



TRACES OF EXISTENTIALISM IN WILLAM GOLDING'S *PINCHER MARTIN*

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ÖZET: Bu çalışma William Golding'in *Pincher Martin* (1996) adlı romanını varoluşçu bir roman olarak sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yaparken de romanı varoluşçuluğun temel prensipleri olan Tanrı'yı reddetme, ölüme karşı mücadele, yabancılaşma hissi, seçim yapma özgürlüğü, dünyanın bir parçası olarak acı çekme, kendini kandırma (bahane bulma), insanın çaresizliği, ve mitolojik karakterlerin kullanımı ışığında analiz etmektedir. Böylece, bu çalışma Golding'in reddetmesine karşın, onun varoluşçu bir roman yaratmış olduğu düşüncesini güçlendirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: William Golding, *Pincher Martin*, Varoluşçuluk, Tanrı'yı Reddetme, Ölüm, Yabancılaşma, Seçim Yapma Özgürlüğü

ABSTRACT: This study aims to display William Golding's novel *Pincher Martin* (1996), as an existentialist work. In doing so, it analyses the novel in the light of the major principles of existentialism, which are the denial of God, struggle against death, the sense of alienation, freedom of choice, suffering as a part of the world, self-deception, the thrownness of man (facticity), and the use of mythological characters. Thus, it reinforces the notion that Golding, despite his rejection, has created an existentialist novel.

Key Words: William Golding, *Pincher Martin*, Existentialism, Denial of God, Death, Alienation, Freedom of Choice

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Of course it is not correct to call Golding's *Pincher Martin* (1996) a totally existentialist work, but the claim here is that this novel harbours many existentialist qualities within its structure, in other words, it bears the traces of existentialism. It is known that Golding has always rejected to have been influenced by existentialism. Because he defined himself as a moralist not an existentialist. Lee M. Whitehead supports this idea as he talks about "this other world" in *Pincher Martin* and says that

(...) it is not simply the world of subjectivity as opposed to the objective world, although again such a distinction, as that between the spirit and the body, would at least be generally accurate. "Mind" or "psyche" as opposed to body again are not quite sufficient. The distinction that seems appropriate to my mind is the one that the phenomenologists make between the intending consciousness and the intended world, or the kindred distinction of the existentialists between the "nothingness" that is the human consciousness and the "things" of the world which it constitutes in imaginative acts. I suggest this, knowing that Golding has rejected the imputation that he has been influenced by existentialism. (Whitehead, 1985: 42 qtd. in Baker, 1988)

Although Whitehead knows Golding's rejection of the influence of existentialism on his works, it is sensed that the critic still has some hesitations about it. Because in another part of the same essay Whitehead says : "the basic and structural metaphor in *Pincher Martin* depends upon the account of the Creation in the Book of Genesis, [nevertheless] there is no risk in asserting that Golding's beleaguered castaways suffer and die in a universe which is more pagan than Christian" (Whitehead, 1985: 47 qtd. in Baker, 1988). Baker further points out that Golding draws upon both traditions "in an effort to define the realities of his cosmos." (Baker, 1993: 7). Baker has suggested earlier that comparison of Golding to existentialists is not very convincing. Further scholarly effort is needed, but it is likely to end by tracing the relationships between Greek tragedy and modern existentialism. Whitehead sharing the same idea with Baker states:

I agree wholeheartedly with this view, but I might add that I think that Golding is closer to both Greek tragedy and existentialism. I am not going to offer in full the "further scholarly effort" Baker asked for, but



I will offer a few suggestions that I think are relevant about the relation of *Pincher Martin* to the Greek tragic sense of life and to the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. (Whitehead, 1985: 51 qtd. in Baker, 1988)

As Whitehead mentions in his critical essay on Golding, despite Golding's denial of the impact of existentialism on his works, Whitehead still has the notion that there is a relationship between Golding's *Pincher Martin* and the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find the "traces" of this relationship between them. A variety of examples about different existential qualities such as the denial of God, struggle against death, the sense of alienation, freedom of choice, suffering as a part of the world, self-deception, the thrownness of man (facticity), and the use of mythological characters, can be found in *Pincher Martin* in order to prove this relationship between the novel and existentialism.

First of all, *Pincher Martin* is a parody of the creation myth in *Genesis*. As Dicken states Martin's suffering continues a "symbolic seven days, seven being a Jewish number of completion"(Dicken, 1990: 24). Seven days is the exact time of creation which reveals that Martin attempts to play the very role of God. In a parody of the creation he gives names to each of the parts of his island. "I call this place the Look-out. That is the Dwarf. 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. This cliff here to the west with the funnel in it is – He paused searching for a name. A sea-gull came swinging in under the sun, " [...] "Gull Cliff "(Golding, 1996: 84-85). Thus, assuming the role of God he creates his own world on this imaginary island of his and names every part of it.

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In another part of the novel he "takes credit for making the rain"(Dickson, 1990: 47). Martin screams: "Rain! Of course. I said there would be rain! Let there be rain and there was rain" (Golding, 1996:170-171). Here, again he usurps the role of God and thinks the rain is his own making, his own creation. So, this is another example of the parody of the creation myth.

However, Martin does not stop here, he even goes farther and claims openly that he is the Creator. Martin yells at the sailor opposite him: "On the sixth day he created God. Therefore I permit you to use nothing but my own vocabulary. In his own image created he Him" (Golding, 1996: 196). "In the form of the sailor Martin has indeed created God in his own image down to the features, the clothing, the seaboots. Forever greedy he insists to the end on his "own vocabulary" that creates in the mirror image of the sailor an equal adversary" (Friedman, 1993: 63). Philip Redpath states that if Martin can make the sailor use his own vocabulary, he can manipulate that sailor "as a part of that creation"(Redpath, 1986:151). Hence, Martin in his mind creates "this new brave world in which God is reduced to a bit player fashioned by Martin in his own image (...)" (Friedman, 1993: 56).

While Martin is talking to the sailor, who is indeed God in his coat and seaboots, God wants him to consider. However, "he raged on the cardboard rock before the immovable, black feet. 'I will not consider! I have created you and I can create my own heaven"(Golding, 1996:196). Martin is so sure of his power as a creator that he even claims that he can create his own heaven and so does not need to consider or repent. A few pages later, he cannot set a bar against his rage and his denial of God reaches its peak:

There was no mouth. Still the centre resisted. It made the lightning do its work according to the laws of this heaven. It perceived in some mode of sight without eyes that pieces of the sky between the branches of black lightning were replaced by pits of nothing. This made the fear of the centre, the rage of the centre vomit in a mode that required no mouth. It screamed into the pit of nothing voicelessly, wordlessly. 'I shit on your heaven!'. (Golding, 1996:200)

With these blasphemous words, he once again shows his rejection of God even a few minutes before he vanishes. As Friedman expresses:

Implicit in God's " Consider now," repeated after Martin's every refusal, is His infinite compassion. Martin's reply is to hold out his identity disc – badge of the unregenerate self – while screaming at God, "I spit on your compassion!" Even when a mouth no longer exists, a disembodied voice issuing from the



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“centre” of what was once Pincher Martin shrieks his last defiant words: “I shit on your heaven!” By rejecting God’s heaven for his own hell, Martin plumbs the depths of obduracy. (Friedman, 1993: 58)

Here, Martin for the last time in the novel denies the existence of God and still tries to preserve his identity and to continue his role as the creator of his own world.

