Journeying to the Center: Time, Pattern, and Transcendence in William Golding's "Free Fall"

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"Be intelligent. Leave the centre alone."
Samuel Mountjoy to himself in *Free Fall.*

FREE FALL is not, despite the assertions of Golding's critics,[1] primarily a fable about the fall of man, nor even a confessional account, a contemporary *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* of one man's search for a guilty self. It is, rather, a highly sophisticated inquiry into how a particular psychic projection, called "Samuel Mountjoy," confers meaning on his existence: how he interprets his past and assimilates the events of his life into patterns of significance which embody that past as well as prefigure a future. "The most crucial fact about existence," says Rollo May, "is that it *emerges* — that is, it is always developing in time, and is never to be defined at static points."[2] It is this sense of his existence as emerging, ever-opening onto new or multiple possibilities, always receptive to new or expanding interpretations of the world, that constitutes both the subject of *Free Fall* and the nature of Sammy Mountjoy's self-discoveries in Golding's novel.

In turn, the novel is also "about" transcendence, for as the hero describes the past and the emergence of his existence, he finds that the autobiographical self can never be fully defined or completed. In uncovering the meaning of the past and, thereby, creating a self-identity, Sammy paradoxically realizes that the origins of his guilt, or the nature of his love for Beatrice Ifor, or the memory of his childhood in Rotten Row, are the ungraspable, indefinable qualities of his existence. Thus his being is seen as mysterious, numinous, not to be strictly aligned with

the mere facts of his existence and never to be fully understood or interpreted. This heroic self-identity, revealed through time, is also seen as a timeless entity, a projection that lives, for the reader, beyond the bounds of rational definition or chronicity. Sammy reveals himself as *a* self in the novel, as the hero of his own existence, but it is a self that defies full explanation and, as such, it calls into question the reader's own self-definition. Thus, my concern here will be to show the double nature of Sammy's quest for identity, for the mysterious "center" which is himself. In studying some of the patterns that emerge from Sammy's past in *Free Fall*, and by seeing how Sammy is both limited by and able to transcend these patterns in depicting an observable self, we can appreciate the depth and ingenuity of this, William Golding's finest statement about how the human world is perceived and interpreted.

Free Fall is the story of Samuel Mountjoy, an artist who lives in London and whose work hangs in the Tate.[3] The novel serves as the means for Sammy to confess his identity in a series of flashbacks as he searches through the "shuffle fold and coil" of time. Through the narrative Sammy relates the significant events of his life and attempts to pin down where he has "fallen" or has become conscious of evil and guilt as forces existing within the world and himself. In the attempt, he recalls with increasing clarity the traumatic events of his childhood, adolescence, and youthful maturity: as a child, he lives with his mother in a slum called "Rotten Row"; he is adopted by a neurotic parson after his mother dies; he goes to school, joins the Communist Party in the years just prior to World War II, and seduces a religious, passive woman named Beatrice Ifor. As Sammy himself readily admits, he sexually exploits Beatrice, then mercilessly jilts her after falling in love with and marrying a party comrade, Taffy. Sammy joins the war effort, is captured by the Germans, and is interrogated by the sinister Doctor Halde about a possible prisoner escape from the P.O.W. camp where he is interned. Refusing to talk, Sammy is locked in a broom-closet, only to be released a short while later and told that his confinement in the closet has been a mistake. After the war, Sammy returns home to find that Beatrice has had a

mental breakdown and has been placed in an asylum, where she lives in a semi-catatonic state. The novel ends with Sammy's visit to the asylum and his interviews with two of his old school teachers. Sammy writes his first-person account of these events at some undefined point in time after they have occurred, and tries, in his retelling, to clarify his responsibility for what has happened to himself and others.

