

Will, Suffering and Liberation in William Golding's *The Spire*

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Although William Golding's *The Spire* has been submitted to frequent analyses, none has explained one of its central elements: the will that the protagonist identifies with that of God. First illustrating this general weakness through a well-known reading of the novel, this article then attempts a more comprehensive interpretation, focused on the primacy of the will, with the aid of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy. Schopenhauer's theory throws light on the uneasy relations between the intellectual perspectives adopted by the two main characters, Dean Jocelin (a religious man with a vision) and Roger Mason (the builder who puts his technical expertise at the Dean's service) on the spire that gives the novel its title. More importantly, it can help us to see how both perspectives serve the all-powerful, amoral will that also fuels Jocelin's sexual desire and underlies the world as a whole. In Golding's novel, as in Schopenhauer, the insatiable quality of willing causes widespread suffering, but Jocelin's involuntary liberation from the force of will (thanks to his aesthetic contemplation of the spire and his subsequent demise) eventually puts an end to his pain.

Keywords: William Golding; Arthur Schopenhauer; will; suffering; aesthetics; death

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Voluntad, sufrimiento y liberación en *The Spire*, de William Golding

Aunque *The Spire*, de William Golding, ha sido objeto de frecuentes análisis, ninguno ha explicado uno de sus elementos centrales: la voluntad que el protagonista identifica con la divina. Tras ilustrar esta carencia con una de las lecturas más conocidas de la novela, el presente artículo intenta ofrecer una interpretación más exhaustiva, centrada en la primacía de la voluntad, con ayuda de la filosofía de Arthur Schopenhauer. El pensamiento de Schopenhauer puede esclarecer las tensas relaciones entre las perspectivas intelectuales adoptadas por los dos personajes principales, Jocelin (el deán que tiene una visión) y Roger (el constructor que pone su pericia técnica al servicio de Jocelin), en relación con la aguja que da título a la novela. Además, permite apreciar cómo ambas perspectivas sirven a la voluntad todopoderosa y amoral que alimenta el deseo sexual de Jocelin y subyace al mundo entero. En la novela de Golding, como en Schopenhauer, la naturaleza insaciable de la voluntad causa sufrimientos generalizados, pero la liberación involuntaria de Jocelin respecto a la voluntad (gracias a su contemplación estética de la aguja y a su posterior fallecimiento) acaba con su dolor.

Palabras clave: William Golding; Arthur Schopenhauer; voluntad; sufrimiento; estética; muerte

## 1. INTRODUCTION: WAYS OF SEEING

William Golding's *The Spire* (1965) recounts the construction of a four-hundred-foot spire. On the basis of an alleged vision, Jocelin, Dean of a mediaeval English cathedral, drives the master builder Roger Mason to carry out the project despite the temple's marshy foundations. The building work destroys the normal fabric of cathedral life and ruins the lives of all involved. Initially blinded by the intensity of the revelation, Jocelin eventually sees so much destruction that he is forced to recognise his own secret motivations—the hitherto unconscious sexual desire for Goody Pangall that he has been sublimating—as well as those of the people around him. After the work has been brought to completion, Jocelin's life ends in puzzlement as he considers the soaring pinnacle, which reminds him of a sapphire “kingfisher,” an “upward waterfall” and a blooming “*appletree*” (205, 223; emphasis in original).

The action of the novel is triggered by an episode during which, in his own account, Jocelin understands God's will to be that a great spire be added to the existing cathedral. The narrator abstains from giving us clear enough clues to decide whether or not Jocelin is a true visionary; but at the same time the text also undermines the scepticism of Jocelin's opponents. On the one hand, the story begins many years after Jocelin's revelation, when the construction of the spire has already started. However, even before the builders begin to experience any serious difficulties, Jocelin reveals that his memory of his vision is as faint as that of “a dream remembered from childhood” (67). The only proof that the erection of the spire is carried out in response to God's intention is Jocelin's word, but frequent doubts are cast on his sanctity and his very sanity. On the other hand, it soon becomes clear that those who criticise the Dean's unquestioning religiosity—beginning with Roger—are motivated by a shortsighted perspective based on rational calculation. Even Jocelin's fellow priests are too concerned with worldly business to pay attention to manifestations of the supernatural. If the real nature of the novel's triggering illumination is hard to ascertain, it is equally difficult to determine the meaning of Jocelin's kingfisher, waterfall and apple tree. The problem here is not so much that we are not sure about the reality of his vision, but that we are not sure of how to interpret it.

Of all the explanations that critics have provided for Jocelin's initial revelation and his final contemplation of the finished spire, the most sophisticated is probably that of Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor. Their discussion concentrates on Jocelin's ways of seeing as successive steps in a process of increasing comprehension. Chronologically, they argue, the Dean moves from metaphysical vision to physical sight and finally achieves multifaceted insight. While the visionary stance dominates most of the novel, the second and third modes occupy the final pages, when the dying Dean catches a glimpse of the finished spire.

