MICHAEL GIFFIN

GOLDING ON THE FALL

LITERATURE

WHAT IS THE FALL?

LAST YEAR I met a man who admitted that, if he were to apostatise, or his theology and ecclesiology were swept away, he would still believe in the fall as its reality stands at the centre of his understanding. What is the fall? If the enlightened West no longer accepts the literary account of Genesis, because it now listens to story and science differently, how do we explain the fall within our contemporary intellectual frame? What does it look like? Did it happen once? Is it still happening? Does it happen to nature or only humans? These questions were important to twentieth-century novelists who—appropriating the religion-versus-science zeitgeist in their different and perceptive ways—interrogated the fall as they reflected on a century of man-made horror.

The fall stands at the centre of William Golding's literary vision. His novels of the 1950s are informed by his experience of the Second World War, with its fresh memory of the marriage between modernity and evil, which revealed to him the truth of the fall. This article gives an overview of Golding's interrogations of the fall in three brilliant and economical novels that succeeded his more popular first novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954): *The Inheritors* (1955), *Pincher Martin* (1956) and *Free Fall* (1959). In each, Golding presents a fall, physical and metaphysical, located within language, consciousness, free will, or a combination of these. The power of Golding's presentations comes from his gift for mimesis rather than diegesis: that is, for his ability to show rather than tell; for the way he embodies rather than narrates. I apologise in advance. Golding's mimetic genius can't be conveyed in a précis of each novel's ideas. I hope readers will be inspired to reread the novels for themselves, as each is a virtuoso performance.

* * *

THE INHERITORS

DOES THE FALL occur through language? Humans are distinguished from other genera by our capacity for language; and, among other things, language gives us the capacity for good and evil. In *The Inheritors* Golding presents the fall in relation to language, and the absence of language, by reworking the story of Genesis through an anthropological prism. The novel is about a fatal encounter between two isolated remnants of different species within the Homo genus; *H. neanderthalensis*, associated with nature, and *H. sapiens*, fleeing from nature as well as other members of their tribe. The former are destroyed by the latter not because there's mutual conflict between them but because the former doesn't have the abstract knowledge, conveyed by conceptual language, which allows the latter to adapt and therefore to survive.

The story doesn't pretend to be a complete history of these two species, or the full encounter between them, and it hasn't dated, any more than the story of Genesis has dated, even if science has added to our understanding. Perhaps both species coexisted for tens of thousands of years, and perhaps *H. neanderthalensis* were more advanced than Golding describes. But that doesn't diminish his anthropological snapshot of the innocence of a species living in harmony with nature—the novel uses the concept of blamelessness to describe that relationship—and the guilt of a species that's more aware and able to flee from nature and tribe because it knows how to respond to nature's challenges and tribal threats. Most of the novel embodies the perspective of *H. neanderthalensis* by presenting its communicative and conceptual limitations. The last chapter embodies the perspective of *H. sapiens*. Each page advances Golding's mimetic genius, as he takes the reader into the minds of two species of humans that, according to most recent data available, didn't interbreed but did share

direct lineages.

There are eight persons among the Neanderthals, referred to as "the people": Mal, an aged patriarch; old woman, an aged matriarch; two men, Ha and Lok; two women, Nil and Fa; Liku, a female child; and new one, a male infant. Hal and Nil are partners, as are Lok and Fa, but their relationships are neither monogamous nor jealous. The people's language and religion and gender identity are precursors of what evolved in modern humans. Their language is made up of mental pictures and a few words to communicate their limited understanding of what those pictures mean. Their religion, a theistic precursor of animism, with high-god ethics, is centred on a female creator, Oa, two letters that frame both the Greek alphabet and monotheism's sense of God alpha and omega (beginning and end). Their gender identity is constructed by their language and religion—the old woman describes that identity in non-negotiable terms: a man is for pictures (language); a woman is for Oa (religion)—and the constraints of language and religion and gender identity frame their fallenness at one period of human evolution.