The skeletal outlines of a plot summary do little to convey the true nature and subject of Golding's novel. As an artist, Sammy is involved in a dual, contradictory pursuit by telling his story: he must strive to depict his perception and interpretation of reality as on a canvas; he must put a frame (a pattern) around the world he sees. At the same time, he is conscious of and reflective on the indeterminate nature of the artistic enterprise, for the final picture, the novel, is not a reflection of *the* world, but a projection of only one world, one view out of the many that might have been painted. As E. H. Gombrich shows in *Art and Illusion,* no one paints what is "really" there, since "really" is a fallacy; each artist paints what he interprets to be there, subject to cultural conditioning and the demands of his own personality. All of this is to say that, in a sense, Sammy "paints" one of the many stories of himself that he might have painted, and realizes that, at any given time, he lives in several worlds at once.[4] Still, and this is the other side of the artist's double consciousness, Sammy feels he must paint something, that he must define for himself a pattern of events, a path once taken, which point the way to the guilt he feels. The conflict between the skepticism of the artistic quest and its hope for the completed object that will be produced is one of the major themes of the novel.

Golding has said that he wished to show in writing *Free Fall* "the patternlessness of life before we impose one on it."[5] The very texture of the novel, its recurrent imagery and events dispersed, seemingly, at random throughout the novel, reveal Golding's desire to write a book in which the hero's "patterning," his interpretation of his life, is of central importance. Thus Sammy says near the beginning of the novel, reflecting his desire to find a meaningful pattern in his existence: "I have

hung all the systems on the wall like a row of useless hats. They do not fit. They come in from the outside, they are suggested patterns, some dull and some of great beauty. But I have lived enough of my life to require a pattern that fits over everything I know; and where shall I find that?" (p. 6). In his search for the "one pattern" that, as he discovers, does not exist, Sammy must reject all rational systems of explanation which come in "from the outside"; he must descend into the cellar of the self, into the chaos of id-like patternlessness, in order to uncover his own history and identity.

Thus is it more than symbolic that, as a prisoner-of-war, Sammy is shut up in a small closet containing, at its center, a wet rag or mop. Metaphorically, Sammy is cast into a timeless void which, like the muddle of his life, he must attempt to map out — to interpret. Like Pincher Martin on his rock, Sammy at first tries to locate in the darkness of the closet cardinal points and clues which will inform him as to the shape and size of his prison, and give him some modicum of human control over his unknown environment. But soon, for a man of Sammy's artistic imagination, the harmless closet becomes a torture chamber where the ceiling may descend and crush him at any moment, and where the center may contain a monster, a dead man, a snake, or a dismembered human phallus. It is wrong to maintain, as some of Golding's critics have done, that Sammy finds any one explicable object or entity at the center.[6] Instead he finds "everything and nothing" — the horror at the center of Conrad's heart of darkness, the sound of the "oum" in Forster's caves of Marabar or, specifically in *Free Fall,* the imagined protoplasmic wetness and texture of primeval existence, utterly irreducible. From this experience of the "utter patternlessness" of existence Sammy is motivated to discover the patterns of his history while, simultaneously, undergoing experiences of transcedence that reveal the fallacy of imposing a single pattern upon the world. An example of such an experience is described in the first paragraph of the novel:

> I have walked by stalls 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 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)

It is a world of multiplicity that Sammy speaks of here, containing the scars of guilt and the stars of transcedence, the flail of the punisher and the crook of the redeemer, "irrational and incoherent," wherein the amateur, searching for the pattern of past and future that may give him his identity, is immersed.

In the novel, the significant patterns of Sammy's life often occur as patterns of imagery or recurring events which serve as the interpretative loci of *Free Fall.* One such pattern, perhaps the most revealing of the novel, exists in a series of three incidents taking place at widely-separated intervals in Sammy's life.[7] Recalling his earliest memories of school at an age when the teacher is perceived as a tree, Sammy tells of a retarded girl, Minnie, who one day "pissed on the floor and the . . . shoes" of a visiting superintendent: "She howled and pissed so that the nice lady jumped out of the way and the pool spread . . . We were impressed and delighted. We had our first scandal. Minnie had revealed herself" (p. 35). A few years later, Sammy is goaded by a friend, Phillip, into urinating on the altar of a nearby church, an act which Sammy fails to do out of fear, spitting on the altar instead. Caught in the act by the parish verger, Sammy is struck violently on the head and taken to Father Watts-Watt, who eventually becomes Sammy's guardian after his mother dies. Finally, near the end of the novel, Sammy visits an asylum where Beatrice Ifor lives. Beatrice, on first seeing Sammy, "pissed on her skirt and her legs and her shoes and my shoes. The pool splashed and spread" (p. 243). The language of this passage is so similar to that depicting Minnie's scandal that it becomes clear Sammy, in his recounting of the events, creates a pattern and establishes a series of prefigurations which find their fulfillment in the climactic scene with Beatrice.