In the light of all these examples, it can be stated that Martin denies the existence of God that created him. Not only does he deny his creator but also tries to assure that he himself is the creator, a kind of saint. Hence, all these examples are reminiscent of Sartre’s idea that man, in the universe is a saint without God. In his self-created universe Martin sometimes assumes the role of a saint figure, and sometimes assumes the role of God, which justifies this idea of Sartre.

For Golding, the universe is a “cosmic chaos” that resists simplistic patterning. So, it is futile to impose an artificial order on “the natural chaos of existence.” However, Martin behaves as if he created his own world on that imaginary island and tries to name the parts of the island assuming the role of God. In other words, he tries to bring a kind of order to this world of his own making. He says: “If this rock tries to adapt me to its ways, I will refuse and adapt it to mine. I will impose my routine on it, my geography. I will tie it down with names”(Golding, 1996: 86). But, all his efforts to bring order, to adapt the world to his ways are in vain because as Golding himself states the world or the universe shows inhospitality to its saints. This inhospitality of the universe is seen throughout the novel, and not surprisingly, ends with the death of Martin. Therefore, this characteristic of the novel, being a parody of the creation myth, is only one of the examples that supports the notion that Golding’s *Pincher Martin* bears a relation to existential philosophy, in that, Martin not only denies the existence of God but also tries to bring an order to this absurd world by assuming the role of God. In other words, he is the Saint, the god of his own world and does not need any other god-like force to exist and preserve his identity. This characteristic is very similar to existentialist denial of God.

The “revolt against death” which exists throughout the novel, from the beginning to the end is another important point for understanding the relationship of the novel to existentialism. There are three allegorical levels of Martin’s struggle against death: his physical struggle to survive in the water and the nature, his mental or social struggle to assert his identity and to dominate other human beings, and his spiritual struggle to accept death. In order to be concise, the first two struggles will be mentioned very shortly and the third one, the spiritual struggle which is the most important of all, will be focused on.

His first struggle is the physical or the elemental one which starts in the water and then, continues on Martin’s self-created island. In the first three pages of the novel he struggles in the water in order to survive and almost all the details of his struggle are given:

He was struggling in every direction, he was the centre of the writhing and kicking knot of his own body. There was no up or down, no light and no air. He felt his mouth open of itself and the shrieked word burst out. ‘Help!’ When the air had gone with the shriek, water came in to fill its place – burning water, hard in the throat and mouth as Stones that hurt. (Golding, 1996:7)

This fragment taken from the first page of the book gives a very vivid description of Martin’s struggle for survival in the water, presented just one page before his death. Because, on the second page of the book he loses his strength in the water and dies. Then, his physical struggle lasts on his self-created island. In order to stay alive he tries to find solutions for his vital necessities such as food, drink and sleep. In a way he tries to create a simple place, a “home” to live in. In the third chapter after he climbs up the rock, he opens his eyes because of pain, a needle and says: “Shelter. Must have shelter. Die if I don’t” (Golding, 1996: 44). On the next page he feels his hunger and starts to think “Food?” He thinks about limpets and sea-snails and then sees mussels. Finally he decides on anemones and goes into the water to take some with the help of his knife (Golding, 1996: 63-64). After having his meal, he looks around for water and finds: “There was a band of red round the nearer end of the pool that was about half an inch across. When he had settled his stomach with the harsh water he came out of the hole backwards. ... He licked a trace of drinkable water from his lips. ‘You won’t get me!’ he screams ‘I have enough to drink – ’” (Golding, 1996: 66). It is as if he



challenged death by saying “You won’t get me!” In order to help him in his struggle against death, he tries to provide himself with the vital necessities: shelter, food and drink and also a dwarf, a man to wait for him as a sign in order to be visible and to be rescued. As Dickson states: “Martin is described as a brutal savage, fighting for his existence against an evil unseen force manifested in the unfriendly natural environment. Martin attempts to dominate the elements just as he has dominated human beings in his sordid past” (Dickson, 1990: 46). In such a case, Dickson’s aforementioned “evil unseen force” may be interpreted as “death” with ease.

The second level of his revolt against death can be named as a mental or social battle, which has already been mentioned above while writing about the idea of “greed for life.” Yet, there are a few things that should not be passed without being mentioned. This level of struggle of Pincher is against people around him, which is reflected in many flashbacks throughout the novel.

Martin’s attempted rape of Mary (p. 152); Peter’s bicycle “accident,” which Pincher has arranged (p. 153); Martin’s seduction of the producer’s wife (p. 153); his attempted murder of Nat (p. 186). Pincher’s life has been little more than a play for power, for domination, for the control of human lives in order to benefit his own monstrous ego. (Dickson, 1990: 52)

Though he has won more of these battles than he has lost, he realizes the possibility of “being eaten” also. But, even this fact does not refrain him from eating other people and dominating over them in order to preserve his identity, which, in a way, means a revolt against death. Therefore, in this mental or social level of his revolt against death he devours or destroys everyone that he sees as a threat for his identity or life.

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Apart from these two levels of revolt against death is Martin’s spiritual struggle or confrontation with death which is the most important level of this revolt. “This revolt is a revolt against the limitations of the body. Man [always wants] to be greater, to live longer, to possess more imagination and wisdom” (Wilson, 1959: 18). This revolt of man against death means that man wants to be immortal, and, so does Martin. After his death on the third page, his spiritual struggle against death starts. In the first chapter after Martin drowns in the sea, the reader sees him (suspended in the purgatory) contemplating about eternity. He thinks:

“The pressure on his legs was bearable now. They were no longer flesh, but had been transformed to some other substance, petrified and comfortable. The part of his body that had not been invaded and wholly subdued by the sea was jerking intermittently. Eternity, inseparable from pain was there to be examined and experienced. The snarl endured. He thought. The thoughts were laborious, disconnected but vital. Presently it will be daylight. I must move from one point to another. (...) Presently it will be daylight. I shall see wreckage. I won’t die. I can’t die. Not me – Precious” (Golding, 1996: 14).

In this part of the book Martin first thinks about eternity, being immortal again. Then, he says he won’t die, he can’t die because he is precious. Once more his strong will to live and to revolt against death is reinforced with these words of Martin. A few pages later, he again shows his determination in struggle with death by repeating: “I won’t die! I won’t!” (Golding, 1996: 17). Throughout the novel he tries to console himself with the idea that he will stay alive and will be rescued sooner or later. In the following chapters, his determination and his revolt against death are still there. “He drew his feet up against him and rolled sideways so that his face was on the rock. His body was jumping and shuddering beneath the sodden clothing. He whispered against stone: ‘You can’t give up.’ ” (Golding, 1996: 64). In another chapter he again says: “ ‘I shall live!’ ” (Golding, 1996: 69). In the same chapter, while talking to Nat about “the technique of dying into heaven,” Nat says: “ ‘You could say that I know it is important for you personally to understand about heaven –about dying – because in only a few years – ’ ” He does not finish his sentence, and after a moment of silence he continues, “ ‘— because in only a few years you will be dead.’ He cried out against the unspoken words in fury and panic. ‘You bloody fool, Nat! You awful bloody fool!’ (...) He shouted. ‘I’m damned if I’ll die!’ ” (Golding, 1996: 71-72). With these final, strong words Martin emphasises that he is determined to stay alive and struggle with death.