In the beginning, the people are nearing starvation as they return, earlier than usual, from their winter home by the sea. They're unable to approach their summer home because a log, which usually bridges a marsh, is missing; they're frightened of water and can't swim. They don't know how the log was moved but—as they're pan-entheists rather than pantheists—believe it may have crawled away on business of its own. Mal has a picture of something similar happening in his youth, but since no one shares his picture, even though they struggle to, he simply orders them to find another log. The new log makes an unstable bridge that all cross successfully except Mal, who falls into the icy water. The people rescue him; because he's already frail and sick, he catches a chill that hastens his death.

The people's summer home is within an overhang, on a rock terrace, near a cliff, by thundering misty falls, with a view over a river they've never crossed towards an island they've never been to. On their approach, Lok slips over a precipice, during a moment of "extreme perception" while struggling to identify a new smell: smoke and mist coming from the direction of the falls and the island. The people rescue him, but as they can't share his picture of something unknown it's regarded to be a mistake.

On their return to the terrace, the old woman builds a fire, which kindles hope. The next day the younger people search for food, by way of gathering and scavenging rather than hunting: they won't shed blood, as that would cause blame. During the search, Fa struggles with an idea that doesn't correspond with any known picture: growing food near the terrace. Lok laughs at her attempt to convey this idea, which is a precursor of gardening, since "No plant like this grows near the fall". They both see smoke rising from the island but as they're unable to find "any picture they could share" they can't find words to give the smoke meaning. When it's discovered Ha has disappeared, Lok tries to find him. Because Lok has an acute sense of smell, he tells the people Ha's scent has dissolved into the scent of others. But as Mal can't see this picture he denies the possibility that others, or "new people", exist.

Mal dies and is given a sacramental burial. This leaves an immature and unprepared Lok, the only man left, to lead the people. He soon sees a new person, and now knows new people exist, but he doesn't perceive them as a threat; his people have never experienced human threat and have no fight-or-flight response. Soon a party of new people arrive at the terrace, kill Nil and the old woman, and kidnap Liku and the new one. From that point onwards, Lok and Fa are alone and become the Neanderthal equivalent of Adam and Eve on the edge of the falls (or the fall). As they explore ways of taking back the female child and male infant, so they can escape and start a new life elsewhere, Golding describes the drama of evolution—and the role language played in the ancient descent from monotheism to animism, or from religion to mythology—in a handful of events that occur within a couple of days.

If they are to survive, it's obvious to Fa, who's recently struggled with many ideas, that in spite of his acute sense of smell Lok needs direction because he has "fewer pictures" than an infant. She tries to lead him, for their mutual benefit, but he is consistently sidetracked and fails to follow her directions, not because he wants to control her but because he doesn't really understand what's happening around them. Their shared frustrations, missed opportunities, and failures are acted out among their shared misery at having lost their people. Their encounter with the new people, whose "many pictures" seem to them like the water they're afraid of, simultaneously horrifies and dares and invites them.

The more the reader views *H. sapiens* from the Neanderthal perspective, as Lok and Fa gaze at them through the dense forest canopy, the physical and mental differences between the two species become starker. By comparison, *H. sapiens* have a society of totem and taboo, which includes masters and slaves, a culture of dominance and submission, and repression and reprisal, sophisticated and brutal sexual gratification, relatively sophisticated technology, and substance use, all supported by an animistic religion of human sacrifices and scapegoats.

Lok and Fa notice Liku (the female child) is tethered, but otherwise appears well, and new one (the male infant) is even being wet-nursed. At first this sends mixed messages about the intentions of the new people, but when Liku disappears Fa realises something is

amiss—although Lok never does—and the reader suspects Liku has been offered as a sacrifice, or been eaten, or both, as in addition to being afraid the new people are also emaciated and starving. They are in a frenzy to repair or build the boats that will enable them to get away from the island, distance themselves from whatever they are fleeing from—whether a challenge of nature or a tribal threat—and make progress towards wherever they are going.

Finally Fa tells Lok the new people haven't come from Oa; her admission the two species can't coexist in harmony. She says the new people are frightened of something in nature that isn't real and doesn't frighten the people. Soon after this, Fa is killed and her body is swept over the falls. Golding now describes Lok as a creature rather than a human. He loses his will to live. Soon after struggling unsuccessfully to give Fa what is, apart from language, that other sign of his humanity, sacramental burial, he dies near her body, above the people's burial mound, unable to bury her or himself.

