

Term Paper

Landscape and Physical Surroundings in William Golding's Novel *Pincher Martin*

(P/) S "William Golding's Novels (2): His Later Works"

Wintersemester 1999/2000

Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	3
1.1	CONTENTS	3
1.2	MAIN PROTAGONIST	4
2	DESCRIPTION AND LITERAL MEANING OF LANDSCAPE AND PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS	4
2.1	INTRODUCTION	5
2.1.1	<i>The Water</i>	5
2.1.2	<i>The Rock</i>	6
2.1.3	<i>Colonising the Rock</i>	8
2.1.4	<i>The Gulls</i>	8
2.1.5	<i>The Black Lightning</i>	9
3	FIGURATIVE MEANING OF LANDSCAPE AND PHYSICAL SURROUNDINGS	11
3.1	INTRODUCTION	11
3.1.1	<i>The Water</i>	12
3.1.2	<i>The Rock</i>	13
3.1.3	<i>The Sky</i>	16
3.1.4	<i>The Gulls</i>	17
3.1.5	<i>The Lobster</i>	17
3.1.6	<i>The “Black Lightning”</i>	18
4	LITERATURE	19
4.1	PRIMARY SOURCE	20
4.2	SECONDARY SOURCES	20

1 Introduction

1.1 Contents

William Golding's novel *Pincher Martin* centres around a man named Christopher Martin who is thrown off a torpedoed ship in the Atlantic. Through most of the novel's pages the reader seems to watch this man struggling to survive on a rock in the North Atlantic Ocean. To somebody first reading the novel, it appears to record the desperate fight for survival. The author describes the protagonist's experience so clearly that the reader can imagine physical details and every minor decision of the struggling man.

After he is blown off his ship, Martin manages to climb on a rock that suddenly appears in the mist. He experiences a long fight in the water and then uses limpets to help him up on a small cliff. He starts exploring the rock, discovers a pool of water he can drink from and builds a pile of stones which he calls "the dwarf". He hopes that this "dwarf" will be seen by other ships and thus could help him being rescued. Furthermore he finds anemones and mussels to eat.

Christopher Martin seems confident and starts to "*survey the estate*"¹ of the island. He tries to impose pattern of his own upon the rock. However he loses strength after he suddenly realises that he should have made a sign recognisable by planes rather than by ships. He wants to make an effective signal by piling seaweed in a line but he does not finish this job, just as he does not complete the Claudian, the cuttings in the rock, with which he wants to enlarge his supply of water.

During the novel, the reader is confronted with several flashbacks from Christopher Martin's life. The reader learns that the protagonist is quite an unpleasant man, greedy and with no respect for other people.

Christopher Martin's condition becomes worse and he seems to suffer from a fever. He appears to be on the verge of madness but tries to cling to his sanity. Finally, however, a storm sweeps over the rock and after a dialogue with somebody that seems to be God, a "black lightning" destroys his life.

In the last chapter there is a shift: On an island in the Hebrides Martin's body has been found. The naval officer who has come to identify the body says that the drowned man could not have suffered because "*He didn't even have time to kick*

¹ Golding, William, *Pincher Martin*, London 1956, p. 77

off his seaboots.”² The reader, however, witnessed Martin kicking off his seaboots on the fourth page of the novel. So he has in fact been dead since almost the start of the story. What the reader has really been watching is a man “*driven by his ego out of himself in a desperate attempt to evade the death which has occurred*”³ Christopher Martin shows no respect for anyone, not even for death, so that he refuses to die. His greed for life forces him to refuse the selfless act of dying.⁴

This term paper deals with the landscape and the physical surroundings described in the novel. The second chapter of this paper is about the first thirteen chapters of the novel. It will look at things from a reader’s view who has not yet read the novel’s last chapter, which means it will deal with the literal meaning. The third chapter of this paper is written from the perspective after having read chapter 14 and describes the figurative meaning of the landscape and the physical surroundings. It will look at the novel from a retrospective.

1.2 Main Protagonist

Christopher Martin, called Pincher Martin, is the protagonist of the novel. At the beginning the reader feels empathy with him because he fights strongly and successfully against the forces of nature. However the reader learns from the several flashbacks during the novel that Christopher Martin is not a very pleasant person. The reader is confronted with the fact that Martin’s character is “[...]the opposite of heroic – an unscrupulous egoist [...]”⁵ During the novel he remembers many of his sins, he admits them but does not regret them. The image of a lobster’s claws are often presented in the novel. These claws are used as a symbol for Christopher Martin’s greed. Also his nickname “Pincher Martin” gives a hint at his character: He is egoistic and pinches everything he can get.