The narrator himself is not consciously aware of the connection to be made between these events, though the reader is compelled to discover the unconsciously related significance of the pattern, as if he were hearing a confession or a dream and attempting to interpret it. As the events unfold, they accrete meaning: Minnie's act is a revelation of both her idiocy and innocence, a non-reflective reaction to fear. Sammy, conversely, fails to urinate out of fear and a growing sense of the wrongness of certain acts. It is a sign of his guilt, not consciously realized on his part, that he can only spit on the altar.[8] Beatrice's act is a repetition of Minnie's, with the added factor that Sammy sees it as a sign of Beatrice's innocence and his guilt; with this final recapitulation of the act the reality of the event becomes apparent to him. Sammy is haunted by the possibility that he has caused Beatrice to retreat into a cataleptic world where she is isolated from the muddle of guilt, and thus unable to dispense the forgiveness he seeks from her.

The pattern which takes shape in Sammy's consciousness, conveyed through the "shuffle fold and coil" of the meandering narrative, is paradoxical in that it embodies the "meaning" of Sammy's existence, it is the means by which he makes sense out of his life, yet it is indeterminate, its ultimate meaning never to be discovered. Sammy is never sure to what extent he is responsible for Beatrice's breakdown, and there is the constant question implied throughout the novel, never fully answered, of where his guilt begins in time and space. There is no ultimate, rationally explicable "meaning" to be assigned the effective image of a spreading pool of urine; it is, rather, an incarnation of Sammy's sense of guilt. At the center of his cell Sammy encounters the wetness of the mop (not knowing it is only a mop) which he connects with the utter ambiguity and horror of evil, the inception of which may be found in the scandal of Minnie's "revelation" and Sammy's own sacrilegious act. The spreading pool, wetness, the center, in themselves become symbolic entities through which Sammy comprehends the guilt of his existence. They recall the primeval slime of existence from which guilty man emerges in Golding's anthropology as presented in other novels such as *The Inheritors* and *Pincher Martin*. For

Sammy, the pool of urine, like the watery foundation of the church for Jocelin of *The Spire,* is not merely a reflection of his guilt, but an embodiment of it, its depths or meaning never to be plumbed, understood, or interpreted.

Throughout *Free Fall,* Sammy is continually questioning himself, and the pattern of interrogation, like the sequence of public urinations, forms an interpretative locus through which Sammy comes to know himself and to give structure to his narrative. The phenomenon of interrogation can involve either an attempt to "know" authentically, or to methodically delineate, and thus destroy, what must remain inexplicable. Sammy's willingness to question his own existence, to re-interpret and accept the past, constitutes an interrogation of the first kind, but the novel is filled with attempts to question the inexplicable. Sammy's interview with the German, Dr. Halde, and his subsequent desire to confess his experiences provide the means whereby he remembers other interrogations: Father Watts-Watt's questioning of him after he spits on the altar; Miss Pringle's interrogation of Sammy in class concerning his interpretation of the Bible and a supposedly obscene sketch in his workbook; Dr. Enticott's inquiries at the asylum about Sammy's responsibility for Beatrice's breakdown. All of these are instances of exploitative questionings. The interrogations are attempts by cruel, misguided, or insensitive people who try to force Sammy to reveal himself — his guilt, knowledge, or responsibility, when, as he says to Halde, "I don't know whether I know anything or not!" (p. 151). The questioners try to catechize empirically what must remain ambiguous and unknown; most importantly, Sammy himself attempts a similar procedure with Beatrice. In his endeavour to dominate her, Sammy constantly questions Beatrice. He asks her incessantly, and pettily, about her going to a dance without him after their first meeting. Later, he asks her an unanswerable question: "What is it like to be you?" (p. 103). He asks her to sleep with him and marry him to such an extent that their conversation becomes a series of questions and answers. To many of his questions Beatrice responds, in chorus-like passivity, "maybe," suggesting both her susceptibility to his domination and her instability. Ultimately,

Sammy's pleadings and questionings force Beatrice to succumb, but he still gains little real knowledge of her.