This “essential threefold process” of focusing, as Kinkead-Weekes calls it (1987, 75), appears in most of Golding's novels, although usually in a different order. To begin with, the narratives rely on a presentation of concrete physical impressions; for Golding there can be “no true seeing that is not primarily and simply visual” (67). Physical appearances are usually less objective than we might expect, because it is part of our egoistic nature to

see things from an individual, self-centred point of view. Only exceptionally may one reach a “wholly ‘objective’” view of things, this being the point at which sight operates “with the greatest impersonality” (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 2002, 367, 369). Due to the ego’s “falsifying power,” it is much more common “to see only what one wants to see” (371, 173). Apart from being generally conditioned by egoism, physical perception has a further shortcoming; if it is never abandoned in favour of more penetrating modes of cognition, it leads to a physical dead end: “at a deeper level,” concrete seeing remains “unaware of the nature of things” (Kinkead-Weekes 1987, 67).

Whereas sight presents objects from one single perspective, insight thrives on the “contradictions” created by the “multiplicity” of existing world-views (scientific, religious, artistic, etc.), and “fuses opposites into inclusive acceptance” (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 2002, 372). As regards this second stage, there is some scholarly agreement that Golding’s method consists in “setting up a tension between two contradictory . . . patterns” (Tiger 2003, 119). After taking part in this conflict as the representatives of one of those clashing patterns or world views, Golding’s insightful characters realise that all perspectives “are true” to a certain extent, and that “a thorough conviction of the truth of one to the exclusion of the other yields a distorted and narrow view of the world” (Boyd 1988, 73). It is thus that insight ushers in pluralism. When one oversteps the limits of one’s world-view, simultaneously occupying more than one standpoint (religious, scientific and artistic, for example), the result is “the overturning of certainties” (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 2002, 173). In the process, one’s understanding of the world becomes much richer, even if it is never complete or perfectly coherent.

The third step corresponds to metaphysical vision. As with insight, this dimension has attracted the attention of critics other than Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor. Redpath, for example, stresses Golding’s aspiration to “make us aware . . . of the need to achieve wholeness” (1986, 178). Pitting a series of world-views against each other, his novels expose them all as “inadequate” (119). All clashing perspectives can be subsumed by or belong in a greater whole; behind the plurality of world-views there is some deeper unity. After emphasising multiplicity, therefore, Golding insists that “no human seeing can be truly human unless all things are made one, if only for an instant” (Kinkead-Weekes 1987, 73). The progression from sight to insight comes to an abrupt end when the characters rupture the patterns that have helped them to understand the world, and they come into contact with the “one-and-all” (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 2002, 254).

Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor maintain that the order in which these three steps are taken in *The Spire* is different from that described in other novels. First comes Jocelin’s vision, then sight and finally insight. The vision occurs before the beginning of the narrative, but its impression is so strong as to tinge Jocelin’s views for most of the novel. Jocelin’s contact with the divinity may have been real and his intentions sincere; but even in this case we should remember that his vision was not grounded in other, worldlier modes of cognition. For Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor, this makes it extremely dangerous: under the influence of his vision, Jocelin remains oblivious of human needs, neglects his

ecclesiastical duties, falls out with the other priests and the builders, and, worst of all, puts everyone's lives in danger. While this happens, Jocelin's perspective conflicts with Roger Mason's entreaties to be reasonable and to see the situation physically, with an awareness of both human and material limits. But the Dean's monomania endures until the very end of the novel, when he acquires sight and finally insight. Both modes follow each other in quick succession. In a sudden moment of what Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor call "*literal, physical, seeing*," Jocelin perceives the spire's beauty (2002, 197; emphasis in original). As we shall discuss, Golding's own explanation of the novel's meaning focuses primarily upon this aesthetic encounter. For their part, Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor argue that Jocelin's untoward aesthetic contemplation is surmounted, just as unexpectedly, by "double" or "split" insight (170). Up to this point the conflict of world-views provoked by the spire has crystallised in the mounting friction between Jocelin's faith in religious metaphysics and Roger's confidence in physical science. In the novel's closing pages, Jocelin comes to incorporate the builder's way of seeing into his own, the effect being the impossibility of describing the pinnacle in a way that satisfies both religious beliefs and technical precision. For this reason, the Dean must resort to figurative language. When Jocelin now attempts to describe the spire, we witness a "flowering of emblematic meanings" (198). Paraphrasing the Dean in a very loose way, Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor compare the pinnacle to "an upward 'fall' rushing like a fountain" (199), a "kingfishershotoverslidingwater" (200) and "the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" (198). At this point, it is hard to say whether the complexities that the critics identify stem from the object that Jocelin perceives, from his double point of view, from the symbolic language that he employs, or indeed from the critics' approach itself.