2 Description and Literal Meaning of Landscape and Physical Surroundings

² ib. (1956) p. 208

³ Babb, Howard S., *The Novels of William Golding*, Columbus, OH 1970, p. 66

⁴ “Pincher Martin“, *Radio Times*, CXXXVIII, March 21, 1958, 8 In: Babb, Howard (1970), p. 66

⁵ Page, Norman, *William Golding: Novels, 1954-67*, London 1985, p. 126

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will deal with the surroundings and its meaning in after one has read the first thirteen chapters of the novel. Golding presents to the reader a protagonist who fights desperately against nature. The novel lacks of human interaction most of the time, so scenery and landscape seem even more important.

The reader feels empathy with Pincher Martin because the forces of nature seem to have no regret with him. The protagonist shows endurance and a will to survive. *“The sea, the rock, the creatures that live on it, the weather - all are meticulously set down. [...] This lonely survivor we must regard as admirable, simply because he clings to life so tenaciously, and against such odds.”*⁶ Christopher Martin seems heroic, a man trapped on a barren rock, fighting against the fate that put him there. The reader gets to know through the flashbacks that Pincher Martin has an unpleasant character. He was greedy especially. But *“we feel rather the resource and courage – the vitality – in Martin’s fight for life, even as we recognise his egoism, which the book claims damns him: in fact the egoism emerges as a necessary condition of that vitality.”*⁷ So all this suffering on the rock can be understood as God’s punishment for him.

2.1.1 The Water

Water is Christopher Martin’s surrounding element especially in the first two chapters. The novel begins with his fight for life in the water. Water even takes over the place of air and gets into his body: *“When the air had gone with a shriek, water came to fill its place – burning water, hard in the throat and mouth as stones that hurt. [...] Water thrust in, down, without mercy. [...] But water reclaimed him and spun so that knowledge of where the air might be was erased completely.”*⁸ Water is Martin’s enemy and threatens his life. It has control over him.

⁶ ib. (1985), p. 126

⁷ Babb, Howard S. (1970), p. 67

⁸ Golding, William, 1956, p. 7

The image of fire and heat is very often connected to the water in the novel: “burning water”⁹, “The seas were intimate and enormous. They smoked.”¹⁰, “Beyond the rock was nothing but a smoking advance of sea.”¹¹ These images let Pincher Martin’s experience in the water seem even more painful and full of agony. It points to the fact that Christopher Martin place of rescue is rather a place of hell. This is not understood literally yet.

In the first two chapters Pincher Martin seems to be in a constant fight with the water and for his life. When Christopher Martin sees the rock for the first time, it seems that he has won this fight. The water becomes calmer. As soon as he can feel the solidity of the rock, “the sea laid him down gently and retreated.”¹² and the water lets him go. The water close to the rock does not seem to be a danger to Pincher Martin: “He made [his eyes] examine the water. This was almost calm in comparison with the open sea.”¹³ After a while, when he then tries to climb the rock, the water becomes stronger again: “He put his feet down and felt for holds, lowered himself resolutely, clinging each time the water hit him and went back. He held his breath and spat when each wave left him. The water was no longer cold but powerful rather. The nearer he lowered his body to the pebbles, the harder he was struck and the heavier the weight that urged him down at each return.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, Christopher Martin wins the fight against the water and manages to climb the rock.

The reader feels empathy with the protagonist already at the beginning. The shipwrecked man, alone in the powerful ocean, and his victory over the forces of nature causes pity and admiration in the reader.

2.1.2 The Rock

⁹ ib. (1956), p. 7

¹⁰ ib. (1956), p. 17

¹¹ ib. (1956), p. 28

¹² ib. (1956), p. 22

¹³ ib. (1956), p. 28

¹⁴ ib. (1956), p. 36

The rock which Christopher Martin finally reaches, is located in the Mid Atlantic. “[...] and the sight of this rock floating in mid-Atlantic [...]”¹⁵ There cannot be found a more exact location throughout the novel. It is cold, grim and infertile there. The novel’s focus is mainly on a single man on a rock in the huge ocean, “a dot on the map at the extreme edge of things: the rock is virtually the novel’s all.”¹⁶ Because of the infertility Pincher Martin has a problem to find food. Additionally, this rock is far off any shipping route, so the chances of being found are bad. The solidity and hardness of the rock is opposed to the waves and swells of the water. This can be seen when Pincher Martin hits the rock for the first time: “Brown tendrils slashed across his face, then with a destroying shock he hit solidity. It was utter difference, it was under his body, against his knees and face [...]”¹⁷ The rock is described as something stronger than the water: “He [...] saw how each swell dipped for a moment, flung up with a white hand of foam then disappeared as if the rock had swallowed it.”¹⁸ The hardness of the rock seems to help him to get back to himself and to recover from the fights with the water.