In the three levels of his revolt against death Martin tries every possible way to stay alive and preserve his identity. This idea of revolt against death is very similar to the “existential revolt against death.” One of the important existentialists, Camus explains the nature of the revolt against death in his arguments:



the absurd frees man from all feeling of responsibility, annihilates the future and leaves only one certainty—the sensation of being alive. The question is now, not to live well in a moral sense—for the absence of moral rules renders this meaningless—but *vivre le plus*, replace the quality of experiences by their quantity. (Camus, 1955: 51-53)

That means since man is far away from all feelings except the feeling of being alive, he tries to live as fully as possible without regarding any moral values. He tries to be happy and satisfied with the situation he is in, because only in this way can he revolt against death. Therefore, in order to revolt against death or escape death man tries to find some solutions or ways. And, so does Martin. There are actually two ways to escape death which are important in the flow of the novel, *Pincher Martin*. The first one is described by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In this work, he describes three men—the seducer, the actor and the conqueror—who by the nature of their lives illustrate “ ‘the passion to exhaust everything which is given’ – or, expressed in more vulgar terms, to get the most out of life—(...)” (Camus, 1955: 51).

The first type of man is the *seducer*. For him the passionate variety of existence is expressed in the specific and concrete relationship he has with each of his collection of women. Love is for him not mere liberty or license or hatred of sex or a method of despising women. It is a necessity for life; each encounter or affair is a renewal of total engagement with existence. He can never be or never wishes to be satisfied. Because, to be satisfied is to accept death. Camus explains this in the following quotation:

The *seducer*'s insatiable appetite for love is an insatiable appetite for life. It constitutes a lifelong revolt, not against religion, or the establishment, or custom as such, but against death. The next type of man is the *actor*. Why is the actor an example of l'homme absurde (absurd man)? Because taking on many roles, he lives each with tremendous and passionate intensity upon the stage. He pours out his substance into the shell of the character he knows exists only the hour or two he incarnates him. (...) the many, many deaths of Hamlet which the actor experiences, do not affect him any more than his own death. The character ceases. He has lived; he ceases. So man. He lives, he ceases. This does not mean the character on the stage should be any less lively or passionate because the actor playing him knows he will die. On the contrary the realization of death to come fills the actor with the desire to make each second of stage life more complete. It has always been the case that man sees the stage life of the characters as larger than life. This merely demonstrates that most men are not living life to the full. The third type, the *conqueror* is the man who knows that “history” is an error, that those who act in the name of history to carry out plans for “humanity” are wrong. He fights this knowing that he will probably lose; he contradicts with his “absurd” conscience the forces which forever try to use man for purposes beyond life. (Camus, 1955: 51-62)

Martin fits in with all these three types of man incredibly well. It is already known that Picher Martin has been a seducer in the past before he dies. As mentioned previously, he seduces Helen, the producer's wife, then has affair with Alfred's girlfriend, Sybil and lastly, he tries to seduce Mary unsuccessfully, so attempts to kill her. However, in all these relationships not love but sex is an occasion for life. He does not love these women, he only wants to usurp them sexually and devour them in order to feed his identity, or, in other words, in order to assure his existence. As Camus states in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, “each encounter is a renewal of total engagement with existence” (Camus, 1955). Also, as is seen in the flashbacks, he is never satisfied with one woman, because “to be satisfied is to accept death.” Since he is an example of existentialist man, he cannot accept death but must revolt against it by getting the most out of life.

In real life Martin is an actor by profession, and plays many parts. But, as Redpath expresses when his identity is threatened by drowning, “actor-Martin stages for himself his masterpiece, his epic survival from the jaws of death” in his self-created, illusory world (Redpath, 1986.145). The reason of this revolt against death is his “insatiable appetite for life,” it is a way to continue using his “passion to exhaust everything that is given.” Each time he takes a role, Martin lives it with tremendous, passionate intensity upon the stage. Because the actor is aware of the fact that the character lives only one or two hours within known limits, and because the actor has “the realization of death to come [which] fills the actor with the desire to make each second of stage life more complete” (Camus, 1955: 62).



Therefore, after Martin drowns in the sea, he plays many roles; assumes the role of God by trying to create his own illusory world or universe, tries to be a saint figure (Christ) in his struggle with the stones while making the dwarf. And finally, he stages his epic survival as a revolt against death. All these efforts of Martin is to hide from and escape death.

The third type of man that Camus describes in *The Myth of Sisyphus* is the conqueror, who again matches with the personality of Martin very well. As Friedman states in Pete's story of the maggots Martin can be seen as the "conquering hero" of that Chinese Maggot box. He needs and so devours all these maggots (literally the people around him) in order to feed and preserve his identity against death. He devours all of them until he (the biggest maggot) is left alone in the box and becomes the conqueror of it. But, he cannot realize that in the end he, himself becomes a rare dish to be eaten. That is to say, it is time for him to face death now, since it is the inevitable end for every creature.

Therefore, being a seducer, an actor and a conqueror at the same time, Martin illustrates all his "passion to exhaust everything that is given" to him. As a seducer, he has affairs with woman each time adding to his identity. As an actor, he always plays all his roles passionately as if he himself lived them. Especially his masterpiece, his epic survival is staged in such a realistic way that the reader almost believes that he is a real hero. As for being a conqueror, he both literally and symbolically destroys everything he lays his hands on. As the conqueror of the maggot box he eats all the maggots in the box and becomes successful preserving his identity, and literally he destroys every person around him, each time adding something new to his identity. With all these actions of exploiting and consuming he tries to preserve his existence against death which is another way of escaping it.

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The third and the last way of escaping or, here more appropriately cheating death is "to creep into the crevice of madness." Storr expresses that madness is never far away in Golding's novels. It is a very essential component in *Pincher Martin* (Storr qtd. in Carey, 1986: 141). Whereas, in the first half of the novel Martin tries to remain sane, but gradually realising that he has no other way to escape death, he decides to cheat death by pretending to go mad. At the beginning of the sixth chapter, he tries to define some essentials to be practised on the island until he is rescued, and the third essential is: "I must watch my mind. I must not let madness steal up on me and take me by surprise. Already I must expect hallucinations. That is the real battle. That is why I shall talk out loud for all the blotting-paper. In normal life to talk out loud is a sign of insanity. Here it is proof of identity" (Golding, 1996: 81). Therefore, in order to preserve his identity he decides not to surrender to madness. But, in the next chapters, he gradually starts to creep into madness whose signs become more evident through the end of chapter eleven when he says:

'Then I was dead. That was death. I have been frightened to death. Now the pieces of me have come together and I am just alive. ... Who carried me down here? ... I have been in a fight.' He lay, considering things dully. 'There is someone else on the rock with me. He crept out and slugged me.' The face twisted. 'Don't be a fool. You're all alone. You've had a fit.' He felt for his left hand and found it with a grunt of pain. The fingers were bitten. 'how long was I? Is it today or yesterday?' He heaved himself up on hands and knees. 'Just when I was myself again and victorious, there came a sort of something. A Terror. There was a pattern emerging from circumstances.' Then the gap of not-being. ... 'It was something I remembered. I'd better not remember it again. Remember to forget. Madness?' (Golding, 1996: 168-169)