Despite its suggestiveness, this reading is not altogether satisfactory. Leaving aside the fact that their account of insight and vision is not entirely clear, the main problem is that the authors hardly mention—and thus fail to explain in a convincing manner—the notion of will, which the novel presents as the main attribute of the deity. Unfortunately, this absence recurs in all other readings of the novel, where the various authors lay the focus elsewhere: for example, on the struggles for worldly power and the explosion of carnivalesque subversion (Crawford 2002); on Golding's narrative method and style, which are condemned as mystifying and clumsy (Lerner 1981), or else praised as suggestive of some other reality beyond the physical (Clements 2012); or on artists' inability to control their creations (Jay 2006). By contrast, I shall argue that the will is one of the pillars of *The Spire*, insofar as it is the object of Jocelin's metaphysical vision, that which provides the initial stimulus for the pinnacle's construction. The Dean is certain that this will is God's. However, the way in which this will is described in the novel is far removed from the image of divine lovingness and morality that dominates the Christian tradition. In the final analysis, I think it necessary to acknowledge the irrational, non-conscious, amoral character of both the will and the divinity in the novel. My contention is that we can gain a better understanding of the centrality of the will in *The Spire* if we make use of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy, which divides the world into the universal will and its

manifestations, places as much cognitive value on irrational feeling as on reason, and gives moral precedence to disinterest over interest. This theoretical framework throws light on the outrageous nature of the will that fuels Jocelin's obsession, and on its direct relation to the Dean's unconscious sexuality. It illuminates the disparate modes of cognition—including physical perception and metaphysical vision—available to Jocelin and the other characters, as well as the relation between his irrational obstinacy and their rational calculation. Finally, it highlights the importance of feeling and death as ways of escaping from interest and suffering.

## 2. VARIETIES OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE WILL

One habitual way of reading *The Spire* has been to see in it a dramatisation of the tension between different understandings of the rising pinnacle. This may also be a good starting point for us. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the clash between the ways the protagonists see the spire as an object in the world are symptomatic of their more general intellectual approaches to the world as a whole. In this regard, the theme on which most of the narrative focuses is the long struggle between Jocelin's and Roger's world-views. As in the rest of the novel, the dominant perspective is the Dean's, and the presentation of events cannot escape the intense metaphysical tinge inherited from his vision. Whenever he looks he sees, in everyday reality, clues to the divinity's plan, in which he plays a central role. Both the influence exerted upon the narration by Jocelin's point of view, and his tense dialogues with Roger Mason, make it clear that their individual perspectives are (relatively) unitary, closed and, therefore, irreconcilable. Behind their dispute it is not difficult to discern the difference between physical and metaphysical cognition, between rational pragmatism and stubborn irrationality.

We can fully grasp what is at stake in this opposition if we examine Schopenhauer's views on cognition—conscious *representation*, as he calls it. In his view, cognition can be classified in two ways. First, according to its rational or irrational functioning, the former giving rise to knowledge through *feeling* and the latter giving rise to knowledge through *concepts* (the basis of linguistic utterances and all other cultural products). While he defines feelings as concrete representations, he speaks of concepts as abstract “representations of representations” (Schopenhauer 1966a, 40), thus suggesting that meaningful concepts necessarily rest on feelings. Despite their vicarious character, concepts have two advantages: while the contents of feelings can always raise suspicions, the truth of concepts can be established with absolute certainty; further, concepts are easy to communicate by means of denotative uses of language which appeal to reason, while sometimes feelings can only be communicated by using language evocatively—figuratively—so it will appeal to the irrational intellect. The second classification of knowledge is into *physical* cognition (the perception of material objects in their temporal, spatial and causal contexts, and the concepts derived from these perceptions) and *metaphysical* cognition (all other kinds of representation, including a person's inward contemplation of their own will, and the

aesthetic contemplation of objects, together with the concepts built on them). Although both oppositions are not exactly the same, the fact remains that when we speak about the world we usually refer to its physical side, and that, with the exception of philosophers, cognition of the world's metaphysical plane seldom goes beyond inchoate feelings. In fact, this is precisely the difference between scientific and religious discourses. Schopenhauer holds that science deals with physical objects and appeals to the rational intellect, while religion starts from metaphysical objects and appeals to the feelings of the believers (art also focuses on the metaphysical realm and appeals to the audience's feelings, but it does so from an aesthetic standpoint; philosophy focuses on the metaphysical realm, but it appeals to reason).