“The hardnesses under his cheek began to insist. They passed through pressure to a burning without heat, to a localised pain. [...] They began to pull him back into himself and organise him as a single being.”¹⁹ *Pincher Martin* is a novel about a man outcast from civilisation, left alone with nature.

Christopher Martin finds then the strength to explore the rock. His situation on this island can be in some way compared to Robinson Crusoe’s: They are both shipwrecked, alone (at least at the beginning) and try to find shelter and food to survive. Martin’s rock though is much harder to live on, since it is small and barren and situated in cold and rough climate zone. Here, again, it is admirable how the protagonist is willing to survive. He finds a place to sleep, a trench, and a pool with water that he can drink.²⁰ At this point one is reminded of the adventures of Robinson Crusoe. Christopher Martin and Robinson Crusoe resemble in their “sheer determination to survive”²¹ Their force of will impels them to go on and to keep up the struggle. Crusoe, however, is much more successful in creating himself comfort. Pincher Martin’s efforts at constructing do not show a lot of success.

¹⁵ ib. (1956), p. 22

¹⁶ Boyd, S.J., *The Novels of William Golding*, Brighton/New York 1988, p. 47

¹⁷ ib. (1956), p. 22

¹⁸ ib. (1956), p. 21

¹⁹ ib. (1956), p. 24

²⁰ ib. (1956), p. 60

²¹ Boyd, S.J., (1988) , p. 51

This is because his island is poorer in resources than Crusoe's.²² While Robinson stranded on an island in the southern hemisphere with a warm climate, Christopher Martin has to deal with an infertile rock in the middle of the north Atlantic.

The rock is barren, so the food that he finds are mussels, seaweed and anemones. It costs him a lot of effort to get it and to eat it. It is hard to get the mussels off the rock: "[...][the mussels] were gripped and glued tight and there was nowhere to get the blade of the knife in."²³ He finally manages to get a mussel off. "He took out the complicated body and looked away over the sea. 'The Belgians do.' He gulped the body down."²⁴ Thus eating on the rock is an agony.

The rock of salvation turns out to be a place like hell. Chris's sufferings can be compared to the traditional underworld horrors.²⁵ Everything that he does, seem to require dreadful physical exertion. This can be seen, for example, when he builds "The Dwarf".²⁶

2.1.3 Colonising the Rock

Pincher Martin gives names to places and things on the rock that are important to him. They suggest home, or, at least a world of social life, of food and drink. "I call this place the look-out. The rock out there under the sun where I came swimming is safety rock. The place where I get mussels and stuff is Food Cliff. Where I eat them is – The Red Lion. On the south side where the strap-weed is, I call Prospect Cliff. [...] I name you the three rocks – Oxford Circus, Piccadilly and Leicester Square."²⁷ In this aspect Pincher Martin can be compared with Robinson Crusoe again, who also made everything around him his subject. Robinson Crusoe later met Friday. He taught him to be his servant and to talk English. Christopher Martin does not have such a servant, he is all by himself on the rock. He builds a dwarf, however. In agony and pain he piles up several stones.²⁸ It is supposed to be a signal for rescue, but it is also someone that he has control over.

2.1.4 The Gulls

²² ib. (1988) p. 51

²³ Golding, William (1956), p. 74

²⁴ ib. (1956), p. 75

²⁵ Boyd, S.J. (1988) p. 52

²⁶ Golding, William (1956), p. 80

²⁷ ib. (1956), p. 84, 86

²⁸ ib. (1956), p. 61

Gulls are present on the rock throughout the novel. The first time Pincher Martin sees a gull is when he sees the rock for the first time: *“He lifted his head and there was rock stuck up in the sky with a sea gull poised before it.”*²⁹ So the gulls seem self confident already in the beginning. They circle above him during the whole novel. They also come very close to him and are not timid at all. Christopher Martin feels threatened by them. It seems that they are just waiting for him to die: *“They were wartime gulls, who [...]resented the warmth of his flesh and his slow, unwarranted movements. They told him, with their close approach, and flapping hover that he was far better dead [...]”*³⁰ The gulls watch him all the time, so they are a constant menace to him. Christopher Martin reacts with panic and tries to chase them away³¹. They harden his fight for survival because he feels offended by them, especially by their cries: *“When the cry had gone everything was gentle again, non-committal and without offence.”*³² Pincher Martin also envies the gulls’ freedom. He imagines how the gull could rise and fly and be in the Hebrides or any other place on the next day. Knowing that the gulls can fly away but not tell anyone about him or get rescue makes him feel worse.³³

