

THE SPLIT SUBJECT IN WILLIAM GOLDING: A PSYCHOANALYTIC INQUIRY INTO ANXIETY, GUILT, AND THE SHATTERED SELF

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ABSTRACT

William Golding's fiction, steeped in the psychological residues of World War II, offers a profound psychoanalytic terrain for exploring the split subject, a fragmented psyche riven by anxiety and guilt, leading to the shattered self. This paper conducts a Lacanian and Freudian inquiry into this motif across three canonical novels: *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *Pincher Martin* (1956), and *Free Fall* (1959). In *Lord of the Flies*, the boys' island exile manifests Freudian id-superego antagonism, engendering collective anxiety and guilt that splinters communal identity into savage shards. *Pincher Martin* internalises this fracture through the protagonist's traumatic solipsism, where Lacanian symbolic failure amplifies existential guilt, culminating in egoic annihilation. *Free Fall* extends the analysis to historical complicity, portraying the artist's moral vertigo as a guilt-ridden descent that shatters illusory self-coherence. Drawing on trauma theory and object relations, this study elucidates Golding's portrayal of the split subject as an ethical imperative: anxiety and guilt, though disintegrative, compel reconstructive self-awareness. Golding's narratives thus diagnose modernity's psychic malaise, advocating psychoanalytic vigilance to mend the self's irreparable fissures.

Keywords: William Golding, split subject, psychoanalytic inquiry, anxiety and guilt, shattered self, *Lord of the Flies*, *Pincher Martin*

INTRODUCTION

William Golding's oeuvre, forged amid the ethical cataclysms of mid-twentieth-century warfare, consistently dissects the human subject's inherent fragmentation, positing anxiety and guilt as the seismic forces that shatter psychic integrity [1]. As a novelist attuned to Freudian depths and Lacanian abysses, Golding rejects monolithic self-conceptions, instead unveiling the split subject, a psyche divided against itself, where unconscious drives collide with moral imperatives to yield existential dread and ethical paralysis [2]. This psychoanalytic inquiry frames Golding's fiction as a diagnostic arena: the shattered self emerges not as pathology but as the normative condition of subjectivity, wherein anxiety signals the Real's irruption and guilt enforces superegoic retribution [3].

The thesis herein asserts that Golding's protagonists embody the split subject's travails, manifesting as id-driven regressions, symbolic ruptures, and historical hauntings, that precipitate identity's dissolution yet harbour redemptive potential through conscientious reckoning. To delineate this, the analysis proceeds through *Lord of the Flies*, *Pincher Martin*, and *Free Fall*, synthesising textual evidence with Freudian structural theory, Lacanian mirror-stage dialectics, and Kleinian object relations [4]. Such an approach not only illuminates Golding's engagement with post-Freudian psychoanalysis but also underscores his relevance to contemporary trauma discourses, where fragmented selves navigate collective guilt in an era of perpetual crisis [5]. Ultimately, Golding's split subjects compel a reevaluation of psychic wholeness as illusory, urging the integration of anxiety and guilt as crucibles for authentic self-emergence.

Freudian Fragmentation: Anxiety and the Id-Superego Rift in *Lord of the Flies*

Lord of the Flies exemplifies Golding's inaugural foray into the split subject, chronicling the psychic disintegration of marooned boys whose civilised veneers fracture under isolation's primal pressures, unleashing Freudian anxieties that splinter the self into antagonistic shards [6]. The novel's microcosmic society initially sustains egoic mediation via Ralph's democratic order and Piggy's rational superego, yet the id's irruption, embodied in Jack's hunting frenzy, engenders a collective anxiety, the "beast" as a projective phantasm of repressed savagery [7]. This rift manifests as guilt-laden dissociation: Simon's hallucinatory dialogue with the impaled sow's head, a superegoic apparition voicing the id's devouring maw, epitomises the split subject's torment, his intuitive empathy overwhelmed by hysterical mob violence, culminating in ritualistic murder that severs moral coherence [8].

Freudian psychoanalysis elucidates this as the superego's punitive collapse: the boys' initial guilt over minor infractions evolves into annihilative anxiety, with Roger's boulder-hurling sadism a libidinal discharge untrammelled by ethical restraint [9]. Object relations theory further nuances the shattered self: Piggy's spectacles, maternal symbols of enlightened vision, shatter alongside his body, symbolising the devouring mother's internalised loss and the ego's orphaned fragmentation [10]. Anxiety here functions as a signal affect, alerting the psyche to id-superego disequilibrium; yet unresolved, it propels identity toward zero-sum savagery, the choir's transformation into "demons", and a masochistic embrace of guilt's ecstatic void [11].

Golding thus deploys the island as an analytic couch, exposing the split subject's genesis in childhood's Oedipal residues: anxiety and guilt, far from aberrant, constitute the self's foundational cracks, demanding perpetual reconstruction lest Freudian barbarism prevail [12]. The novel's denouement, Ralph's sobbing epiphany, hints at redemptive integration, yet the naval officer's averted gaze affirms the adult world's complicit shattering, a meta-commentary on civilisation's neurotic denial.

