

## PINCHER MARTIN'S LOSING STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY

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The main character in William Golding's "Pincher Martin" finds himself on a solitary rock in the Atlantic after his ship sank, utterly isolated from the rest of humanity, his loneliness being a symbol of his estrangement from his fellow creatures. He kept repeating "I am so alone! Christ! I am so alone!" [2: 165].

As he scrutinized his past actions and his present condition trying to find an explanation and a way out of his predicament he discovered a close resemblance between himself and the limpets. In some scenes on pages 32- 34 Christopher focused his attention on the limpets he found around him whose movements he closely watched. This insistence on limpets serves to establish a parallel between his condition and that of a limpet which is instrumental in suggesting Martin's isolation. Golding used animal imagery elsewhere in the novel to depict man's alienation from other men. Thus Christopher Martin recalls the parable of the Chinese box

*"You see when the Chinese want to prepare a very rare dish they bury a fish in a tin box. Presently all the lit' maggots peep out and start to eat. Presently no fish. Only maggots ... Well, when they' ve finished the fish, Chris they start on each other... The little ones eat the tiny ones. The middle-sized ones eat the little ones. The big ones eat the middle- sized ones. Then the big ones eat each other. Then there are two and then one and where there was a fish there is now one huge successful maggot. Rare dish."* [2:124].

This parable can be traced back to Shakespeare's "Pericles, Prince of Tyre," where in Act II Scene I, in a conversation between three fishermen a parallel is made between men and fishes.

Pincher Martin sees all social and human intercourse as being governed by the principle of man either eating all his fellow beings or being eaten by others.

*"Killed and eaten. And of course eating with the mouth was only the gross expression of what was a universal process... Secure in his knowledge of the cosmic nature of eating, he grinned down at him."* [2:81]

The universal process of eating, turned into a cosmic one has stamped Martin's life and actions both in his former life which we come to know through flashbacks and his present one. In the past he had always used other people for his own selfish purposes, for his own pleasure.

*"You are not a person, my sweet, you're an instrument of pleasure."* [2:87]

This is obviously an illustration of the alienated relationship between people. There are other instances in Christopher Martin's life which illustrate the same process of alienation. He had tried to make love to Mary Lovell but she had steadily refused and resisted him. All his attempts ended in failure. Their relationship turned into hatred, and when his former friend Nathaniel got married to that girl, Christopher Martin's hatred for him grew so fierce that it decisively influenced his life henceforward. He gave up his career as an artist and joined the Navy to follow Nathaniel on that trip and had attempted to kill him throwing him overboard by a manoeuvre of the ship. His estranged relationship with other men was followed by a loss of man's intrinsic qualities, which we will call man's alienation from himself. Christopher Martin felt that he was on the point of losing his intrinsic human qualities, and in this context he tried at all costs to preserve his identity and rational approach to reality, which he considered as defining for his human quality.

*"The end to be desired is rescue. For that the bare minimum necessary is survival. I must keep this body going. I must watch my mind. I must not let madness steal up on me and take me by surprise. In normal life to talk out aloud is a sign of insanity. Here it is proof of identity."* [2:74]

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*“He remembered that speech was proof of identity and his lips began to move again.” [2:74]*

Time and again, in an obsessive way, he wanted to make sure that he had not lost his personality, his identity.

*“Christopher Hadley Martin. Martin Chris. I am what I always was.” [2:69]*

In order to preserve his identity in the hard conditions of isolation and confrontation with adverse nature Christopher Martin was going to organize the rock, to name every part of it, to impose his personality on it.

*“I am busy surviving. I am netting down this rock with names and taming it. Some people would be incapable of understanding the importance of that. What is given a name is given a seal, a chain. If the rock tries to adapt to its ways I will refuse and adapt it to mine. I will impose my routine on it, my geography. I will tie it down with names. If it tries to annihilate me with blotting paper, I will speak in here where my words resound and significant sounds assure me of my own identity.” [2:79]*

The world of human relationship as seen by Christopher Martin is in many respects like the one depicted by Thomas Hobbes in “Leviathan.” Here he said:

*“during the time men live without a common power to keep them in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as if of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known; a time of war where every man is enemy to every man” [3:82]*

This view is closely echoed by Martin’s definition of eating as a universal process, where man eats all others or is eaten himself. The resemblance between Pincher Martin’s view on man and those expressed by Hobbes covers some other aspects. Hobbes considered speech to be proper to man alone. Man is also defined by the fact that he gives names to objects, names which he arbitrarily chooses [4:16]. Christopher Martin in his turn wants to preserve his identity and keeps saying: *“Speech is identity” [2:105].*

He also gives names to all objects around him, in this way asserting his personality. The names he chooses are arbitrarily selected, to remind him of some event he experienced on the rock. For instance the rock where he had come swimming he called Safety Rock. The place where he had got the mussels and stuff he called Food Cliff. Some rocks which seemed to him like teeth

he called the Teeth. This manner of giving names strikingly corresponds to a definition given by Hobbes.