2.1.5 The Black Lightning

The first time that Pincher Martin encounters the black lightning is when he discovers a destroyed trunk of a tree. *“The trunk and the branches and the twigs were terrible black. Round the twigs was an apple blossom of grey and silver stain. As he watched, drops of water dulled the stain and lay in the branches like tasteless fruit.”*³⁴ At first he thinks that it was just lightning, but then he knows that the tree was hit by his “Black lightning”.

Robinson Crusoe was punished for his sin, but he was also saved alone of all his shipmates and took this to be a sign of his eternal salvation through God’s mercy. Robinson was rescued in the end of the story and taken home. Christopher Martin does not regret his sins, he does not ask for forgiveness. So the black lightning seems at the end of chapter 13 to be a symbol for a punishing God without grace.

²⁹ ib. (1956), p. 21

³⁰ ib. (1956), p. 56

³¹ ib. (1956), p. 56

³² ib. (1956), p. 58

³³ ib. (1956), p. 115

³⁴ ib. (1956), p. 177

The Black lightning that destroys Christopher Martin is presented to the reader as a God without mercy, “*wearing them away in a compassion that was timeless and without mercy.*”³⁵ Christopher Martin and the island that he managed to live on are gone. The reader who has watched the protagonist throughout his fight against nature regards this God as cruel and merciless because he lets Pincher Martin suffer and does not rescue him in the end.

³⁵ *ib.* (1956), p. 201

3 Figurative Meaning of Landscape and Physical Surroundings

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 14 of the novel, there is a shift: The protagonist's dead body is found by a naval officer. He assures his listener, in the last sequence of the novel, that the drowned man could not have suffered because *"He didn't even have time to kick off his seaboots."*³⁶ In the novel's beginning, however, one can read: *"He got his right leg across his left thigh and heaved with sodden hands. The seaboot slipped down his calf and he kicked it free."*³⁷ So Christopher Martin must have died at the very beginning of the story. The reader has to rethink the whole novel. Everything that happens to the protagonist, the fight with the water in the beginning, the climb on the rock, the survival on this rock, must have been invented by Pincher Martin's ego. *"Disregarding his physical death, Martin's consciousness persists, focuses on a 'picture' out of the past – significantly, 'a picture of a little world ... which one could control'"*³⁸ *"His consciousness reconstitutes him: "[...] a flood of connected images came back."*⁴⁰ and *"Suddenly he knew who he was and where he was."*⁴¹ Everything is made out of Pincher Martin's memory. He is not fighting for bodily survival but for his continuing identity. He creates this world because he refuses to die. The landscape and the physical surroundings on the rock are a projection of Martin's ego. This ego sustains the illusion of his physical existence. It manages to govern Pincher Martin's behaviour with determinedly rational points. When the body undergoes a fever, the body wants to allow the death that has happened, but the mind explains everything in terms of *"sexual images"*⁴².⁴³ Golding shows several violations of Christopher Martin's surroundings which hint at the fact that these surroundings are projection of Martin's ego. Therefore the novel has to be looked at from a new and different per-

³⁶ ib. (1956), p. 208

³⁷ ib. (1956), p. 10

³⁸ ib. (1956), p. 8

³⁹ Babb, Howard S. (1970), p. 72

⁴⁰ Golding, William (1956), p. 9

⁴¹ ib. (1956), p. 10

⁴² ib. (1956), p. 146

⁴³ Babb, Howard S. (1970), p. 74

spective. The landscape and physical surroundings carry a deeper, a figurative reading after one knows the end of the novel.

3.1.1 The Water

The water is, as mentioned in chapter 2.1.1., very often connected with the image of fire. Someone reading the novel for the first time could think that this might symbolise the pain and agony that Christopher Martin goes through. His pains are described as fiery: “[...] *their distant fires, their slow burnings, their racks and pincers were at least far enough away.*”⁴⁴ and “*I went through hell in the sea.*”⁴⁵ After knowing that Pincher Martin must have been dead from the very beginning of the novel, these expressions are all hints at the fact that there is described a literal hell. Instead of giving himself to a greater power he chooses to create his own hell, full of pain, but over which he, Christopher Martin, has still power. The reader learns from the several flashbacks that the protagonist is too greedy and egoistic than to let someone else rule over him.