Lacanian Abyss: Guilt and Symbolic Dissolution in *Pincher Martin*

Pincher Martin intensifies Golding's psychoanalytic scrutiny through Christopher Martin's posthumous solipsism, wherein wartime trauma rends the Lacanian subject asunder, anxiety erupting as the Real's traumatic kernel and guilt enforcing symbolic exile [13]. Clinging to the rock, a phallic signifier of lack, doubling as a rotten tooth, Martin fabricates a nominative empire ("Piccadilly Circus"), a desperate mirror-stage bid to suture the fragmented self; yet, intrusive flashbacks of torpedoed betrayal convoke guilt's tribunal, the Dwarf as mocking Other dissecting his rapacious history [14]. This split manifests as anxiety's vortex: Martin's gluttonous ravages, devouring limpets in id-like frenzy, betray the ego's illusory mastery. guilt manifesting as the "maggot at the center", a superegoic parasite gnawing at symbolic coherence [15].

Lacanian theory illuminates the shattered self's mechanics: the novel's coup, Martin's decease at the outset, retroactively savages his narrative as "painted paper", a fantasmatic scrim rent by jouissance's black lightning, expelling the subject from the symbolic order into the Real's annihilative void [16]. Guilt here operates as the ethical demand of the Other, Nathaniel's spectral negation haunting Martin's autonomy, fracturing identity into predatory shards incompatible with intersubjective wholeness [17]. Trauma studies extend this: Martin's repetitive death-imprint, temporal stasis amid sinking, evokes Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, deferred anxiety retrofitting past sins into present guilt, and the self's reconstitution as a Sisyphian toil against dissolution [18].

Through this mythic minimalism, Golding critiques the modern subject's narcissistic split: anxiety and guilt, as Lacanian lacks, propel the ego toward symbolic death, yet in annihilation lies ethical rebirth, a spectral conscience unburdened by fleshly tyranny [19]. *Pincher Martin* thus posits the shattered self as psychoanalytic telos: fragmentation's chaos, navigated, forges a subjectivised void, resonant with post-war survivors' guilt-ridden reintegration.

Kleinian Hauntings: Historical Guilt and Object-Relations Rupture in *Free Fall*

Free Fall transposes Golding's split subject to Sammy Mountjoy's confessional odyssey, where historical complicity amid Nazi internment unleashes Kleinian guilt, anxiety splintering the artist's self into persecutory and depressive shards [20]. Mountjoy's pre-war idyll, Edenic nudes masking Oedipal thefts, fractures through betrayals: seducing Thelma under Pippin's ideological creed engenders projective guilt, the "bad breast" of moral failure introjected as persecutory phantasm [21]. Internment's cell, a womb-tomb of sensory privation, catalyses this rupture: foetal regressions evoke primordial anxiety, the superego's accusatory gaze dissecting complicit sins, from childhood bullying to wartime paralysis [22].

Kleinian object relations frame the shattered self: Mountjoy's ethical vertigo, "Where did I lose the soul?", mirrors the depressive position's reparative urge, guilt as an internalised bad object demanding reintegration; yet, unresolved, it yields manic defences, the artist's canvases manic elixirs against fragmentation's terror [23]. Freudian undertones amplify this: anxiety signals castration's historical echo, Gestapo interrogation a paternal superego enacting symbolic emasculation, splintering identity into voyeuristic shards [24]. Postcolonial critiques intersect: Mountjoy's liberal guilt indicts imperial neurosis, the split subject a colonial residue haunting metropolitan psyches [25].

Golding's non-linear confessions thus enact psychoanalytic cure: guilt's chaotic irruption, though shattering, compels object-reparative narrative, forging a self from historical detritus [26]. *Free Fall* affirms the split subject's redemptive arc: anxiety and guilt, as Kleinian transitions mend psychic fissures, birthing an ethically scarred yet integrated identity.

Theoretical Convergence: The Split Subject's Psychoanalytic Imperative in Golding's Fiction

Golding's triptych converges on the split subject as a psychoanalytic archetype: *Lord of the Flies'* Freudian rifts yield to *Pincher Martin's* Lacanian voids and *Free Fall's* Kleinian repairs, with anxiety and guilt the dialectical engines of self-shattering and reconstitution [27]. Unified by trauma theory, these dynamics reveal the unconscious as an ethical battleground: the id's savagery, symbolic lack, and object-persecution converge in guilt's superegoic forge, demanding vigilant integration [28]. Ecocritical extensions broaden this: the island, rock, and cell as maternal enclosures expose environmental anxiety's role in psychic splitting, with Golding anticipating climate guilt's fractured selves [29]. His oeuvre thus mandates psychoanalytic praxis: embrace the split to transcend it, lest guilt's unheeded whisper devolve into collective shattering.

CONCLUSION

Golding's fiction masterfully anatomises the split subject, anxiety and guilt, the psychoanalytic scalpels excising illusory wholeness to reveal the self's ineradicable fractures. From juvenile barbarism to solipsistic abyss and historical atonement, his narratives diagnose psychic disarray while prescribing conscientious mending. In a world of amplified traumas, Golding's inquiry endures: the shattered self, confronted, heralds ethical rebirth, transforming guilt's chaos into identity's resilient mosaic.

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