In the last chapter *H. sapiens*, having struggled successfully, as porters with their portage—to carry their boat overland to avoid falls and rapids—continue their flight from whatever they're fleeing and their migration towards wherever they're heading. In an exchange between two clansmen, Tuami and Marlan—the former may soon murder the latter in a slay-the-king leadership struggle—we're told why "the devils" were killed:

> What else could we have done? … The devils do not like water … If we had not we should have died … They keep to the mountains or the darkness under the trees. We will keep to the water and the plains. We shall be safe from the tree-darkness.

The *H. sapiens* thought the Neanderthals were evil gods in human form, which needed to be killed because they perceived them to be a threat to their progress. They never understood the people were harmless.

Fa was half right. The *H. sapiens* are afraid of the dark forest, an environment they haven't adapted to and therefore can't control. But they have more to fear than that. They've come a long way, over ocean or sea, and for some unknown reason they're frightened of being pursued by their tribe. Also, there's an eternal triangle—something that would never occur among Golding's Neanderthals—as Vivani, the woman nursing the male infant, plays her lovers Tuami and Marlan against each other. Vivani lost a child, fathered by Marlan, in a storm on the salt water. Tuami saved the life of the Neanderthal infant as a joke and gave it to Vivani as a plaything. But the joke has backfired as *H. sapiens* now find themselves both loving and hating an infant devil that represents what they fear most.

The novel ends with unanswered questions: What will happen when the infant devil grows up? What will happen if it becomes necessary to once again offer sacrifice to a world of darkness and confusion? Both Tuami and the reader are unsure: "He peered forward past the sail to see what lay at the other end of the lake, but it was so long, and there was such a flashing from the water that he could not see if the line of darkness had an ending."

PINCHER MARTIN

DOES THE FALL occur through consciousness? Apart from our capacity for language, humans are distinguished from other genera by our degree of consciousness: our awareness of self and world, of facts and phenomena, which determines our actions; and, among other things, which also gives us the capacity for good and evil.

Up to and including the neoclassical Enlightenment, Western discourse about consciousness tended to be framed by the Platonic model of mind as a tripartite structure of reason and feeling and base appetite, analogous with head and heart and loins respectively. This is the model, inherited from the classical Enlightenment of ancient Greece, upon which the still influential Cartesian dualism of mind and body rests. For the last two hundred years, that model has been critiqued, and the frame has been enlarged to include movements such as phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism, and their posts. In *Pincher Martin* Golding presents the fall within consciousness, and the limits of consciousness, through a mimesis that's strikingly similar to what's been explored in philosophy and theology, and the sciences, since the post-metaphysical interrogation of classical metaphysics began.

The story is deceptively simple. A British seaman serving in the Second World War, Christopher Martin, falls from a ship in the North Atlantic. He is struggling in the sea; his ship is exploding and sinking near him; his lungs are filling with "air and water mixed", dragging his body down "like gravel". While being buffeted about on icy swells, in panic, vomiting water and taking in more, he has an image of a little world he once saw, which was "quite separate but which one could control". It's a jam jar, nearly full of water, with a tiny glass figure of a floating man "delicately balanced between opposing forces". The top of the jar is covered with a membrane of rubber. If you put pressure on the rubber, you can make the man rise or fall in the water, so the man's life is wholly within your power.

Martin relates the glass figure to his own body and the delicate balance to his own situation. This makes him think of his lifebelt and thereafter to imagine his life is within his control. Once his lifebelt is on, he struggles between rationality and irrationality—those two Greek

prisms that underpin classical metaphysics—while he alternately makes plans for survival (because he's now in control) and screams for help (because he's still helpless). This struggle frames Christopher's belief that he won't die because his life is precious, and because reality is something his consciousness has always constructed.

Eventually "hardnesses under his cheek" become "vicious in their insistence" and begin to "pull him back into himself". Christopher is now vaguely conscious of being on land. There follows a very slow and painful process as his consciousness struggles to ground itself and summon the will to move and act. The capacity to think eludes him during this struggle, but when it finally returns he's inspired by the idea of his intelligence—by his version of the still influential Cartesian "I think, therefore I am" (*Cogito ergo sum*)—and its capacity to save him.