Martin’s “real” life ended in the water. He died by drowning. Death by water, however, is symbolically ambivalent, it serves a dual purpose: ending and beginning. Pincher Martin’s death in the water is a symbol for the baptismal rite “*that serves to signal Martin’s entrance into a new life.*”⁴⁶ The element of water therefore means for the protagonist death and life, ending and beginning, at the same time.

Furthermore, E. C. Bufkin states that Martin’s climb up the rock is described like a physical birth: “*Before beginning his journey, which is through a vaginal ‘cleft’ in the rock, he is in a ‘crouched’ fetal position; and his egress from the cleft is an exact parallel to a baby’s leaving the womb: ‘The cleft narrowed until his head projected through an opening, not much wider than his body.*”⁴⁷ This Martin arrives on the rock newly born; and the rest of the novel relates the other phases of his life there: from the time when he ‘was young and strong and handsome’ to the time when he is ‘thin and weak’, with ‘joints like knobs’, ‘limbs like sticks’, his

⁴⁴ Golding, William (1956), p. 49

⁴⁵ ib. (1956), p. 122

⁴⁶ Bufkin, E.C., “Pincher Martin: William Golding’s Morality Play”, *Studies in Literature Imagination* 2 (1969) Oct., p. 6

⁴⁷ Golding, William (1956), p. 34

face 'fallen in with age' and his hair 'white with salt and suffering'^{48,49} This, again, depicts that water stands not only for the ending, but also for the beginning of a whole new life.

There is an other part in the novel that hints towards the fact that the described landscape is just a projection of a dead man's mind: "*He peered down the High Street and it was a picture. He shut his eyes and then opened them again but the rock and the sea seemed no more real. They were a pattern of colour that filled the three lights of his window.*"⁵⁰

3.1.2 The Rock

Christopher Martin's ego creates the rock as a point of rescue, as a defence against the destruction of his centre. It clings on it because it does not want to die. Several times throughout the novel it is depicted how the ego loses strength to believe in this illusion and projection.

The rock is created out of the memory of a lost tooth. It has exactly the shape of a tooth that Pincher Martin remembers from his childhood. "*The tooth [...] is gradually revealed as the model for the rock that he has invented to prolong existence.*"⁵¹ The first time that the protagonist uses the image of a tooth to describe the rock is on page 30: "*A single point of rock, peak of a mountain range, one tooth set in the ancient jaw of a sunken world.*"⁵² First reading the novel, the "tooth" seems simply a way of describing a real rock. Looking back, however, it is the response of Martin's ego to a fact it resists recognising: the fact that he is dead. The second time Pincher Martin mentions the tooth is when he starts to survey the rock: "*Some convulsion of the upper layers, [...] a gripe of the earth's belly had torn the deep bed and thrust this broken end up vertically through the mud and clay until it erupted as the tooth out of the fleshy jar.*"⁵³ When he later names things on the rock, it becomes clear how he fights against the realisation that the rock is only a projection of a tooth: "*I shall call those three rocks out*

⁴⁸ ib. (1956), p. 82

⁴⁹ Bufkin, E.C. (1969), p. 6

⁵⁰ Golding, William (1956), p. 124

⁵¹ Babb, Howard S. (1970), pp 76-77

⁵² Golding, William (1956), p. 30

⁵³ ib. (1956), p. 77

there the Teeth. 'All at once he was gripping the lifebelt with both hands and tensing his muscles to defeat the deep shudders that were sweeping through him. 'No! Not the Teeth!' The teeth were here, inside his mouth. He felt them with his tongue, the double barrier of bone, each known and individual except the gaps – and there they persisted as a memory if one troubled to think. But lie on row of teeth in the middle of the sea-⁵⁴ The special shape of the rock irritates him several times in the book. His ego actually knows that the rock and everything else is a projection, but represses it on the other hand. So the ego stands in a constant fight with itself. The rock starts to become familiar to the protagonist. He tries to figure out the source of this familiarity: *"How the hell is that hat rock is so familiar? [...] Familiar as a relative seldom seen, but to be reckoned with, year after year [...] familiar now as the rocks of childhood, [...] remembered in the darkness of bed, [...] imagined as a shape one's fingers can feel in the air –*⁵⁵ But he catches himself and tries to ignore his situation by saying *"I ought to fish."*⁵⁶