Sammy interrogates until he dominates, as others have dominated him, indicating that the phenomenon of the question in the novel signifies an attempt to "interpret" another person in an obsessive manner. Sammy wants to "nail down" Beatrice, to pull the heart of her mystery from her, to literally *be* her, thus imposing his own pattern of being upon hers. Miss Pringle wants to impose her own way of seeing upon Sammy's; thus, she perceives in Sammy's innocent landscape an obscene drawing. In one of the central scenes of the novel, Halde tries to wrench from Sammy not only what he doesn't know, but what he doesn't know he knows. The demand for a response that satisfies self-reflection, one's own interpretation of the world, is depicted in the novel as an imposition of self-created desires upon the unquestionable opacity of others. However, at the same time, it is only through self-questioning that Sammy is able to recall his past and search for the patterns of his life. In this sense of "questioning," self-interrogation is represented as the realization that when the "I" perceives the world and opens itself to its own historicity, there is always room for further inquiry and no final answers. The interpretation of the self, as Sammy discovers, must remain open to question.

The conception of space in *Free Fall* forms another important pattern of significance revealing the nature of Sammy's existence. Virginia Tiger notes the spaces Sammy inhabits as he undertakes the journey of self-transformation and discovery of the "other": "Finally, the journey bears similarities to archetypal journeys underground and the imagery of the door, wall, darkness, and encirclement are all metamorphic: they suggest that a total change of being follows when the separating medium between consciousness and the other is broken through."[9] The constricted spaces of the novel, as Tiger suggests, signify the imprisonment of the self, most radically evidenced by Sammy's confinement in the broom-closet. Sammy describes several "closed spaces" in recalling the past which bear resemblance to the dark, suffocating space of his prison. Rotten Row is depicted as "the alley as a world, bounded by the

wooden gate at one end and the rectangular but forbidden exit to the main road at the other" (p. 18). There is the dark, claustrophobic room where Sammy sleeps as a ward of Father Watts-Watt. Sammy describes the room where he seduces Beatrice as cheap and tawdry, containing a narrow bed with barely enough room for two people, a place that becomes, eventually, Beatrice's prison. Ultimately, there is the broom-closet itself, the absolutely confining space where Sammy descends to find his own "heart of darkness." The cell, it is true, is also the place where Sammy breaks through to transcendence, but it serves as the model for all of the enclosed spaces of the novel, which are worlds within worlds where the self is delimited or exploited and imprisoned in a single, defined, suffocating world. Sammy's recollection of these spaces forms a pattern in which the multiplicity and mystery of the world are absent, and only a singularly defined, dominated version of the self can survive.

In contrast to these are the open spaces of the novel, places where the world in its transcendence and mystery is evident. The General's garden, the park near Beatrice's house, and the airfield are places where Sammy makes important self-discoveries, and where the varied possibilities for existence are present in their array, multiplicity, and contradiction.[10] Even the seemingly confined space of the prison camp becomes open space after Sammy emerges from the broom-closet, transfigured by his confrontation with his own identity and the presence of evil. Walking out into the daylight of the prison compound, Sammy experiences what the philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, would term authentic reflection, where the world is revealed as strange, mysterious, and paradoxical.[11] This is what Sammy perceives:

> I lifted my arms . . . and was overwhelmed by their unendurable richness as possessions, either arm ten thousand fortunes poured out for me. Huge tears were dropping from my face into dust; and this dust was a universe of brilliant and fantastic crystals, that miracles instantly supported in their being. I looked up beyond the huts and the wire, I raised my dead eyes, desiring nothing, accepting all things and giving all created things away. The paper wrappings of use and language dropped from me. Those crowded shapes extending up into the air and down into the rich earth, those deeds of far space and deep earth were aflame at the surface and daunting by right of their own natures though a day before I should have disguised them as trees. (p. 186)

In this moment of illumination, occurring as a kind of resurrection after his descent into the abyss of self and cell, Sammy is open to the world. Not only does he see everything — his body, the earth, the camp — in a new light, but he perceives them in such a way that their utility ("the paper wrappings of use") is non-significant, and they become entities not to be described or encompassed by common language. The collation of these open spaces forms yet another pattern in the novel, a series of scenes where the hero's perceptions of the world, and his interpretation of it, are open to its beauty and mystery.