*“A name is a grouping of loud sounds arbitrarily chosen by man to remind him of the thing for which he has chosen it.” [5:2]*

According to Hobbes man is also characterised by the capacity of perceiving the future effects of present actions or situations and of organizing one’s present actions in view of future designs.

*“When an effect is imagined we seek the causes or means to produce it: and this is common to man and beast. The other is when imagining any thing whatsoever, we seek all the possible effects, that can by it be produced that is to say we imagine what we can do with it, when we have it. Of which I have not at any time seen any sign, but in man only.” [3:15]*

Christopher Martin also organized his activity in view of a prospective rescue. His thinking is directed towards obtaining the desired results in the future.

*“I will use my brain as a delicate machine tool to produce the results I want. Comfort. Safety. Rescue. Therefore tomorrow I declare it a thinking day. [2:79]*

But all efforts are in vain. In the confrontation man versus nature, man is doomed to lose his identity, his personality is destroyed. The first signs of it are recorded by Martin’s mind.

*“Christopher, and Hadley and Martin were separate fragments and the centre was smouldering with a dull resentment that they should have broken away and not be sealed on the centre.” [2:147]*

Depersonalisation, a form of man’s alienation from his own self, is suggested by the replacement of the personal pronoun “he” by “it”, a device that Golding had already used in the final chapter of “The Inheritors.”

*“Something was coming up to the surface. It was uncertain of its identity because it had forgotten its name. It was disorganized in pieces. It struggled to get the pieces together because then it would know what it was. There was a rhythmical noise and disconnexion.” [21:153]*

Loss of identity goes hand in hand with loss of sanity, of reason and thinking, in this way contributing to man’s alienation from his own self. During a storm the terrified sailor went mad. Finding out his desperate situation, understanding that there was no way out, that he was doomed to fail in his attempts at preserving his identity, he saw no alternative. For

*“There is always madness, a refuge like a crevice in the rock. A man who has no more defence can always creep into madness like one of those armoured things*

*that scuttle among weed down where the mussels are.*" [2:170]

The end of "Pincher Martin", like the end of his previous novels has a surprise in stock for the reader. After having witnessed the character's obstinate and unrelenting struggle for survival, for preserving his personality and identity, which the author described in full detail, with concrete imagery, with stress on sight, hearing, touch, all circumstantial details, we are suddenly told

*"He didn't even have the time to kick off his seaboots."* [2:190]

This is indeed a very surprising and puzzling conclusion to the novel.

Critics are divided when interpreting the book in the light of the end of the novel.

Bernard Dick [1:50] thinks that Martin dies within a few minutes of the torpedoing and that the major part of the book describes an afterlife.

Virginia Tiger [9:106] also thinks that the fable is the report of some after-death hallucination, taking place in the mind of a dead man.

Clive Pemberton [8:154] concludes that the ending proves there are alternative readings of the novel which the author cannot deny us.

Other authors of Golding studies consider that the end was meant to achieve a shock effect. [7:154]

We suggest an alternative interpretation of this puzzling end, based both on the text analysis and on the knowledge of Golding's previous ends.

We have seen already [6] that the naval officer in "Lord of the Flies" was wrong in his assessment of the situation. He was unable to understand the real dimensions of the ordeal through which Ralph had lived, he saw everything as having been only fun and games. He himself was the target of the writer's irony. He himself was very much like the hunters and unable to realize this.

Based on this insight why should we not also extend this to Davidson? Davidson, we think, has never lived in a situation like Martin's and was unable to assess the

latter's will to live and endurance. Maybe Martin lived long enough to have the experience the author described. After all no critic has based his/her assertions on anything else than Davidson's misleading remark. All the text, the concrete imagery, the circumstantial details, all are a proof in favour of our point of view.

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