In this part, he starts to mix reality with hallucinations and cannot decide whether his situation is real or not. He even imagines that apart from him there is another person living on the island. He remembers his previous decisions and victories against madness and now realises that these are the efforts of madness to lay its hands on him and to take hold of his identity. As a result of this, he goes and comes between madness and sanity. In chapter twelve he says: "I have no armour and that is why I am being squeezed thin" (Golding, 1996: 175). This is another evidence that he has no way out, no defences, no armour but only madness as a refuge against death, and so starts to surrender to it. As Martin himself says: "There is always madness, a refuge like a crevice in the rock. A man who has no more defence can always creep into madness like one of those armoured things that scuttle among weed down where the mussels are" (Golding, 1996: 186). Martin accepts the fact that when man is left with no defence, he naturally tries to creep into the "crevice of madness." These words of him reveal that from then on, he is thinking of doing so in order to



reject or ignore the reality and the inevitability of death which he tries to cheat by pretending to be mad. In other words, he tries to use madness as “a strategy for survival” (Friedman, 1993: 55). Toward the end of the novel madness becomes his major concern:

The world turned black and came to him through sound. ‘If a madman heard it he would think it was thunder and of course it would be. There is no need to listen like that. It will only be thunder over the horizon where the ships are passing to and fro. Listen to the storm instead. It is going to flail on this rock. It is going to beat a poor wretch into madness. He does not want to go mad only he will have to. Think of it! All you people in warm beds, a British sailor isolated on a rock and going mad not because he wants to but because the sea is a terror—the worst terror there is, the worst imaginable. (Golding, 1996:187)

In his speech Martin says he does not want, but he “will have to go mad,” which again reveals the fact that he has no other choice, or defence against death, but only madness as the last solution, last way to escape it. So, he decides to use madness as a weapon in his revolt against death and on the next page, he immediately starts pretending that he is going mad. He says: “ ‘I am going mad. There is lightning playing on the skirts of a wild sea. I am strong again— ’ ” (Golding, 1996:188). This is the point where he exactly starts to use madness. Through the end of the novel, in the thirteenth chapter, God wants Martin to consider. He says, “ ‘Consider now’ and Martin replies, ‘What’s the good? I’m mad.’ Then, God warns him, ‘ Even that crevice will crumble.’ He tried to laugh up at the bloodshot eye but heard barking noises. He threw words in the face. ‘On the sixth day he created God. Therefore, I permit you to use nothing but my own vocabulary. In his own image created he Him’ ” (Golding, 1996: 195-196). As Friedman states: “Despite God’s warning that the “crevice of madness” into which Martin creeps as King Lear, will crumble like his previous defences, Martin refuses to retract the doomsday scenario he has scripted for himself” (Friedman, 1993: 59). Though God warns him that the “crevice of madness” will fail to work like his previous strategies to escape death, Pincher Martin ignoring His words, continues talking about his creation myth, once again assuming God’s role. Now, it seems as if he really went mad. But, this madness, again owing to his profession, being an actor, is only a role-playing, a part of his masterpiece. However, he is not mad and his intelligence cannot be abandoned. Along with this realization comes the awareness that death is the inevitable end which will destroy and absorb him. As Dickson explains:

Early in the novel, Christopher defies the inevitability of death when he proclaims, “I’m damned if I’ll die” (p. 72), but he gradually perceives the futility of his egotism. He notices the rocks around him are like teeth: “ they were the grinders of old age, worn away. A lifetime of the world had blunted them, was reducing them as they ground what food rocks eat” (p. 78). He eventually realizes that through death and the blackness of eternal sleep, “the carefully hoarded and enjoyed personality, our only treasure and at the same time our only defence, must die into the ultimate truth of things, ... the unquestionable nothingness” (p. 91). Thus, the abundance of “devouring teeth” images in *Pincher Martin* clearly supports the symbolic action. (Dickson, 1990: 48)

Consequently, these two ways; exhausting everything that is given and creeping into the crevice of madness, in his revolt against death cannot prevent him from facing it, and eventually death takes hold of him and annihilates him, symbolically turning him into a pair of lobster claws. Therefore, this revolt against death is another existential quality of this novel. Because, according to existentialism the only reality in this world is death. Death is the seal for life, which ends everything that has been lived and experienced. So, there is no way to escape it. It is the inevitable ending. As Hynes expresses: “ [...]death is the end of identity. If we accept this, we will prepare for the end of identity, [...] [if we prepare for it], we will fear death less because the loss of identity will be familiar and acceptable to us” (Hynes, 1985: 132 qtd. in Baker, 1988). Therefore, there remains only one thing to do, that is, to accept death as a natural part of this life and to learn living in the face of death. All the existentialists (Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche and the others) do agree upon this issue.

The other relationship between the novel and the existentialism is the isolation or the alienation of the main character, Martin. When a man does not conform to the social and moral values of the society, he is alienated from the society. This is exactly the same for Martin. He is alienated from the society whose social and moral rules he does not conform to. His isolation starts at the beginning of the novel, when his ship is torpedoed in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. And he is thrown into the water, and then continues on his island that he creates in his own mind.



Hynes states: “Strictly speaking, there is no character in the novel except Pincher; his isolation is complete from beginning to end. The naval officer and Campbell in the last chapter have no particular definition, and even the persons who people Pincher’s memories and visions are not really characters, because Pincher has regarded them not as separate human beings but as things to be devoured” (Hynes, 1985: 130 qtd. in Baker, 1988). Therefore, Martin is totally alone, isolated throughout the novel, till the end. At first, when he is thrown into the sea, he is alone in his struggle for survival. There is nobody except him. This isolation lasts even after his death, when he creates an imaginary island and starts to live there. As Redpath expresses: “The creation of the rock [or, the island] might appear to save Martin from destruction, but for a man who defined himself through his ‘eating’ of other people his solitude poses a problem” (Redpath, 1986: 147). He explains this problem with a quotation from the novel:

“ But there were other people to describe me to myself—they fell in love with me, they applauded me, they caressed this body they defined it for me. There were the people I got the better of, people who disliked me, people who quarrelled with me. Here I have nothing to quarrel with. I am in danger of losing definition” (Golding, 1996: 132).

In this example Martin starts to feel that he is alone on this island. There are no people and so no quarrels with these people, which is a threat for his identity. Because he thinks only by these people and his quarrels with them, can he preserve his precious treasure, his personality. But, As Dickson expresses what is more significant is his “realization that he himself is the cause of this terrible isolation. At this moment he achieves his most important insight” (Dickson, 1990: 51). He realizes that his past deeds are the reason of his solitariness and says: “ ‘Because of what I did I am an outsider and alone’ The centre cried out. ‘ I am so alone. I am *so* alone!’ Now there is no hope. There is nothing. If they would only look at me, or speak—if I could only be a part of something — ’ ” (Golding, 1996: 181-182). Here, he comes to the realization that his isolation is a kind of punishment for his wrongdoings in the past. As Whitehead emphasizes:

“‘ Because of what I did’ refers specifically to particular acts he has remembered of using others—forcing his sexual advance upon Mary, seducing the producer’s wife in order to get the roles he wanted, attempting to murder Nathaniel to have Mary to himself, etc.—but it refers also to all the acts of “doing” by which the centre had created the identity of Christopher Hadley Martin” (Whitehead, 1985: 45 qtd. in Baker, 1988).

Now, he perceives why he is in such a situation, isolated on a rock in the middle of the ocean. “[...] yet his insight leads not to redemptive vision of an Oedipus or a Lear but to the threshold of damnation” (Friedman, 1993: 56). Though he feels “so alone” and “confined existing only in his own mind” (Dicken, 1990: 23), he shows no sign of remorse and continues his “deeds” on the island, this time assuming the role of God.