The final realisation happens at the end of chapter eleven. After having realised two other illogical facts, namely the red lobster and the soluble guano, he feels with his tongue along his teeth. *"His tongue was remembering. It pried into the gap between the teeth and re-created the old, aching shape. It touched the rough edge of the cliff, traced the slope down, trench after aching trench, [...] understood what was so hauntingly familiar and painful about an isolated and decaying rock in the middle of the sea."*⁵⁷ He knows now why the rock seemed familiar to him: It is just a projection of an old, aching tooth, a tooth that does not exist anymore, not even in his mouth. There is a gap now where the tooth was. This tooth stands literally for "nothing". And this is what the rock is: nothing but a creation of Christopher Martin's ego. Horror grips Martin at the moment of this insight because the tooth-lined rock is just a carved image of his memory and identity. Another hint at this nothingness is woven in when Christopher Martin fails to remember the rock's name but recalls a remark that his captain had made about it: *"I call that name a near miss."*⁵⁸ What is meant here: *"A near miss for F--- all, nothing at all."*⁵⁹

⁵⁴ ib. (1956), pp 90-91

⁵⁵ ib. (1956), p. 125

⁵⁶ ib. (1956), p. 125

⁵⁷ ib. (1956), p. 174

⁵⁸ ib. (1956), p. 31

⁵⁹ Boyd, S.J. (1988), p. 47

It is known from the flashbacks that Martin had been an actor earlier in his life. So he connects his created world, the rock, with certain expressions from the theatre: *“He began to speak against the flat air, the blotting paper.”*⁶⁰ and *“It’s like when you’ve finished a lights rehearsal and they cut. Then where there was bright, solid scenery is now only painted stuff, grey under the pilot light.”*⁶¹ Blotting paper is used to create theatrical scenery. So the way that Pincher Martin describes his physical surrounding hint at the fact that it is not real, just a creation and something that is easy to destroy. The world is just created out of pieces of memory from his former life. The scenery, like in a theatre, is there to keep up an illusion, to forget the reality and the truth. The connection to the theatrical scenery can be seen even more clearly when the “black lightning” destroys everything at the end of chapter 14: *“The sea stopped moving, froze, became paper, painted paper [...] the rock was painted on the same paper.”*⁶²

The reader learns from the flashbacks that the protagonist is a very unpleasant person. Greed is the one of the seven deadly sins that he is attached to the most. His moral attitude is that of the successful maggot in Pete’s anecdote: eat or be eaten.⁶³ So the rock, created of the memory of a lost tooth, is a symbol for his greed, the greed for food. Furthermore, Philip Redpath sees Pincher Martin himself swallowed and thrown up by the sea: *“The rock as tooth, eating and swallowing, is horribly reflected in the second level of the text, when Martin is swallowed by the sea and literally ‘thrown up’ ore even, ironically, excreted on to Campbell’s island. The excretion is ironic because Martin’s blasphemous ‘I shit on your heaven!’⁶⁴ is taken up literally, and he is ejected as a waste on the island that would [...] have saved his life [...].”*⁶⁵ While E.C. Bufkin sees Martin’s journey from the sea to the rock as a baptising and a birth, a beginning of a new life (Chapter 3.1.1.), Redpath regards it symbolically as a “throwing up” or even an excretion, an ejection of waste. This difference in interpreting is probably caused by explaining it with a different surrounding: Bufkin puts the element of water in the centre, Redpath starts with the rock as a tooth.

⁶⁰ Golding, William (1956), p. 163

⁶¹ ib. (1956), p. 169

⁶² ib. (1956), p. 200

⁶³ ib. (1956), pp 135-136

⁶⁴ ib. (1956), p. 200

⁶⁵ Redpath, Philip, *William Golding: A Structural Reading of his Fiction*, London/Totowa, NJ, 1986, p. 146

The rock serves also as the central symbol to show Pincher Martin unbalanced reason and his longing for stability. Martin thinks: *“Sanity is the ability to appreciate reality. What is the reality of my position? I am alone in the middle of the Atlantic. There are vast distances of swinging water around me. But the rock is solid. It goes down and joins the floor of the sea[...] I must remember that the rock is solid and immovable. If the rock were to move then I should be mad.”*⁶⁶ Of course the rock is not fixed, it is not an absolute, it is turning with the world. *“In both lives Christopher Hadley Martin sought stability for his reason; in both lives he failed.”*⁶⁷ Already in the beginning of the novel, the solidity of the rock is mentioned: *“[...] then, with a destroying shock, he hit solidity. It was utter difference, it was under his body, against his knees and face, he could close fingers on it, for an instance he could even hold on.”*⁶⁸ Pincher Martin is looking for solidity that he hold on to his illusion. The metaphor of the rock as a false still point reaches its final irony when the reader finds out that Martin has not reached a rock at all. *“The quasi-absolute of the tooth-lined rock was a sheer negation.”*⁶⁹ Golding gives the reader a hint at this already at the beginning of the novel: *“It felt just like solidity, but it was a sea trap.”*⁷⁰