Once Christopher becomes mobile, the novel unfolds in two broad spheres: his flashes of memory of life before his physical fall, and his moment-to-moment struggle to survive in an environment hostile to human life. These spheres unfold in a real and surreal frame, embodied and disembodied, as his mind simultaneously looks out at the world from within and looks at himself from without.

Through Christopher's flashes of memory, Golding gradually assembles a picture of a man whose profession was acting, and whose life itself has been an act, without any sense of loyalty or morality to recommend him. He struggles through life, a failed second-rate *Übermensch*, which is important to note, as Nietzsche is part of the post-metaphysical zeitgeist Golding is working with. He has an ambiguous sexuality, cuckolds his employers and colleagues, takes women by force if they don't submit to him willingly, and trades sexual favours on the casting couch.

This is during the 1930s, a decade in which individual desires give way to communal concerns. As the decade unfolds, Christopher reaps what he sows. First, his career doesn't go his way, as his producer, whom he's cuckolded, no longer gives him the roles he wants, telling him instead that he'd be good at playing most of the seven deadly sins (and could play Pride without a mask, with just stylised make-up). Second, when war breaks out, his producer refuses to protect him from conscription. He's desperate to avoid conscription, and begs for loyalty and support, from his producer, from his producer's wife, but none is forthcoming. When he's conscripted he lies about it. He tells everyone he's volunteered for altruistic and noble purposes.

Christopher has a kind of antithetical twin, Nathaniel, who shadows him throughout the novel, right up until his fall. Nathaniel represents everything Christopher isn't, never notices his bad character, is aware of the unhappiness at his centre, is sensitive and loyal, and is always, with a perceptive naivety that Christopher patronises, holding out the prospect of redemption to a friend who consistently refuses it. Nathaniel is a spiritual person, although his religion is dualistic rather than orthodox, and he prays to his aeons as often as he can. He ends up marrying a woman Christopher once raped. He asks Christopher to be best man at their wedding, to honour the fact that he brought them together. Nathaniel preaches against the sort of heaven "we invented for ourselves after death, if we aren't ready for the real one", and reminds Christopher about human mortality and the need to be prepared for death. Golding repeats his religious vision twice during the novel, verbatim "Take us as we are now [in our dark state] and heaven would be sheer negation. Without form or void. You see? A sort of black lightning destroying everything that we call life."

Through Christopher's struggle to survive, we see Golding interrogating, as many self-consciously literary authors once did, the assumptions of the classical and neoclassical Enlightenments in a systematic late modernist or early postmodernist way. His struggle focuses on his ability to think, and through thought to reason, and through reason to master nature and survive. Golding has chosen an extremely inhospitable place for Christopher's struggle to take place, which may be modelled on Rockall, a remote islet in the North Sea, 300 kilometres west of Scotland. It's worth doing an internet search for Rockall, just to see how inhospitable it really is. Nature is not as kind to Christopher as she is to Robinson Crusoe, and *Pincher Martin* is a very different kind of allegory from *Robinson Crusoe*, both in its aesthetic ideology and in the greater demands it places on the reader's imagination. Like *The Inheritors*, this is an immensely rewarding novel but not an easy one to read.

Christopher focuses on how to meet his physiological needs (water, food, shelter, warmth, excretion) and emotional needs (safety, security, wellbeing), all basic to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy. And, of course, because all this depends on his state of mind, he's conscious of the need to remain sane. There are periodic assertions of rationality, as Christopher tells himself he must "use his loaf" to create shelter, find water and food, and do as

much as he possibly can to participate in his rescue. Affirming but irrational exclamations of identity—I shall live! I am what I always was! I am awake!—are balanced by more rational assessments of his situation: I shall never get off this rock. The overall effect—as he tries to control his environment by naming it, builds unsuccessful monuments to attract the attention of passing ships or planes, exists on foetid rain water and seaweed and raw limpets, and gives himself a comical (and classical) symphonic enema—is of increasing despair and mental decline.