However, having realized that he is totally alone, he is filled with the fear of losing his identity and so he tries to find some ways, solutions in order to preserve his existence. Firstly, as Hynes states there are some human attributes such as speech and thought that assert identity. These two human attributes have an important role in the novel, because from time to time, when Martin gets suspicious of losing his identity, he uses speech and thought to assure it. In the sixth chapter he says: “If it [the rock] tries to annihilate me with blotting-paper, then I will speak in here where my words resound and significant sounds assure me of my own identity” (Golding, 1996: 87). In this speech, he again has the fear of losing his identity by being annihilated by the rock, so immediately he starts to speak in order to assure his identity. At the end of the fifth chapter his fear is more evident when “[h]e stood by the dwarf and began to talk like a man who has an unwilling audience but who will have his say whether anyone listens to him or not” (Golding, 1996: 80). This “man who will have his say whether anyone listens to him or not” signifies that it is a necessity, an obligation for Martin whether anyone listens to him or not, because to speak is to be, to verify the existence of him. On the next page he defines some essentials in order to “keep this body going.” Among these essentials or necessities is speech as a proof of identity and sanity. Pincher says: “In normal life to talk out loud is a sign of insanity. Here it is proof of identity” (Golding, 1996: 81). Thus, he decides to use his mouth for speech, ‘chewing’ words rather than people.



The second human attribute is thought. As Redpath states: “Martin equates his humanity [and identity] with his intellect” (Golding, 1996: 155-156). Martin says: “ ‘Men make patterns.’ Seaweed, to impose an unnatural pattern on nature, a pattern that would cry out to any rational beholder—Look! Here is thought. Here is man!’ ” (Golding, 1996: 109). To assert his identity he says, ‘I am what I always was’, and later simply, ‘I am! I am!’ “Pincher, in his efforts to assert that because he thinks, he is, is simply the modern heir of Descartes: man proving his own existence from the inside out” (Hynes, 1985: 130 qtd. in Baker, 1988). Firstly, he creates his own world in his mind, secondly tries to assert his identity first by his thought and then by his speech. Thus, he proves “his own existence [or, identity] from the inside out.”

The other two objects that help him assert his identity are photographs and mirrors. It may be useful to discuss these two objects together, because in the novel these two objects are generally mentioned together. As Hynes explains: “In his past life he has used other people to reassure himself on his own existence, as he has used photographs and mirrors. But on the rock there are no mirrors and his identity-card photograph is blurred, ...” (Hynes, 1985: 129 qtd. in Baker 1988). Since he has no people around him, and also no mirrors and photographs, he is in danger of losing his identity. In chapter nine of the novel, Martin himself realises this situation and complains about it:

How can I have a complete identity without a mirror? That is what has changed me. Once I was a man with twenty photographs of myself—myself as this and that with the signature scrawled across the bottom right-hand corner as a stamp and seal. Even when I was in the Navy there was that photograph in my identity card so that every now and then I could look and see who I was. Or perhaps I did not even need to look, but was content to wear the card next to my heart, secure in the knowledge that it was there, proof of me in the round. There were mirrors too, triple mirrors, more separate than the three lights in this window. I could arrange the side ones so that there was a double reflection and spy myself from the side or back in the reflected mirror as though I were watching a stranger. I could spy myself and assess the impact of Christopher Hadley Martin on the world. (Golding, 1996: 132)

Here, Martin recalls his past life and talks about the objects that assured his identity and helped him to preserve it in the past. He talks about his identity card and the photograph on it and many mirrors around him that assure and reassure his identity many times. He says he looks at them to assess his impact on the world. That is to say, he wants to be sure of his place in this world, wants to know where he belongs to in this world, which is again about the question of identity. But, now on this island he desperately realises that apart from the people who do not exist around him any longer, there are also no mirrors and photographs to verify his existence. So, he is completely desolate and alone on this island with the fear of losing his identity. In his effort to find something to cling to, he searches around and finds some papers and booklet.

The papers and the booklet were still damp but he took up the booklet and opened it. Inside the cover was a transparent guard over a photograph. He peered through the cover and made out a fogged portrait. He could see a carefully arranged head of hair, a strong and smiling face, the white silk scarf round the neck. But detail had gone for ever. The young man who smiled dimly at him through fog and brown stains was distant as the posed portraits of great-grandparents in a faint, brown world. Even so, he continued to look, searching for details he remembered rather than saw, touching his bristled cheek while he divined the smiling smoothness of the one before him, rearranging the unkempt hair, feeling tenderly the painful corner of an eye. (Golding, 1996: 75-76)

While looking for something to assure his identity, he finds a blurred photograph of himself and searches for the details of it as though he tried to remember who he was. But, the photograph is so brown and foggy that it is impossible to make out the details. Thus, he understands this photograph cannot help him to preserve his identity.

As for the mirrors that have an important role in Martin’s life, since he cannot find one to look at himself, he tries to find another alternative for it. He says:

‘The most I know of my face is the scratch of bristles, an itch, a sense of tingling warmth.’ He cried out angrily. ‘That’s no face for man! Sight is like exploring the night with a flashlight. I ought to be able to see



all around my head—’ He climbed down to the water-hole and peered into the pool. But his reflection was inscrutable. He backed out and went down to the Red Lion among the littered shells. He found a pool of salt water on one of the sea rocks. ... He leaned over the pool, looked through the displayed Works of the fish and saw blue sky far down. But no matter how he turned his head he could see nothing but a patch of darkness with the wild outline of hair round the edge. (Golding, 1996: 133)

The fact that his identity-card photograph is blurred and his reflection in the water is an inscrutable darkness reveals that he will not be able to assure and preserve his identity on that isolated island any longer. The traces of his identity will disappear gradually in the course of time. That means he lives alienated from other people who actually are the objects helping him establish his existence, and solidity in their own bodies by their “warmth, caresses and triumphant flesh”(Golding, 1996: 132). Therefore, this total alienation of Martin on this imaginary island creates another relationship between the novel and the philosophy of existentialism. Because, he is both literally, in his struggle in the water and symbolically, on his self-created island, alienated from the rest of the society “because of what he did” in his past life.

Another principle that is present in the novel is “freedom of choice” which establishes a strong connection between the novel and the philosophy of existentialism. Wilson claims that: “As a philosophy, existentialism must emphasize the primacy of the will, the importance of the individual, the final unpredictability and freedom of even the most ‘neurotic’ and conditioned human being” (Wilson, 1959: 147). Here, Wilson emphasizes some points which he thinks existentialism must focus on and actually does so. Since the human being is a creature thrown into this world, he is alone, on his own without any guidance and is free to choose whatever he wants.