Each of these patterns I have delineated, and there are many others in the novel, serves as a locus of interpretation for both the hero and the reader: the former unconsciously repeating types of events or scenes that hold inexplicable meanings for him as he "figures out" his life, the latter consciously assisting the hero by recognizing the patterns as arising out of his self-projections and his search for identity. What is of importance, in observing how both hero and reader confer meaning upon the world of the novel, is to realize that the process of assimilating patterns, if we listen at all to what the novel tells us, must remain open to revision, ambiguity, and contradiction. Ultimately, the patterns themselves and the process of assimilating them can emerge only through the temporality of the novel, since the patterns are presented as part of a temporal succession, and thus it is to the question of time in *Free Fall* that we must now turn.

One critic has said of *Free Fall* that its reader, the "pattern finder," is "obliged to question the validity of patterns."[12] This assessment can only take place as part of a temporal process, for it is only by reviewing his past, by taking on its inexorable burden, that Sammy is able to re-live the events of his life and find patterns of significance in them. If the validity of these patterns is open to question, and if the past of the novel is one of many that Sammy might have related, then the reader must ask what, if anything, constitutues the authenticity of Sammy's past as well as his future. Merleau-Ponty says of the true perception of time, "each present reasserts the presence of the whole past which it supplants, and anticipates that of all that is

to come, [so that] by definition the present is not shut up within itself, but transcends itself towards a future and a past."[13] In *Free Fall* the narrator asserts his openness to his historicity through his willingness to investigate the past, to see the present moment as an opening onto the indeterminate horizons of past and future, and to see the future as a field of possibilities, not a predetermined fate or destiny. In his capacity to see his "human time" in this manner, Sammy attains to his heroic presence in the novel, that of a man desirous of undertaking the long journey out of the self, into the world.

Thus the present for Sammy, the moment-by-moment passage of time as he recalls his life, is always a locus of shifting patterns so that, as we have seen, interrogation becomes the central fictional mode for interpreting those patterns. In the first pages of the novel Sammy betrays his desire to find *a* pattern in the past that he can communicate, *a* self-identify, as well as his skepticism at the possibility of doing so. He writes of his attempted autobiography: "Our mistake is to confuse our limitations with the bounds of possibility and clap the universe into a rationalist hat or some other. But I may find the indications of a pattern that will include me, even though the outer edges tail off into ignorance" (p. 9). Even earlier, Sammy despairs of communicating this "possible" pattern which trails off, indeterminantly, "into ignorance," to the most sympathetic listener:

> My darkness reaches out and fumbles at a typwriter with its tongs. Your darkness reaches out with your tongs and grasps a book. There are twently modes of change, filter, and translation between us. What an extravagant coincidence it would be if the exact quality, the translucent sweetness of her cheek, the very living curve of bone between the eyebrow and hair should survive the passage! How can you share the quality of my terror in the blacked-out cell when I can remember it and not re-create it for myself? No. Not with you. Or only with you, in part. For you were not there. (p. 8)

Sammy knows that the mind cannot deal with the past through imposed systems of belief of desire, that memory and language cannot complete the pattern perceived through time, but that the past must constantly be re-created and re-lived in the present, and that an understanding of the past "requires a sweep

that takes in the whole of remembered time" (p. 7). Sammy sees that by re-living the past, he will compel himself (and us) into the radical uncertainty of what the past really is, the mystery of guilt and being that is symbolized by the unknowable, irresolvable object in the center of the broom closet. He discovers that, unlike painting, which is "a single attitude, a selected thing," living is "like nothing because it is everything" (p. 7). The past, for the artist-hero of *Free Fall,* must remain open to the patterns of interpretation unfolding in the present for the author as he, simultaneously, re-tells his history.