3.1.3 The Sky

The sky puts a certain weight and pressure on Pincher Martin. One can connect this with the image of the glass sailor. Pincher Martin remembers this glass sailor in the jam jar from his childhood. The movement of the sailor in the jar could be controlled by pressing on top of the jar. By either restraining or giving pressure, the sailor moved up or down. The same happens with Pincher Martin: He feels a weight or pressure tempting him to reaffirm his childhood belief: *“The ponderous sky settled a little more irresistibly on his shoulders. ‘What’s the matter with me? I’m an adult. I know what’s what. There’s no connection between me and the kid in the cellar, none at all. I grew up. I firmed my life. I have it under control.’”*⁷¹ Christopher Martin who does not believe in God, who wants to have everything

⁶⁶ Golding, William (1956), p. 163

⁶⁷ LaChance, Paul R., “Pincher Martin: The Essential Dilemma of Modern Man”, *Cithara* 8 (1969) May, p. 58

⁶⁸ Golding, William (1956), pp 21-22

⁶⁹ LaChance, Paul (1969), p. 59

⁷⁰ Golding, William (1956), p. 33

under his control, feels that there is something above him. He is a person that likes to control but not to be controlled. Now he feels like the sailor in the jam jar, feels a presence and something controlling him. This control, coming from above, from the sky, makes him feel pressured. It is a greater power, God, that Pincher Martin does not want to be reminded of.

3.1.4 The Gulls

The gulls on the rock present, as mentioned in chapter 2.1.4 , a constant menace for Christopher Martin. Before one has read the whole novel, it does not become quite clear why this is so. When the reader knows that everything, including the gulls, is just a projection of dead Pincher Martin's ego the gulls can be seen as part of his creation which constantly tries to confront him with the truth, namely that he is dead. Furthermore the gulls want to convince his ego to accept his death and not to cling to his life. The sentence "*They told him [...] that he was far better dead, floating in the sea like a burst hammock.*"⁷² gets a different meaning. The gulls are not waiting for his death for their own profit because he truly *was* far better dead, meaning accepting his death, than creating his own hell with struggle and agony. Martin, however, does not want to accept this truth. He tries to chase the gulls away, meaning that he represses the thought of being dead. Just like the gulls, the fear of being dead is constantly present. The screams of the gulls make him feel worse at once. Pincher Martin explains his worsening condition either with the lack of sleep or food.⁷³ In this way the gulls erode Martin's capacity to convince himself of his survival.

3.1.5 The Lobster

Pincher Martin sees the red lobster for the first time when he is looking for seaweed. The colour of it is not yet mentioned explicitly but it Christopher Martin can see it in the greenish or brownish weed, so the lobster must be of a different colour. Pincher Martin does not like the lobster, he "loathes it"⁷⁴. It is the claws of

⁷¹ ib. (1956), p. 139

⁷² ib. (1956), p. 56

⁷³ ib. (1956), p. 126

⁷⁴ ib. (1956), p. 167

the lobsters that he hates the most: “*An ancient antipathy for things with claws set him shuddering at them [...]*”⁷⁵ The claws are the symbol of greed. Later then he watches the lobster again. Then he realises that a red living lobster cannot exist in reality: “*Whoever saw a lobster like this swimming in the sea? A red lobster? Something was taken away.*”⁷⁶ This realisation is a further step to admitting to himself that everything is just a projection.

3.1.6 The “Black Lightning”

The first touch of the black lightning that later dissolves Martin’s self-created world is normalised by the rational mind as a mere “lightning”, later he calls it black lightning: “*His mouth quacked. ‘Lightning!’ But the dark centre was shrunk and dreadful knowing. The knowing was so dreadful that the centre made the mouth work deliberately. ‘Black lightning.’*”⁷⁷ After having learned that Christopher Martin’s ego has created the rock and everything on it, that he is physically dead since the beginning of the novel, this black lightning does not seem so merciless and cruel anymore. Chris manages to save himself on an island of his own invention, and it appears that he has invented his own hell. All the agony and the suffering on this barren rock are a product of the protagonist’s ego. However, the traditional view of hell is that its torments are eternal, of infinite temporal duration. This is not the case with Martin’s experience on the rock. The rock and the ocean are torn to pieces on the seventh day to reveal a nothingness that is “*three times real*”⁷⁸, “*real with the intensity, the absoluteness of spiritual things*”⁷⁹ The hellish agony and misery of the rock are temporary and that might suggest that Martin is experiencing not hell but the tribulations of purgatory. He has been allowed by a power that watches over and cares for him “*to create a place of trial where his sins will be punished but also purged from him.*”⁸⁰ Chris himself is convinced that that his suffering is caused by something he ate, by a build-up of filth within him, and attempts to cure this by giving himself an enema, which is also a hint at the purgatory that Christopher Martin experiences. “*The enema,*