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Likewise, Martin is utterly free to choose and to do whatever he wants. As Golding, in his own explication of the novel, expresses: “Christopher Hadley Martin had no belief in anything but the importance of his own life; no love, no God. [...], he had a freedom of choice which he used to centre the world on himself” (Friedman, 1993: 52). Therefore, whatever he does and says, he does it by his free will without any external force or guidance. He admits it, that he is free to choose, in his conversation with God disguised as a sailor. Pointing out Martin’s imaginary world God says:

‘You have created it.’ He glanced sideways along the twitching water, down at his skeleton legs and knees, felt the rain and spray and the savage cold on his flesh. He began to mutter. ‘I prefer it. You gave me the power to choose and all my life you led me carefully to this suffering because my choice was my own. Oh yes! I understand the pattern. All my life, whatever I had done I should have found myself in the end on that same bridge, at that same time, giving that same order—the right order, the wrong order. Yet, suppose I climbed away from the cellar over the bodies of used and defeated people, broket hem to make steps on the road away from you, why should you torture me?’ (Golding, 1996: 197)

Here, Martin is aware of the fact that he has freedom of choice. He says, “My choice was my own” and thus, verifies it once again. As Friedman emphasises: “Whatever the hero’s fate, he chooses it” (Friedman, 1993: 62). Hence, Martin freely chooses his own fate and his own end. Friedman states:

Martin’s “I shit on your heaven!” replicates the moral degeneracy of Dante’s greatest blasphemer: like Fucci in hell, Martin on his rock chhoses to defy God and perseveres in his defiance no matter how futile and painful its consequences. The blasphemy of a Fucci [...] —or a Christopher Martin – demonstrates free will at its most perverse. Yet the existence of free will is no less crucial to *Pincher Martin* than to the *Inferno*. Golding’s theology is grounded in ‘the proposition that man has free will because he was created in God’s image, that he had free will the way God has it. Well, once you have free will and you are created, you have alternatives before you. You can either turn towards God or away from Him. And God can’t stop you turning away from him without removing your free will, because that’s what free will is. This is the whole thing about *Pincher Martin*. It’s that and nothing else’. (Friedman, 1993: 62-63)



Therefore, nothing can stop Martin or make him change his mind since he has the free will. Of course, being an existentialist man, Martin does not know whether what he has chosen is right or wrong. But, since he has the freedom to choose, to make decisions on his own, he must also prepare for the consequences whatever they might be.

Together with the theme of “freedom of choice” come two other qualities of the novel that have also utmost importance for existentialism: “suffering and pain as a part of this world” and “bad faith or self-deception.” These two will be discussed separately. Throughout the novel Martin’s suffering is displayed in almost every part of it: in the beginning his suffering in the water (p.1-2), then his suffering on his self-created island while he is trying to build a dwarf and struggling with stones (p. 61-65). Later, when he becomes ill on the island because of sunburn, he suffers from pain and fever (p. 122,140-143). Most importantly, Martin has the greatest pains when his past haunts him in many different parts of the novel. However, as all existentialists do, Martin admits that he has to suffer since it is a part of this world, (and also a part of the world he has created). As Whitehead states pain is so dominant in the novel that Martin “even creates this island from the memory of his missing tooth, the memory of pain as if pain were somehow necessarily and essentially a quality of the world conjured up by [Martin]” (Whitehead, 1985: 44 qtd. in Baker, 1988).

In chapter eleven, when Martin feels that he was poisoned, he says:

“Stings. Poison. Anemones poisoned me. Perhaps mussels are all right after all. [...] Everything is predictable. I knew I shouldn’t drown and I didn’t. There was a rock. I knew I could live on it and I have. I have defeated the serpent in my body. I knew I should suffer and I have. But I am winning. There is a certain sense in which life begins anew now, [...]” (Golding, 1996: 166).

It is seen that he is fully aware of the fact that he must suffer, and so he does. He knows that it is his choice and accepts it. In chapter thirteen he accepts the suffering more evidently when God asks him to consider. He says: “I have considered. I prefer it, pain and all.” God asks: “To what?” At that time he starts to rage weakly and screams: “To the black lightning! Go back! Go back!” (Golding, 1996: 197). He prefers and accepts all the suffering and pain he is experiencing and has already experienced. In other words, he chooses “pain and suffering as an alternative to nothingness” (Whitehead, 1985: 53 qtd. in Baker, 1988). The “black lightning” in the novel may be accepted as a synonym for “nothingness” in Whitehead’s explication. However, Friedman evaluates the same event from a different point of view. He says Martin, with all his blasphemous words (the last and the worst of which was: “I shit on your heaven!”), and with his acceptance of pain and suffering refuses “God’s heaven for his own hell” (Friedman, 1993: 58). Thus, Martin prefers all pain and suffering either to black lightning and nothingness or to God and His heaven. As Whitehead explains: “The center’s [Martin’s] choice of pain, its [his] choice to create its [his] own hell, gives it [him] a tragic dimension that is linked to Satan’s assertion in *Paradise Lost* that ‘The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven’”(Oldsey and Weintraub, 95 qtd. in Whitehead, 1985: 53 in Baker, 1988). What Whitehead means is that Martin creates his own hell in his own mind and prefers it to God’s heaven. He chooses his own hell, all the pain and suffering because they make him know his existence. Once again he does and accepts everything, even the greatest pains and sufferings for the sake of his identity, his existence. Hynes expresses that Martin’s own existence gives meaning to his suffering, and his suffering affirms his existence (Hynes, 1985: 130 qtd. in Baker, 1988). That is to say, Martin needs both suffering and existence because existence and life are the meaning of his suffering. His suffering is the sign of his existence and it is the sign that he is alive. Therefore, suffering being the part of man’s (Martin’s) life, and so being a part of the novel bears a great similarity between the novel and the philosophy of existentialism.

The second existentialist quality that comes along with the “freedom of choice” is bad faith or self-deception. If man has the freedom to choose and to act, he must also take the responsibility of his action and must bear the consequences no matter how painful they are. But, when man gets tired of suffering and cannot bear that pain any longer, he tries to escape responsibility by finding excuses for his wrong choice and pretending that there is an external source of value dominating him. Martin in the novel behaves in the same way. When he understands that he will suffer and will not be able to escape death, he tries to find excuses for his wrongdoings in the past. As Friedman states Martin tries to blame God for his own shortcomings (Friedman, 1993: 64). Because Martin says: “Yet, suppose I climbed away from the cellar over the bodies of used and defeated people, broket hem to make steps on the road



from you, why should you torture me? If I ate them, who gave me a mouth?” (Golding, 1996: 197). While in the beginning he assumes the role of God ignoring God’s all warnings, now he almost accepts the existence of a Creator other than himself. Because, he needs a being to blame for all his wrongdoings and wrong choices. He says: “If I ate them, who gave me a mouth?” That means “you gave me that mouth, so you are responsible for what I have done so far. I am not the one to be blamed for all those wrongdoings. But you! So it is unfair!” However, he realises that it is too late to try to escape the responsibility of his shortcomings, because the end is very near, waiting for him. Consequently, this is another existentialist quality that connects the novel to the philosophy of existentialism.

Facticity or thrownness is the other existentialist quality which is displayed very well throughout the novel. Thrownness means human being is a poor, wretched creature thrown into this world, alone, and deserted to his own fate created through his own actions. Philip Redpath expresses this thrownness of the main character, Martin with these words which are highly appropriate to Martin’s situation: “The rock as a tooth, eating and swallowing, is horribly reflected when Martin is swallowed by the sea and literally ‘thrown up’ (...) on to Campbell’s island” (Redpath, 1986: 146). Therefore, as in the philosophy of existentialism, Martin is thrown by the sea on to the island, actually into the world of his own creation. In this world, he is completely alone. He has nothing, no guidance or external force to help him, isolated and deserted to his fate which he has created through his own actions, actually his own wrongdoings.