With respect to *The Spire*, it is reasonable to interpret Jocelin's opinion that "the spiritual" is more important than "the material" as referring respectively to the metaphysical and the physical (Golding 1965, 193). While Jocelin's conduct is guided by a feeling of the metaphysical will (which he locates outside rather than within himself), Roger can but rely on physical feelings and concepts in order to bring the spire's construction to a successful conclusion. As the two characters soon realise, in the absence of any common intellectual ground they can only share the same perspective if one succeeds in forcing his own upon the other. Jocelin tries to convince Roger and his army of workers that the spire's erection has been ordained by God himself, while the master builder reacts by exposing the Dean's folly. In the following passage we witness Roger's attempts to make Jocelin see reason and to allay his own misgivings through the fusion of physical sight and rational calculation: "I know how much the spire will weigh, and I don't know how strong it'll be. Look down, Father—right over the parapet, all the way down. . . . I have to save weight, bartering strength for weight or weight for strength, guessing how much, how far, how little, how near, until my very heart stops when I think of it. Look down, Father" (117). Since Jocelin is eager to "build in faith, against advice" (108), and seems blind to all considerations of feasibility, it falls to Mason to work out how to build a durable structure. As the spire increases in height, however, we witness how Jocelin's irrational faith in the metaphysical will and Roger's rational consideration of material factors complement each other, and the reader is left in no doubt that both are needed during the works. The key to why they need each other can be found in the fundamental role that the narrative allots to the universal will, and in Golding's—and Schopenhauer's—view of the process of artistic production. These are the issues to which I now turn.

Despite the disastrous consequences of his obsession, Jocelin's initial reaction is to dismiss them. At first, God is only made responsible for the presumable positive aspects the spire's construction will have—not only solidarity among the workers, but also the spiritual renewal of the whole community of laypersons and clerics at whose centre the cathedral stands. All the other consequences—Jocelin's sinful pride in being the chosen one, his sexual attraction to Goody Pangall, Roger Mason's drunkenness and attempted suicide, his cheating on his wife, the death of Goody and her husband, "the debts, the deserted church, [the] discord" (Golding 1965, 194)—are routinely attributed to Satan. Evil is also associated with the unexpected intrusion of a hitherto hidden side of reality,

a terrifying underworld to which we usually have no conscious access and which, in Jocelin's view, should never come to light. What the Dean does not realise is that this dark region, whose doorway is the stinking pit full of human remains that the builders open inside the cathedral in order to inspect its foundations, may be the very place from which his revelation comes. To understand how this can be the case, we must again recall Schopenhauer's thought.

The keystone of Schopenhauer's philosophy is the polarity between the single universal will—which he presents as the world's unconscious essence—and its countless manifestations—which in fact make up the world we are usually aware of, but which he reduces to mere appearances. The universal will is “a constant striving without aim and without rest” (Schopenhauer 1966a, 311), to which the will of each individual is connected. The universal will is “the truly real” essence of the world, and the realm of appearances “is like a dream” (229, 8). The universal will is omnipotent, but it is also lacking, because it is in constant need of satisfaction. Since it is all that, in the final analysis, we know to exist, the only way in which the universal will can suture this gaping wound is through its manifestations, more specifically through the emergence of organic life. The universal will finds satisfaction when its manifestations fulfil their desires, which they often do in mutual competition. In the ensuing war of all against all, the almighty energy pushes every individual manifestation to reproduce itself and to preserve its life at all costs (even preying on other individuals of the same or a different species); for this reason we can say that the universal will is a will to life. Because of its inherent lack and of the way in which it compensates for this through cut-throat competitiveness and violence, Schopenhauer condemns the omnipotent will as more devilish than divine (see 1966a, 349). Life is a “constant struggle, *bellum omnium*, everything a hunter and everything hunted” (Schopenhauer 1966b, 354; emphasis in the original). In such a state of permanent warfare on a global scale, cognition proves a lethal weapon.

In Schopenhauer's view, some forms of metaphysical cognition—especially the inner contemplation of the individual will—give us a glimpse of the essential kernel behind the veil of appearances. As it is rooted in the universal will, the striving of the individual will knows no respite. As a rule, individuals believe their own will to be theirs alone and isolated from the will of others. This opinion springs from the egocentrism of the individual, that is, from their exclusive reliance on their own individual perspective and their failure to notice that their apparent separation from other beings does not apply to the essential will. Insofar as it serves individuals to satisfy their individual will, cognition is egoistic or interested as well as egocentric. As a matter of fact, however, it is always the needs of the universal will that an individual unconsciously fulfils through his or her individual will. Egocentrism and egoistic interest only operate within the domain of appearances. Egoistic interest appears even in the case of rational cognition, whose sole function is to prove one's point, thus satisfying “a *purpose of the will*” (Schopenhauer 2000, 417; emphasis in original). Owing to the combination of the insatiability of the individual will and the subordinate role of interested cognition, for the creatures that populate the plane of

appearances the world is characterised by “much and long suffering” amidst which “only momentary gratification” can be found (Schopenhauer 1966b, 354).