⁷⁵ ib. (1956), p. 57

⁷⁶ ib. (1956), p. 167

⁷⁷ ib. (1956), p. 177

⁷⁸ ib. (1956), p. 200

⁷⁹ Boyd, S.J. (1988), p. 55

however, shows Chris to be still much concerned with the physical rather than the spiritual, more concerned with body than soul.”⁸¹ The true cause of his miserable condition is the spiritual filth of sin.

Pincher Martin admits the guilt of his life and his self: *“Because of what I did I am an outsider and alone.”*⁸² Such an admission of guilt is the first step towards salvation and freedom of torment. But it is the only step that Christopher Martin makes. He does not regret any of his sins. *“For him to be redeemed or saved he must lose his life, but he foolishly and misguidedly clings to it, vile though it is.”*⁸³

The presence, the black lightning, attempts to force the protagonist to let go of the life to which he hangs on. The black lightning which finally destroys the rock and the ocean in a storm it identified by Christopher Martin at last as *“a compassion that was timeless and without mercy”*⁸⁴. S. J. Boyd describes this timeless compassion, which was merciless only *“in its determination to release Chris once for all from bondage to sin”*⁸⁵, as the love of God. Because God’s love is opposed to Pincher Martin’s will, it is seen in a negative way, as terror and black lightning. He is so much attached to the world, the flesh and the devil that the force that take these away from him appears as an enemy. In a world of inverted values, as Christopher Martin’s world, *“God is the hated darkness”*⁸⁶ Pincher Martin refuses to let go the world that he has chosen and created. *“Still the centre resisted. It made the lightning do its work according to the laws of his heaven.”*⁸⁷ He rejects God’s compassion: *“‘I spit on your compassion!’ [...] ‘I shit on your heaven!’”*⁸⁸ Despite all these blasphemies, Christopher Martin is separated from the hell that he would choose. His entry into nothingness is his salvation. It is the end of agony and a vicious struggle. So this God, that the protagonist sees as a “black lightning”, as merciless and cruel, is much more a God of love, mercy and forgiveness.

4 Literature

⁸⁰ ib. (1988), p. 55

⁸¹ ib. (1988) p. 55

⁸² ib. (1988), p. 56

⁸³ ib. (1988), p. 56

⁸⁴ Golding, William (1956), p. 201

⁸⁵ Boyd, S.J. (1988), p. 56

⁸⁶ ib. (1988), p. 56

⁸⁷ Golding, William (1956), p. 200

⁸⁸ ib. (1956), pp 199-200

4.1 Primary Source

Golding, William, *Pincher Martin*, London 1956

4.2 Secondary Sources

Babb, Howard S., *The Novels of William Golding*, Columbus, OH 1970

Boyd, S.J., *The Novels of William Golding*, Brighton/New York 1988

Bufkin, E.C., "Pincher Martin: William Golding's Morality Play", *Studies in Literature Imagination* 2 (1969) Oct., Pages 5-16

Cox, C.B., "William Golding's 'Pincher Martin'", *Listener* 71 (1964) 12 Mar, Pages 430-431

Delbaere (-Garant), Jeanne, "William Golding's 'Pincher Martin'", *English Studies* 51 (1970) 6, Pages 538-544

Henry, Avril, "The Pattern of Pincher Martin", *Southern Review* 9 (1976), Pages 3-26

Jaentsch, Karin, *Das Böse in den späten Romanen William Goldings*, Frankfurt/Main 1994

LaChance, Paul R., "Pincher Martin: The Essential Dilemma of Modern Man", *Cithara* 8 (1969) May, Pages 55-60

Morgan, Edwin, "'Pincher Martin' and 'The Coral Island'", *Notes and Queries* (1960) Apr. Page 150

Page, Norman, *William Golding: Novels, 1954-67*, London 1985

Redpath, Philip, *William Golding: A Structural Reading of his Fiction*, London/Totowa, NJ, 1986

Ryan, J.S., "The Two Pincher Martins: From Survival Adventure to Golding's Myth of Dying" *English Studies* 55 (1970) 2, Pages 140-151

Subbarao, V.V., *William Golding: A Study*, London 1987