Since Martin does not have anything to help him, he has to rely on himself in his struggle to survive, which he does so. In chapter five realising that he is alone, on his own in this struggle, he shouts at the sea and the rock: “‘I don’t claim to be a hero. But I’ve got health and education and intelligence. I’ll beat you.’ The sea said nothing. He grinned a little foolishly at himself. ‘What I meant was to affirm my determination to survive. And of course, I’m talking to myself’ ” (Golding, 1996: 77). Here, being helpless he tries to console himself by saying that he has health, education and intelligence. But, actually he is aware of the desperation and the helplessness of his own situation. As Hynes states, he exists in such hard conditions that these strip him of his personality and leave him simply a *human creature* (Hynes, 1985: 132 qtd. in Baker, 1988). So, no matter what he does or how hard he tries, he will not be able to survive. As Dickson states:

Though he keeps reminding himself that he has intelligence and education to back up his unbounded will to live, [...], he never exhibits extraordinary resourcefulness. He forces anemones, mussels, and seaweed down his throat; he builds himself a shelter; he doctors an attack of food poisoning; he puts together makeshift signals out of Stones and seaweed. Every one of these accomplishments is the product of a tremendous expenditure of will and a strenuous exertion of mind, and Mr. Golding means them to seem no less impressive than that. But under his subtle prompting we also begin to understand that they are, after all, elementary animal achievements, that in themselves they are not enough to support Christopher Martin’s conviction of the uniqueness and superiority of his humanity (Norman Podhoretz, “The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin,” p. 189 qtd. in Dickson, *The Modern Allegories of William Golding*). (Dickson, 1990: 45)

So, this explication most accurately describes the discrepancy between Martin’s high estimate of his ability to survive and what he actually manages to do. Also, it exhibits the limitations of human condition once more. This means that “Golding, from the very beginning, set out to expose the limitations of “rational” man, his inability to measure and grasp the greater reality that mocks all his arrogant claims to knowledge” (Baker, 1993: 9). Although he claims that he has education and intelligence which will help him to survive, these cannot be enough for his survival, because he is still a poor, wretched creature thrown into this world to suffer. According to existentialists this thrownness is the natural human condition that everybody must experience.

Since Martin has created his own fate through his own actions, in other words, his wrongdoings, he has no way out, but to suffer on his own. He has made his own choice, and thus has created his own fate. Therefore, he has to take the responsibility of his choices and bear the consequences of them alone, without any external help. He is completely alone and deserted to his fate in his suffering and struggle for survival. So, neither his education nor his intelligence can prevent him from suffering and can help him stay alive. He has to experience this human condition, thrownness and suffering on his own, without any intervention from the outside. This is the other quality of the novel that reinforces the relationship of the novel to existentialist philosophy.



The last but perhaps the most significant existentialist quality of the novel is its use of myth and its allusions to particular mythological characters. It is an existential quality because almost all existential writers ground their characters on mythological heroes. For instance, Sartre, in *The Flies*, takes *Orestes Myth* as a starting point and builds his new existential work on it. Also, Camus, another important existential writer uses the situation of *The Myth of Sisyphus* as a basis and creates a completely new work out of it: *The Stranger*. As for Golding he favors myth and he thinks that “myth is [very] fundamental in its application to the human condition” (Dickson, 1990: 3). Therefore, in many of his novels he employs this mythic quality. As Baker states, Golding has a “desire to be seen as a ‘maker of myths’ ” and he generally relies on “simple situations and plots that either partake of or suggest mythical archetypes” (Johnston, p.28 qtd. in Baker, 1988: 249). Golding himself wants to be seen as a myth maker and applies myths to human condition. Baker verifies Golding’s application of myth to human condition and states: “In the fiction, Golding consciously tries to construct a religious mythopoeia relevant to contemporary man [...]. As [Golding] has remarked in conversation: ‘Myth is a story at which we can do nothing but wonder; it involves the roots of being and reverberates there.’” (Tiger, 1974: 15 qtd. in Baker, 1993: 7). Within myths lie “the roots of being”, so Golding gives utmost importance to the use of myth in most of his works. Thus, *Pincher Martin*, like his two previous novels, “combines the factual with the fabular, [and] the mythic with the realistic [...] [and the] novel is [...] an ironic version of the Prometheus myth...” (Dickson, 1990: 42). So, there is a Promethean scenario in the novel which Martin creates in his confrontation with God. Dickson expresses the same idea in these words:

The novel is a parody [...] of the Prometheus-Zeus tension, except that in it one finds an antihero and anti-God. Even the most practiced blasphemer never answers the Deity with, “I shit on your heaven!”; and no Supreme Being, despite his abhorrence of a moral vacuum like Christopher Martin, replies with the annihilation of a soul—a problem that should puzzle even the most liberal theologians. Golding, then, has turned a mythic theme of human endurance into a twentieth-century allegory of humanity’s fallen state. (Bernard F. Dick, *William Golding*, p. 99 qtd. in Dickson, 1990)

Here, what Dickson means is that Golding takes a mythic theme or mythological scenario and adapts it to human condition. Therefore, in *Martin*, like his other novels, there are many examples of mythological figures.

However, in the fifth chapter of the novel *Martin* says: “I don’t claim to be a hero. But I’ve got health and education and intelligence. I’ll beat you” (Golding, 1996: 77). In this part of the novel, *Martin* says that he does not claim and need to be a hero. Because he thinks his health, education and intelligence are sufficient in his struggle for survival, and he does not need to be a hero in order to survive. Although he thinks so, as time passes, these three attributes of him disappoint him. For example, he becomes ill because of sunburn (Golding, 1996: 142). Then, he has food poisoning after he eats anemones (Golding, 1996: 160). He cannot sleep and starts to see hallucinations, says there was a man on the rock who carried him (Golding, 1996: 168). Therefore, disappointed by his health, education and intelligence, he starts to despair. Then, realising that he will not be able to survive by relying on these three qualities, he tries to find other ways to give him strength and to support him to stay alive, and eventually, finds refuge in mythological characters. As Friedman explains:

In clinging to the imaginary rock of life and refusing to accept the inalterable fact of his dissolution, *Martin* continues to defy God in death even as he did in life. “I am Atlas. I am Prometheus,” he cries, invoking the Titans of Greek mythology who rebelled against the Olympian gods. Both were punished for their temerity, Atlas by being forced to support the heavens, Prometheus by being chained to the face of a cliff. *Martin*’s fate is previewed in their unremitting punishments: Atlas can never lay down the heavens; Prometheus must endure not only bondage but the pain inflicted by an eagle that tears at his liver for all eternity. Both Titans are associated with rocks, especially Prometheus with whom *Martin* more closely identifies. Because Prometheus stole fire to benefit humanity, his defiance of Zeus was as heroic to mortals as it was blasphemous to the gods. *Martin*’s corresponding defiance of God – “I shit on your heaven!” – is no more than a vulgar parody of Prometheus’s supreme denial of Zeus. (Friedman, 1993: 54)

In order to defy God- actually in order to go on living- *Martin* identifies himself with these mythological archetypes. In chapter eleven of the novel, for instance, *Martin* cries: “ ‘I am Atlas. I am Prometheus.’ He felt himself loom,



gigantic on the rock. His jaws clenched, his chin sank. He became a hero for whom the impossible was an achievement. He knelt and crawled remorselessly down the rock” (Golding, 1996: 164). In his struggle for survival, in order to console himself he declares that he is a hero. Especially, he calls himself as Atlas and Prometheus. As for Atlas, he defies Zeus and he is given a punishment which is to support the heavens for ever. He never complains about it and never gets tired of the situation. On the contrary, he tries to be happy with the situation he is in. So, Martin, likewise, by taking Atlas as an example tries to bear this situation. In addition to this, both Martin’s and Atlas’s never-ending punishments may bear a similarity between the two characters. Atlas can never lay down the heavens and Martin is punished by a never-ending suffering on that rock.