Schopenhauer’s moral theory gives feelings precedence over concepts because the former can be disinterested. Disinterest defines those forms of feeling that are involuntary, those that involve knowing what one did not seek or want to know or, alternatively, what one cannot help but know. This is a type of knowledge—usually metaphysical in character—that has no bearing whatsoever on the satisfaction of a person’s individual will, and therefore has nothing to do with the selfish employment of certain means for the attainment of certain ends. Ordinary cognition is tied to interest; it always contains a measure of anxiety, because it cannot fail to seek the avoidance of suffering and the pursuit of satisfaction. By contrast, disinterested cognition is absolutely placid and painless. It is, quite simply, an unselfish “better consciousness” liberated from one’s will (see Janaway 2002, 6).

A good example of better consciousness can be found in the origin of Jocelin’s obsession. As we know, the vision that triggers the construction of the spire is strikingly absent from the main storyline, and is only narrated at some length towards the end of the novel. The allusions to the episode, which occurred when Jocelin was still young, are scant and difficult to interpret. The longest reference is the Dean’s own record in an old notebook:

One evening . . . *a feeling rose from my heart*. It grew stronger, reached up until at the utmost tip it burst into a living fire . . . which passed away, but left me now transfixed. For there, against the sky, I saw the nearest pinnacle; and it was the exact image of my prayer in stone. . . . [*A*] *fountain burst up from me*, up, out, through . . . an implacable, unstoppable, glorious fountain. . . . The vision left me at last; and the memory of it . . . shaped itself to the spire. (Golding 1965, 191-93; emphasis added)

The incident leads to Jocelin’s acquaintance, in his own view, with “a Will without limit or end” which he identifies with “God’s will” and to which his own particular will is somehow linked (Golding 1965, 84, 40). From what he says, it is nevertheless apparent that the will that urges him to action is not (only) God’s but his own. In Schopenhauer, the feeling of a person’s individual will is the first stage of the philosopher’s conceptualisation of the universal will (see Schopenhauer 1966a, 110). This feeling is not directed outwards but rather inwards, towards one’s heart as it were, and allows individuals to grasp the source of their voluntary actions as well as the site of their emotions and passions, which in Jocelin’s case are more carnal than pious. Although the Dean subsequently attributes his vision to God, the truth is that the old notebook locates its origin within—in the heart—not without. Other passages in the novel confirm that when he speaks of God’s will he also means his own will. A case in point is his attempt to reassure the master builder with these words: “You’ll see how I shall thrust you upward by my will. It’s God’s will in this business” (Golding 1965, 40). It is legitimate to surmise that it is in fact his own will that the Dean refers to when he speaks of his heart. The reason why he does not fully realise the inner source of his vision lies in his attempt to deny the sinful passions that dwell inside him.

Jocelin's notebook tells us how, following on from the explosion that rises from his heart, he is struck by the idea of a new tower. One explanation is that, as Schopenhauer tells us, the metaphysical feeling of the will cannot be easily translated into denotative words, and requires a better embodiment in other kinds of expression. A poet may use language figuratively to evoke certain feelings; a painter may create a two-dimensional picture; a sculptor and an architect may conceive three-dimensional structures. In Jocelin's case, the vehicle is a spire which functions not only as a monument to the almighty and omnipresent will but also, unwittingly, as a direct expression of his own will and as a work of art. In reality, his revelation seems to have consisted of two different kinds of experience: inward contemplation (projected outside) combined with aesthetic inspiration. By virtue of this second moment the novel would be a dramatisation of the artistic process, starting with the work's inception, proceeding to its production and ending with its reception. This analysis tallies with Golding's account of the novel as an exploration of "the problem of what is an artist, why is an artist, how is an artist" (as reported by Baker 1982, 150).

In his frequent mentions of beauty, Schopenhauer maintains that the artist's task is to elevate the receiver's mind beyond the physical dimension of objects to the metaphysical-aesthetic sphere. Aesthetic contemplation produces "the deliverance of knowledge from the service of the [individual] will, the forgetting of oneself as individual, and the enhancement of consciousness to the pure . . . timeless subject of knowing" (Schopenhauer 1966a, 199). Works of art make the aesthetic dimension accessible to the audience, in much the same way as artistic inspiration made it accessible to the author. Grasping objects in an aesthetic manner (and any object can be treated in this way) allows individuals to transcend themselves by reaching a state in which they become "free from individuality" and from "servitude" to their own individual will (180). This state—in which the craving individual gives way to an unselfish observer that appreciates universal beauty in a particular object—opens the door, temporarily at least, to a better life. The disinterested moments of artistic inspiration and reception are mediated by artistic execution, which, according to Schopenhauer, is driven by interest. As it is intended to materialise the artist's creative feeling and to produce a similar effect upon the audience, a work of art can only aspire to be the most suitable technical means to the artist's ends.