The concept of the future in the novel, like the past, is seen by Sammy as a field of possibilities where the shadows of being ambiguously define themselves, and as the place where the inevitable future reveals itself. In the moment before he is let out of his prison, Sammy describes his state of mind in the closet, approaching near-madness as he simultaneously approaches transcendence and escape from the confinement of his guilt:

> There was no escape from the place, and the snake, the rat struck again from the place away from now into time. It struck with full force backwards into time past, saw with the urgency of present need that time past held only balm for a quieter moment; turned therefore and lunged, uncoiled, struck at the future. The future was the flight of steps from terror to terror, a mounting experiment that ignorance of what might be a bribe, made inevitable. The thing that cried fled forward over those steps because there was no other way to go, was shot forward screaming as into a furnace, as over unimaginable steps that were all that might be borne, were more, were too searing for the refuge of madness, were destructive of the centre. The thing that screamed left all living behind and came to the entry where death is close as darkness against eyeballs.
> And burst that door. (p. 185)

In the closet, which might be described as Sammy's existential hell, he is threatened by a future where he moves "from terror to terror"; he is faced with the only inevitable future of a man, his own death. Then he, "the thing that cried," bursts through the door that encloses him in his dreadful prison where the future is ultimately, radically made present. In a real sense, it is necessary for Sammy to undergo this meeting with death, so that he can be reborn into a present where the future is authentic,

where possibilities are not predetermined by some obsessive plan, but converge upon each other into *the* future. By facing death, Sammy faces the convergence of all possible patterns, systems, lives, and is thus able to turn to the transcendence of the present moment. By living out the possibility of his own death, Sammy metaphorically sees the indeterminate, multiple possibilities of all futures available to him while, at the same time, seeing the only determinate, death-filled fact of *the* future. The experience is both terrifying and instrumental in helping Sammy to achieve the state of transcendence discussed earlier, the rebirth from the realm of death into a place where all things shimmer with the beauty of a world revealed. The future becomes for Sammy the place where the past will unfold itself, where more questions will be asked, and where the problem of personal identity is seen in its extremities.

It is appropriate and significant that, at the end of *Free Fall*, Sammy re-examines "two worlds" given to him by his old teachers, Nick Shales and Rowena Pringle, and concludes that both worlds are "real," as are dozens more: "Useless to say that a man is a whole continent, pointless to say that each consciousness is a whole world because each consciousness is a dozen worlds" (p. 249). We have seen that Sammy, emerging from his cell, views the future as an opening outwards onto indeterminate horizons which may contain dozens of possibilities or worlds; but he must also try to understand how the worlds of his past, those worlds given to him for example, by his two teachers, fit into this open future. Between the rational, scientific world of Nick and the spiritual, albeit obsessively puritanical world of Miss Pringle, Sammy says there "is no bridge" (p. 253). The metaphor of the bridge in the novel is quite important, and many of Golding's critics see Sammy's failure to find a connection between the physical and spiritual worlds as a failure on his part.[14] This view is somewhat supported by a statement Golding once made in a book review:

> [T]here is a deep desire in the minds of people to break out of the globe of their own skulls, and find the significance in the cosmos that mere measurement misses. Any man who claims to have found a bridge between the world of the physical sciences and the world of the spirit is

> sure of a hearing. Is this not because most of us have an unexpressed faith that the bridge exists, even if we have not the wit to discover it?[15]

This statement implies that the hero of *Free Fall*, like most of us, believes in "the bridge" but cannot find it. The analogy of the bridge might be made to extend to Sammy's perception of past and future, for the past, like scientific "facts," is that which is given and can be investigated, while the future, like any conception of the spiritual world, is open, mysterious, full of the possible. Sammy's failure is then compounded: he has not only failed to find the bridge between matter and spirit, but he cannot make the vital connection between past and future which seems to form the essence of his autobiographical quest for identity.

However, contrary to what Golding's statement may indicate, there is no "bridge" in *Free Fall* because the two worlds must exist, for Sammy, simultaneously and contradictorily, side by side. The "worlds" of guilt and innocence, passivity and exploitation, suffering and retribution, "the crook and the flail" of the novel's first pages, past and future are, as Sammy discovers, inextricably mixed, and any definable bridge or connection existing between them would belie the whole point of the novel. Golding himself takes this view, I believe, in an interview, where he talks of the "two worlds" of Miss Pringle and Nick Shales:

> . . . as experience, it seems to me that we do live in two worlds. There is the physical one, which is coherent, and there is the spiritual one. To the average man — with his flashes of religious experience, if you like to call them that — that world is often very incoherent. But nevertheless, as a matter of experience, for *me* and I suspect for millions of other people, this experience of having two worlds to live in all the time — or not all the time, [but] occasionally — is a vital one and is what living is like. And that is why the book is an important one to me, because I've tried to put those two worlds into it, as a matter of daily experience.[16] [Interviewer's brackets].