Golding signals this despair and decline with increasing surrealism. From halfway through the novel, he begins to describe Christopher more as creature than human, as he did with Lok near the end of *The Inheritors*. Christopher is still the centre of his universe—his consciousness being the only universe he knows—but in fact he's become decentred: "There was still the silent indisputable creature that sat at the centre of things, but it seemed to have lost the knack of distinguishing between pictures and reality." He becomes more aware of his insanity, sees flying lizards, and eats red lobsters that could be his own bleeding hands.

His final moments of consciousness are during a sea storm that, prophetically, brings the black lightning of negation Nathaniel spoke of. Christopher is convinced supernatural forces are trying to end his life. As he's meant to be the antithesis of Job, he rails against them:

> The lightning crept in. The centre was unaware of anything but the claws and the threat … Some of the lines pointed to the centre waiting for the moment when they could pierce it. Others lay against the claws, playing over them, prying for a weakness, wearing them away in a compassion that was timeless and without mercy.

There's a twist in the final chapter. A naval officer arrives on an island, not the islet of Christopher's consciousness, to claim his body, whereupon it becomes obvious to the reader that he actually died near the beginning of the novel not long after falling into the sea. Most of the novel, then, is an extended exploration of the relationship between time and consciousness, and consciousness and the fall, where Golding presents in thirteen chapters what occurred in Christopher's final seconds.

When the novel was first released, many critics thought this ending gimmicky. But later critics are more sensitive to its importance. To say the ending is gimmicky is to suggest that, without it, the reader is already fully aware that the novel is about Christopher's life flashing before him moments before his death and doesn't need to be reminded with a touch of diegesis that spoils the mimesis. But no mimesis is perfect and, as Christopher is everyman, Golding is allowed to narrate a moral greater than his protagonist's personal story. That moral is explained by the man whose job it is to guard Christopher's putrefying body until the navy arrives to collect it: "They are wicked things, those lifebelts. They give a man hope when there is no longer any call for it." Christopher died not long after he put on his lifebelt. Whether during war and peace, then, Christopher's consciousness was never really in control, and his fall, which is a fall within the Cartesian cogito, is also ours.

FREE FALL

DOES THE FALL occur through free will? Apart from our capacity for language and consciousness, humans are distinguished from other genera by the ways in which our rationality—as opposed to its antithetical twin, our irrationality—influences our decisions and actions. The question of free will is debated. The debate focuses on the relationship between freedom and cause: whether the laws of nature are determined, whether freedom is compatible with determinism, or ultimately whether freedom is an illusion. In science, free will implies that the actions of the body, including brain and mind, are not wholly determined by physical causality. In ethics, it implies that individuals are morally accountable for their actions. In religion, it implies that divinity doesn't assert its power over a humanity that has choices.

In *Free Fall* Golding presents the fall in relation to free will, or the loss of free will, through a mimesis that weaves the story of one man with the history of his civilisation, to the point where story and history can't be separated. Sammy Mountjoy is an artist, born in 1917, raised between the wars, who later in life tries to locate precisely when he lost his freedom—a free will that couldn't be debated, but only experienced, like a colour, or the taste of potatoes—along the journey from a happy childhood in a poor slum (Rotten Row) to an unhappy adulthood in a wealthy neighbourhood (Paradise Hill). This journey of ascent is, ironically, a descent: from infancy, where nature and myth are competing influences; to boyhood, where science and religion are competing influences; to adolescence and young adulthood, where Sammy acts out the contradictions of modernity as a romantic communist; to the postmodern reflections of his maturity.

Paramount in Sammy's story and history are his relationships, mainly with women, some of whom are prototypes as well as persons. At the end of his reflection on each relationship, Sammy asks the rhetorical question of himself, or perhaps of the reader: Did I lose my free will during this relationship?