The disparity of the first two stages, the inspiration and the construction, is most evident in the case of architecture—particularly of contemporary architecture, where the creative architect frequently needs the technical assistance of an engineer (in this respect, the collaboration between Jocelin and Roger in *The Spire* is perhaps more characteristic of our times than of the construction of mediaeval cathedrals); but in Schopenhauer's opinion the disparity is present in all artistic manifestations. However disinterested artistic inspiration may be, interested calculation becomes instrumental in the work's elaboration. Opposed as they are in other respects, Roger and Jocelin are equally eager to complete the steeple. Because it is his professional prestige as well as his life that is at stake, the former employs rational calculation to perfect his building techniques. The latter's obsession with finishing the pinnacle proves to be similarly interested. Consciously, Jocelin justifies the

construction as a way to please the divinity; but it is also a way of proving to himself and others that his vision was genuine, that he has been chosen for the task and that his is not a “bogus sanctity” (Golding 1965, 209). At an unconscious level, the spire is an outlet for his latent sexuality as well a means of increasing the Church’s and his own power over the whole region. The way in which his thirst for power fuses with lust is illustrated in this scene:

He . . . was looking away from the tower and out into the world. . . . I would like the spire to be a thousand feet high, he thought, and then I should be able to oversee the whole county . . . He examined the strips and patches of cultivation, the rounded downlands that rose to a wooded and notched edge. They were soft and warm and smooth as a young body. . . . In a flash of vision he . . . understood how the tower was laying a hand on the whole landscape, altering it, dominating it, enforcing a pattern that reached wherever the tower could be seen, by sheer force of its being there. . . . The countryside was shrugging itself obediently into a new shape. (Golding 1965, 105-08)

As the story unfolds, Jocelin becomes progressively aware of these dual motivations. The discovery shakes his faith as much as the construction’s difficulties shake Roger’s confidence in reason. Whereas the builder can hardly believe that the spire has not yet collapsed despite its lack of foundations, the cleric becomes increasingly suspicious that the steeple may be for him the fulfilment of something other than the Christian God’s will. At first he simply believes that he is attuned to the omnipotent divinity. Now seeing himself as an instrument of the Lord’s will, now identifying his own will with God’s, Jocelin treats other people as mere tools in order to ensure that the spire gets built. Initially, he is adamant that his will “is linked to a Will without limit or end” (Golding 1965, 84). But as the story advances, and the afflictions caused by the erection multiply, he becomes uncertain as to whether his illumination is the result of God’s will, or “his [own] will, or whatever will it was” (150). By the end of his mental and physical ordeal Jocelin cannot but harbour serious doubts about God’s plans: “*There is no innocent work. God knows where God may be*” (222; emphasis in original). Perhaps he is correct in believing that he is obeying an omnipotent will, and perhaps he is entitled to regard this force as divine; but in that case, what kind of God is he talking about?

It becomes apparent that the Dean’s will (one of whose components is sexual) is linked to the world’s essential will (the will to life), and that his own will ends up being embodied in the erect spire. Carey states that “the ruthless willpower with which Jocelin drives on the spire’s ‘erection’ is . . . a sublimation of his lust as well as—or rather than—an expression of pure faith” (2009, 272). To make the sexual undertones of Jocelin’s mania all the more manifest, Golding thought the novel “ought to be called *An Erection at Barchester*” (as reported by Biles 1970, 100). Although he did not stick to this title, Golding made sure that the concern with sexuality would not escape the reader’s attention. To begin with, the model of the cathedral with the new spire resembles a man with an erection lying

on his back: "The nave was his legs placed together, the transepts on either side were his arms outspread. The choir was his body; and the Lady Chapel . . . was his head. And now also, springing, projecting, bursting, erupting from the heart of the building, there was its crown and majesty, the new spire" (Golding 1965, 8). The sexual implications are even more explicit in one of the Dean's dreams, where the building is again identified with his body, whose penis is stroked by a red-haired Satan resembling Goody: "Only Satan himself . . . clad in nothing but blazing hair stood over his nave and worked at the building, tormenting him so that he writhed . . . and cried out aloud" (65).

Even after he has begun to realise that the force that he locates outside himself might in fact be his own inner will, and that this springs from a greater will that underlies the whole world, Jocelin clings to the comforting idea that the will that he obeys is, like his own conscious motivations, irreproachable. In refusing to see the obscene drive that propels him for what it is, he tries to divorce himself from the obscenity. Jocelin is "seriously ignorant of human nature, priding himself in his attempt to exclude sexuality in excessive and morbid revulsion" (Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor 2002, 184). When he affirms that the spire is not so much "a diagram" of "Jocelin's Folly"—the name given to the construction by the workers—as of "God's folly" (Golding 1965, 128, 121), he seems to ignore the true implications of the words that he has chosen. Among the senses of "folly," the *OED* records that of "lewdness" or "wantonness." On this linguistic evidence, Boyd argues that the will "that forces the spire upwards" is more closely linked to the pagan "dark gods" abhorred by Jocelin than to the Christian divinity (1988, 100). The very term *will* can have carnal and genital connotations (94-95). For everyone except himself, it is soon obvious that behind his conscious motives lies a demonic impulse that tends towards excess and disruption, an almighty drive that takes no account of human morality and needs. As McCarron notes, Golding's novels frequently suggest that "the irrational, numinous force . . . at the centre of existence . . . can be apprehended as much, if not more, by outrage and violence as it can by conventional piety" (2007, 192).