What I have defined as Sammy's "transcendence" is precisely his mixing of these two worlds as "a matter of daily experience" after he emerges from the cell. And, in fact, the "two worlds" of *Free Fall* are many worlds, containing an endless amount of contradictions, oppositions, and possibilities. In a novel that concerns itself so much with the ambiguity of the past and the

openness of the future, where the hero is made to reflect upon the validity of patterns he projects upon the past, just as he is made to realize how he has imposed an egotistical pattern of self-indulgence upon the passivity of his Beatrice, it is clear that the "two worlds," the "dozen worlds," must all exist simultaneously. Any artistic bridges constructed between them, we finally realize, are not determinate structures, but human projections in a human world. That world is utterly mysterious and unknowable, yet desired to be revealed and known; it is ultimately ambiguous, yet the forcing bed where self-identity, immersed in the muddle of guilt and temporality, becomes known.

NOTES

[1]See John Peter, "The Fables of William Golding," *KR*, 19 (1957), 577-92, and Walter Sullivan, "William Golding: The Fables and the Art," *SR*, 71 (1963), 660-64, for a discussion of Golding's novels, including *Free Fall*, as fables of the fall of man.

[2]Rollo May, "Contributions of Existential Psychotherapy," in *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*, ed. Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger (New York: Basic Books, 1958), p. 66.

[3]William Golding, *Free Fall* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), p. 7. All future references will be to this edition and will be noted parenthetically in the text.

[4]Sammy sometimes speaks of his thoughts and perceptions of the past as impressionistic "pictures"; like the Neanderthals in *The Inheritors*, he often "thinks in pictures," suggesting that Golding sees perception as a primitive, picture-making faculty.

[5]Quoted by Leighton Hodson, *Golding* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), p. 72.

[6]It is true that Sammy *thinks* he sees a phallus at the center of the closet, but then he thinks he sees a lot of things. Thus, contrary to Ian Gregor and Mark Kinkead-Weekes in *William Golding: A Critical Study* (London: Faber, 1967), p. 184, who suggest that what Sammy sees at the center is what he says it is, a human phallus symbolizing Sammy's sexual guilt, I think the object at the center is everything and nothing, an indeterminate entity that is the phenomenological embodiment of Sammy's guilt.

[7]John J. Stension, in "Trying to Exorcise the Beast: the Grotesque in the Fiction of William Golding," *Cithara*, 11 (1971), 3-30, notes the same pattern but in a different context, since he is more interested than I in elucidating Golding's "grotesque," cloacal imagery.

[8]Thus I disagree with Bernard S. Oldsey and Stanley Weintraub, *The Art of William Golding* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), who try to delineate between Sammy's innocent acts and his guilty ones, saying that the expectoration on the altar is innocent because Sammy, then, had no knowledge of evil (pp. 112-13). Despite his sometimes contradictory reflections on the subject, Sammy never truly establishes the place or time of his fall from innocence to guilt for a good reason: he cannot, as I hope to

show. The spitting on the altar emerges, through time, through Sammy's reflections, as part of a pattern of socially unacceptable acts and, despite his proclaimed "innocence" at that time of his life, Sammy is quite fearful of committing the act itself. He knows something is wrong.

[9]Virginia Tiger, *William Golding: The Dark Fields of Discovery* (London: Calder and Boyers, 1974), pp. 160-61.

[10]John Vernon, *The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), notes the prevalence of "garden" imagery in modern literature which symbolizes the integration and "openness" to the world I discuss here.

[11]Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes this in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962): "Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical" (xiii).

[12]Ian Gregor and Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *William Golding*, p. 167.

[13]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 420-21.

[14]Both Gregor and Kinkead-Weekes, and Howard Babb in *The Novels of William Golding* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1970), take this point of view towards the novel.

[15]William Golding, "All or Nothing," *The Spectator*, Vol. 26 (March 24, 1961), 410.

[16]Jack I. Biles, *Talk: Conversations with William Golding* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p. 79.