Sammy's first relationship is with Ma, a person and a force of nature, whom he can only remember as earth or

ground, not drawn on canvas or outlined in words "ten thousand years younger than her darkness and warmth". His second is with Evie, a girl who brings knowledge and myth to his life. As an adult, Sammy remains grateful for these two relationships, with Mother Nature and Eve; the first a whore, the second a liar. Their memory tempts him into an aphorism, "love selflessly and you cannot come to harm", until he remembers what came after them. His memory of what came after them—his personal dark ages, medieval period, enlightenment and modern period—begins with a disabled girl at infant school, who howls and pisses on the shoes of a visiting (perhaps royal) lady and is taken away. To Sammy and his classmates: "Minnie had revealed herself. All the differences we had accepted as the natural order drew together and we knew she was not one of us. We were exalted to an eminence. She was an animal down there as we were all [human] up here."

Sammy moves out of Evie's orbit, enters boyhood, and befriends Johnny and Philip. This period of his story parallels the Dark Ages, where the boys are described as barbarians who bully and terrorise other students. Sammy and Philip are caught trying to invade a local parish and desecrate its altar. The verger catches them and boxes Sammy around the ears, which gives him mastoiditis, a serious condition in the age before penicillin. Ma dies during his admission to hospital, and he's adopted by the high-church vicar of the parish, the eponymous Father Watts-Watt, an ascetic reclusive celibate who's apparently paranoid and struggling with sexual demons. (This clerical prototype—here a postmodern Casaubon—is a stock character in the post-metaphysical novel.) Golding then shifts suddenly to Sammy's young adulthood, but will return to his boyhood later in the novel. The shift is necessary because Sammy's first experience of romance is medieval and closer to his personal dark ages than to his personal enlightenment.

In his young adulthood, around the time of the phony war, Sammy is both a promising artist and a member of the Communist Party. He has fallen madly in love with Beatrice, an art student: "Part of me could kneel down, could say as of Ma and Evie, that … if she would be by me and for me and for nothing else, I wanted to do nothing but adore her." He idealises her, places her on a pedestal, as Dante did his Beatrice, but Sammy's Beatrice is chapel, a conventional and moral woman of her period, with the pragmatic expectations of her class. He tells her he'll go mad without her. She warns him against saying such a thing. The more Sammy pursues her, the more she resists him, but once he's seduced her with a promise of marriage—once she lets down her barriers and plans a future with him, once the ideal gives way to the real, once their relationship becomes like millions of others—he no longer desires her.

Sammy then becomes "wildly and mutually" involved with Taffy, a beautiful fellow communist. He rationalises their passion as appropriate, since the world "was exploding" and neither of them "would live long". They get married, for expedient rather than romantic or idealistic reasons, she has a baby, and they fade out of the party.

The moral dilemma of running away from Beatrice is easy for him to rationalise, once she begins to bore him and he sees her as needy and pathetic. More rationalisations assist him: "I had lost my power to choose. I had given away my freedom. I cannot be blamed for the mechanical and helpless reaction of my nature. What I was, I had become." He then welcomes the destruction and death and terror of war: "There was anarchy in the mind where I lived and anarchy in the world at large, two states so similar that the one might have produced the other." He is recruited, but because of his artistic talent he becomes a war artist rather than a soldier.

The novel shifts again suddenly. Sammy is a prisoner being interrogated by German intelligence. His interrogators want him to inform on fellow prisoners, to prevent further escapes from the camp. The reader is never sure how much Sammy knows, or how strong his resistance is, for Golding is determined, as he is with Christopher in *Pincher Martin*, that Sammy never achieves heroic status. He's blindfolded and stripped and thrown into a "cell" where he experiences his dark night of the soul. He's frightened of the dark and a whole chapter explores where his fear may have come from. He wonders whether it began when Ma died and he was adopted into the cold repressions of Father Watts-Watt's revealed religion; he wonders what kind of person the priest might have become had he given in to the same passions Sammy has. But later he admits that blaming the priest is an excuse and settles for a simpler admission: "Once upon a time I was not frightened of the dark and later on I was."

Another chapter explores his existential panic, during this ultimate deprivation of freedom in his dark "cell". Later, at the end of the novel, the possibility emerges that Sammy's "cell" was merely a broom cupboard. While in it he was tortured by his own consciousness, not by his interrogators.

After the war, Sammy continues to reflect: "Somewhere, some time, I made a choice in freedom and lost my freedom." He turns to two normative influences at school, Rowena Pringle, a spinster who taught him Enlightenment religion, and Nick Shales, a bachelor who taught him Enlightenment science.