Among the exuberant images that abound in the novel, two point with clarity to the way in which knowledge of the workings of the will finally intrudes into Jocelin's cloistered consciousness. When the workers start digging a hole at the centre of the cathedral's body, they open the gates of an uncanny area that Jocelin would have preferred to remain ignorant of. From the bottom of the pit arises a force that—like Schopenhauer's universal will—animates even lifeless matter. This force poses a real threat to Jocelin's Christian faith and ominously foreshadows the end of his individual existence:

a patch . . . fell out of the [pit's] side below him and struck the bottom with a soft thud. The pebbles that fell with it . . . never settled completely. He saw . . . that they were all moving more or less, with a slow stirring, like the stirring of grubs. . . . Some form of life; that which ought not to be seen or touched, the darkness under the earth. . . . Doomsday coming up; or the roof of hell down there. Perhaps . . . the living, pagan earth, unbound at last and waking, *Dia Mater*. (Golding 1965, 79-80)

Here, as in the dream quoted earlier, the encroaching powers of evil that surface from the subterranean chambers of the earth and the unconscious are associated with femininity. In this case the female figure is *Dia Mater* or *Demeter*, the pagan goddess of agriculture who presided over the fertility of the earth, and whom Jocelin sees as the enemy of “God the Father” (Golding 1965, 7). This is not the only occasion on which the unstoppable energy of vegetable life is linked to Jocelin’s growing awareness of a hidden dimension of the world. There is another passage in which the narrator tries to convey, in Kinkead-Weekes and Gregor’s words, “the disturbance of a mind unconsciously aware of things it does not wish to know consciously, things which insist on intruding” (2002, 180). The images of plant growth convey the invasion of Jocelin’s hermetic mind by a force that exceeds human control:

[H]e saw there was a twig lying across his shoe, with a rotting berry that clung obscenely to the leather. He scuffed his foot irritably; and . . . [h]e found himself thinking of the ship that was built of timber so unseasoned, a twig in her hold put out one green leaf. He had an instant vision of the spire warping and branching and sprouting; and the terror of that had him on his feet. (Golding 1965, 95)

Given the close affinities between *The Spire* and Schopenhauer’s thinking, Jocelin’s expressions are likely to remind us of the philosopher’s description of the will as “the inner, mysterious, sprouting force” from which appearances grow (Schopenhauer 1966b, 478). In general, the image of “a plant with strange flowers and fruit, complex, twining, engulfing, destroying, strangling” symbolises the “unlooked-for things” that come with the spire, “things put aside” that return to upset Jocelin’s sense of reality (Golding 1965, 194, 105).

Though the dispute between Jocelin’s irrationality and the rest of the characters’ calculating reason is largely maintained throughout the novel, the story’s progression blurs the other oppositions between appearance and essence, consciousness and unconsciousness, faith and sexuality, Jocelin’s Christianity and the workers’ pagan rituals, masculinity and femininity (God the Father and *Dia Mater*), the spire and the pit. Jocelin gradually discovers that the first cluster of elements is not opposed to but must be understood as manifesting or at least depending on the second. He is thus forced to admit the wisdom of the words of Roger’s old master: “a spire goes down as far as it goes up” (Golding 1965, 43). The loftier the spire, the deeper its foundations should be. And the same goes for the spire’s instigator: the higher he soars, the more clearly his non-conscious motivations are exposed. Here again it is easy to see the relevance of Schopenhauer’s characterisation of the will as “the *prius* of consciousness, and the root of the tree of which consciousness is the fruit” (Schopenhauer 1966b, 139; emphasis in original). The unconscious essential will is not opposed to conscious representations, but is rather their source or “maternal soil” (390). A similar idea lies behind Jocelin’s repeated allusions to the unconscious motives that thrive, as in a dark pit, “in the vaults, the cellarage of [his] mind” (Golding 1965, 166).

The links between Schopenhauer's views and Golding's themes continue in the last stretch of the novel. The concluding pages, where Jocelin appears as a broken man, reintroduce one of the modalities of feeling with which the story began—the cognition of the object's aesthetic dimension. As he lies dying, the Dean catches a glimpse of the finished spire, and sees it not from a religious perspective but aesthetically, as an object of beauty. As Golding explained, it cannot be denied that “the book is about the human cost of building the spire.” Yet it is also about something else: Jocelin “does not think of beauty” until the very end of his life, and “only when he is dying does he see the spire in all its glory.” Previously he had not been aware of the aesthetic character of the enterprise, and it is only after many hardships have transformed him into a new man that he comes to appreciate the pinnacle from an artistic angle. So important was the aesthetic interpretation for Golding, that he placed it as the book's main theme: “after all the theology, the ingenuities of craft, the failures and the sacrifices, a man is overthrown by the descent into his world of beauty's mystery and irradiation” (1984, 166-67).

