and critics of all ages.

Conversely, Levi-Strauss, for example, focuses primarily on the ramifications of Prometheus's actions, which do not, in his opinion, bode well for human species. Briefly:

The Promethean appropriation of fire to human needs and wishes encodes the catastrophic step whereby man acquired control over the principal factors in his biological setting... But it has been achieved, says Levi-Strauss, at a formidable cost. Possessing a hearth and the art of cooking, man has broken with the animal world, with the immediate shared relationships of consumer to food. Having altered the binary polarities of light and dark, of heat and cold, of night and day, man finds himself in an unnatural power-relation to his environment and to his own animal origins (Steiner, 1997, p. 28)

On a slightly different note, Golding was loath to acquiesce to the ideas laid down by Freud which propounded that man must seek out a pattern in every field of life. However, it is interesting to note that he himself applied patterns to the formation of his characters. In his novels, individuals dangerously unequipped brain-wise come closest to unraveling the mysteries of the universe. By utilizing the Promethean myth, Golding endeavored to shed light upon man's suffering from various, incongruent angles.

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МИТ О ПРОМЕТЕЈУ У ДЕЛИМА ВИЛИЈАМА ГОЛДИНГА

Сажетак

Рад се бави анализом дела енглеског романописца, нобеловца Вилијама Голдинга из митолошке перспективе, која одражавају Голдингову постојану заокупљеност сложенешћу људске психологије, природе и судбине у савременој технолошкој цивилизацији. У настојању да пружи свеобухватнији увид и разумевање поменутих проблематике, Голдинг у својим делима посеже за митовима (мит о Прометеју, мит о Озирису). Сам писац се не бави толико искупљујућим особеностима људске природе колико га интересује њена изопачена страна. Отуда су у његовим делима палост или униженост човекове природе и његова интензивна патња међусобно повезани, будући да грешна природа нагони човека на грех, а грех нужно води у патњу. Описујући сву сложену трагику света савремене индивидуе, Голдинг не следи традиционалну формулу грех – страдање – искупљење, будући да могућност искупљења у његовим романима не постоји. За разлику од митског Тезеја који, борећи се са видљивим бићем Минотауром, ипак уз помоћ Аријадне успева да савлада ту немањ, човек данашњице нема пред собом видљивог противника. Он се бори са невидљивим противником: са силом коју је у бити произвео он сам – а то је *инструментални разум* чије је најеклатантније подручје дјеловања *технолоџија*. Митски мотив који се провлачи кроз неколико Голдингових романа јесте фигура Прометеја, хероја човечанства из грчке митологије који се побунио против бесмртних богова зарад остваривања идеала слободног човечанства. Класични грчки писци, попут Есихла, приказују Прометеја као бунтовника који се на крају мири са бесмртницима. Међутим, у ренесансној и романтичарској књижевности Прометеј постаје симбол напаћеног и славољубивог човечанства. У савременој литератури улога и симболика овог великог хероја изнова се мења. Како је Прометејев херојски свет неповратно изгубљен у савременој цивили-

лизацији, Голдинг се фокусира на пале аспекте човечанства које је, захваљујући давању примата инструменталном разуму, створило услове сопствене пропасти.

Кључне речи: Вилијам Голдинг; мит о Прометеју; *Пинчер Мартин*; *Господар мува*; инструментални разум; људска природа.