He remembers Miss Pringle as an irrational theist, mentally and sexually frustrated, who probably disliked him, and was cruel to him, because of a repressed desire for Father Watts-Watt. She was still a good teacher, though, even if she "achieved the apparently impossible" by bowdlerising Bible stories while "keeping their moral implications" clear, and even if she took the magic out of the scriptures by demythologising them.

He remembers Mr Shales as a rational atheist, but as there was no place for spirit in his cosmos, "consequently the cosmos played a huge practical joke on him". He too was a gifted teacher, who loved humanity, and was a selfless and kind "homeland for all people", even if he "preached the gospel of a most drearily rationalistic universe".

To the boy Sammy, neither of these prisms of the neoclassical Enlightenment is real, but both were coherent, suggesting that the real universe "does not come so readily to heel". He did make a choice, though. Miss Pringle didn't convince, because of what she was, not by what she said. Mr Shales did convince, because of what he was, not by what he said. Having made his choice, Sammy slammed the door shut on revealed religion and would not knock on it again until he was in a Nazi prison camp "huddled against it half crazed with terror and despair".

Sammy leaves his boyhood enlightenment and grows into adolescence, which Golding links with the Romantic period. He discovers he has talent, and becomes fixated on Beatrice, now the Beatrice of the Pre-Raphaelites as well as Dante, which invests his fixation with all the ironies—the tensions between ideal and real—present in their aesthetic ideology. On leaving high school, he has a final meeting with the headmaster, who makes perceptive observations and asks cogent questions: You'll go a long way from Rotten Row but only partly because of the patronage of Father Watts-Watt. If you want something enough, you can get it provided you're willing to make the appropriate sacrifice, but what you get is never what you thought, and sooner or later the sacrifice is always regretted. Is your artistic gift for portraiture important to you? Is anything important to you? You haven't been happy for some years now, have you? Towards what end are you working? Sammy is too immature to understand, as he's consumed by a Byronic passion for Beatrice; his only desire is to consume her, even though, as the headmaster tells him, she dislikes him and thinks him depraved.

The novel ends with three visits, each with a twist, in which Sammy seeks reconciliation: with Beatrice, Mr Shales and Miss Pringle. He visits Beatrice in the institution where she's lived since he abandoned her. She behaves exactly as Minnie did. She howls, pisses on his shoes, and is taken away. He's shocked and wants to know whether she would have become mentally ill anyway, or whether his abandonment tipped her over the edge. The doctor, who knows their history, tells him no one knows. But Sammy sees her illness as an example of cause and effect. He has an epiphany that reconciles the science and religion of the Enlightenment.

He visits the atheist Mr Shales, dying of a tired heart in hospital, but leaves before speaking to him, on seeing, from the edge of the ward, that his teacher is struggling with what science never gave him. He visits the theist Miss Pringle, intending to forgive her, but forgiveness needs to be received as well as given. She's now delighted to see him; she wants to take some credit for his success. His flesh crawls and he wants to get away: "She was still this being of awful power and now her approval of me was as terrible as her hatred and I knew we had nothing to say to each other." Deprived of reconciliation—whether because it's impossible or simply because he's wilful and still wants it on his terms—Sammy continues to live with the mystery of his fall, without the pre-lapsarian wholeness he experienced with Ma and Evie. "Love selflessly and you cannot come to harm."

The Idea and Art of the Fall

I hope this article summarises how Golding presents the fall—physical and metaphysical—in three novels that ought to be widely read. When their scaffolding is laid bare, their discourse becomes simultaneously contemporary and prophetic. But a whole dimension is missing. It's one thing to describe a novel's ideas and another to communicate its genius as a work of art.

Golding is a genius, as an intellectual and an artist. It's an extraordinary mimetic achievement to weave idea and art in the way he has; to write novels that embody—rather than simply narrate—what the fall might look like within language, consciousness, free will, or a combination of all three. These are canonical novels that deserve to be read again and again, like canonical scripture, to appreciate the immensity of what the author has accomplished, and perhaps to learn from them.