In the novel, aesthetic inspiration and aesthetic reception are separated not only by a lapse of several decades but also by a gulf of unsettling experience. The place of the pinnacle that does not initially exist outside the Dean's imagination is at the second moment occupied by a completed physical structure that everyone can admire. Jocelin initially believes the projected spire to satisfy God's all-powerful will, later realising that it is his own lascivious desire that the spire fulfils. Now he discovers the spire's aesthetic aspect, and this allows him to escape, during an instant of unselfish tranquillity, from the vicissitudes of individual willing. Schopenhauer's discussion of these two features of aesthetic cognition (the contemplation of beauty and the accompanying relief) can help us understand the ending of Golding's novel. As we have seen, Jocelin likens the spire to an “*appletree*” (Golding 1965, 233; emphasis in original), which for a man who has never paid attention to aesthetics, must be an accessible image of beauty. By a happy coincidence with Golding's narrative, Schopenhauer explained this aspect of his philosophy through the example of a tree: “if . . . I contemplate a tree aesthetically . . . it is immediately of no importance whether it is this tree or its ancestor that flourished a thousand years ago, and whether the contemplator is this individual, or any other living anywhere and at any time. The particular thing and the knowing individual are abolished” and nothing remains but the universal dimensions of the object and its observer (Schopenhauer 1966a, 209). The coincidence of vocabulary highlights the connection between Schopenhauer's ideas and Jocelin's contemplation of the spire qua aesthetic object. The universal quality that the philosopher attributes to art makes it easier to explain why the spire's contemplation makes Jocelin blurt out: “Now—I know nothing at all” (Golding 1965, 223). On the subjective side, egocentrism disappears, and there is no individual ego that can be held responsible for aesthetic reception. On the objective side, aesthetic contemplation does not afford any (conceptual) knowledge; it consists in the feeling not of any physical thing in particular but of the object's metaphysical-aesthetic dimension. Alongside its cognitive value, art has other advantages. As the observer of the aesthetic dimension of an object,

Schopenhauer notes, one leaves one's willing behind. Whoever comes across beauty becomes a "will-free . . . intelligence without aims and intentions," a person in whom individual will "vanishes entirely from consciousness" (Schopenhauer 2000, 415). Since the striving to satisfy one's will is the source of one's suffering, "with the disappearance of all willing from consciousness, there yet remains the state of pleasure, in other words absence of all pain" (416).

### 3. CONCLUSION

Although the value of aesthetic liberation is undeniable, one of the consequences of reading *The Spire* side by side with Schopenhauer's writings is to open our eyes to the transient, relative nature of such relief. Through aesthetics we cannot achieve "a lasting emancipation, but merely . . . an exceptional, and in fact only momentary, release from the service of the will" (Schopenhauer 1966b, 363). Metaphysical awareness of the aesthetic dimension of objects lies outside the bounds of ordinary cognition; but it is not the most extreme experience of disinterest that Schopenhauer brings to our attention. In a sense, the place of honour within his philosophy is reserved for involuntary death. Death is "a deliverance from a world whose whole existence presented itself to us as pain" (408-09). It delivers us from suffering by allowing us to escape individual interest for good. Compared with aesthetic contemplation, death has the advantage of providing a more effective and permanent relief from an individual existence that is too painful and too long. As if it wanted us to witness a complete liberation from suffering, *The Spire* ends with its main character's demise. Living individuals usually rebel against death, an interested "*fuga mortis*" that comes "solely from the blind [individual] will" (Schopenhauer 1966b, 468; emphasis in original). Together with sexuality, this reveals the will qua will to life, i.e., to existence in the realm of appearances. Nevertheless, for Schopenhauer, passive acceptance of death is a token of wisdom. Indeed, those who have lost all interest in the world acknowledge death as "the great opportunity no longer to be I," the moment of definitive "liberation from . . . individuality" and thus from pain (507, 508). Precisely because aesthetic experience involves becoming an unselfish subject, it is a good preparation for death: anyone whose will has been "burnt up and consumed" by disinterested cognition "will be least afraid of becoming nothing in death," since he "no longer takes any interest in his individual phenomenon" and therefore disdains "any keen desire for individual existence" (609). What this suggests is that, if Jocelin were wise enough (the novel does not tell us), he would welcome death as the perpetuation of his unselfish, painless apprehension of the beautiful spire that he has helped to build.

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