However, there are even more similarities between Pincher Martin and Prometheus. Firstly, as Dickson expresses:

the initial sounds of “Pincher Martin” suggest a similarity to “Prometheus” [...] The other parallels between the mythic Prometheus and Golding’s Pincher Martin are numerous: both defy God; both assert their will and intelligence against natural and supernatural forces; both are bound to a rock; both endure the agonies of prolonged suffering. (Dickson, 1990: 44-45)

So, the relationship between the two is reinforced by all these similarities. In the twelfth chapter of the novel there is a very good example which is a reminiscent of the punishment of Prometheus who is bound to a rock. Martin cries:

Oh help, help! I am dying of exposure. I am starving, dying of thirst. I lie like driftwood caught in a cleft. I have done my duty for you and this is my reward. If you could only see me you would be wrung with pity. I was young and strong and handsome with an eagle profile and wavy hair; I was brilliantly clever and I went out to fight your enemies. I endured in the water, I fought the whole sea. I have fought a rock, and gulls and lobsters and seals and a storm. Now I am thin and weak. My joints are like knobs and my limbs like sticks. My face is fallen in with age and my hair is white with salt and suffering. My eyes are dull stones— (Golding, 1996: 188)

This is a very good description of the picture of Martin’s suffering on the rock which is very similar to Prometheus’s pain and suffering as a punishment on the rock. Although these two characters seem very alike, as Dickson expresses:

All these similarities are purposely transformed in Golding’s work for the sake of irony. Because, while Prometheus defies a selfish, unjust God to champion humanity; Pincher defies God, but only to centre the world upon himself, not for any heroic motive. Both characters use their intelligence to achieve their ends: Prometheus tricks Jupiter and steals fire for the benefit of humanity, but Pincher steals from everyone for the sole benefit of himself. Though both of them are bound to a rock, Prometheus is victimized by an angry God; Pincher suffers because he has made his own purgatorial rock as a consequence of his wicked life. Finally, Prometheus’s suffering ends in triumph. He never relents and is eventually saved by Hercules. Though Pincher’s last words are the defiant “I shit on your heaven!”(p. 200), he is slowly reduced to a pair of red claws, as he is defeated spiritually and physically. (Dickson, 1990: 45)

Hence, Prometheus steals the fire, is punished as a result of this and suffers for the sake of humanity, finally being saved. Whereas, Martin steals from everyone only for the benefit of himself and suffers on the rock of his own creation as a result of his wrongdoings in his past life and is eventually reduced to a pair of claws, thus being annihilated. So, the aim and the end of the two characters are completely different from each other.

In chapter thirteen of the novel, Martin identifies himself with another mythological figure, Ajax. “The world came back, storm-grey and torn with flying streamers, and he gave it storm-music, crash of timpany, brass blared and a dazzle of strings. He fought a hero’s way from trench to trench through water and music, his clothes shaking and plucked, tattered like the end of a windsock, hands clawing. He and his mouth shouted through the uproar. ‘Ajax! Prometheus!’ ” (Golding, 1996: 192). This time, Martin tries to find power and refuge in another mythological character. As Dickson states:

Much of the action consistently corresponds with extrafictional events associated with classical mythology, specifically the Prometheus legend discussed above. One critic has also made a case for Pincher as “the



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lesser Ajax,” who raped the virgin princess Cassandra, became shipwrecked on his journey from Troy, boasted that he saved himself without help from the gods, infuriated Poseidon, and was then killed by the angry god of the sea. Such a narrative of events parallels Martin’s own life. (Dickson, 1990: 47)

Martin in his past life seduces many women and tries to rape Mary. Then, like Ajax he becomes shipwrecked after his ship is torpedoed. After his painful struggle in the water, he dies, and being not able to accept the truth creates his own world in his mind. (During this time he is actually in purgatory suffering because of his past wrongdoings and his denial of God.) Then, refusing God’s warning to consider and repent, he is punished by God and symbolically turned into a pair of lobster claws, being annihilated by the *black lightning* (which may be a symbol for *death*).

Although not mentioned directly like the other figures in the novel, there is one more mythological figure with whom Martin is identified: that is Sisyphus. In the fourth chapter, Martin decides to build a man with stones to stand there for him as a signal:

There was a broken rock below his hands, leaning against the wall from which the clean fracture had fallen. He climbed down and wrestled with a great weight. He made the stone rise on an eagle; he quivered and the stone fell over. He collapsed and lay for a while. He left the stone and scrambled heavily down to the little cliff [...] He got the stone against his stomach, staggered for a few steps, dropped the stone, lifted and carried again. He dumped the stone on the high point above the funnel and came back. There was a stone like a suitcase balanced on the wall of a trench and he pondered what he should do. He put his back against the suitcase and his feet against the other side of the trench. The suitcase grated, moved. He got a shoulder under one end and heaved. The suitcase tumbled in the next trench and broke. He grinned without humour and lugged the larger part up into his lap. He raised the broken suitcase to the wall, turned it end over end, engineered it up slopes of fallen but unmanageable rock, pulled and hauled. Then there were two rocks on the high part, one with a trace of blood. [...] He found a third stone but could not get it up the wall of the trench. [...] his hands were broken. [...] He got up, put the second stone laboriously on the third and the first on the second. [...] Immediately he began to crawl away down the hill. [...] and toiled back to the others. [...] He put one last stone on the others, one big as his head. (Golding, 1996: 61-65)

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This detailed description of Martin’s struggle with stones is very like Sisyphus’s struggle in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He tries very hard to carry the stones and to pile them so as to make a man, even his hands are broken and bleed, and he collapses with exhaustion. But his struggle is in vain. Because, he carries the rock to the top and it rolls down back again. This continues until he builds the man. Another reason why it is futile is that, no matter how hard he tries to build it in order to be rescued, he will not be saved in the end. So, this struggle of him is futile like Sisyphus’s action. As Friedman expresses:

“Equally futile was Martin’s earlier struggle to pile stones at the summit of the rock, an action that recalls the pointless labors of another mythological figure—Sisyphus. Condemned eternally to roll a heavy rock up a hill in Hades only to have it roll down again as it nears the top, Sisyphus, even more than Atlas or Prometheus, epitomizes Martin’s actual condition” (Friedman, 1993: 54).

That is to say, this struggle of Martin is like Sisyphus’s meaningless struggle more than the other mythological characters’. Among all these characters the one whose struggle is the most meaningless is Sisyphus, and so he is the one whose struggle best epitomises Martin’s futile action. Hence, the use of myth is the last and the most important quality of the novel which makes it an existentialist work.

In conclusion, William Golding’s *Pincher Martin* has been analysed in relation to the major principles of existentialism, which are the existentialist denial of God, revolt against death, alienation, freedom of choice, suffering as a part of the World, bad faith, thrownness of man, and the use of mythological characters, respectively. What is reached as a result is that all these qualities that have been explained and analysed in detail above contribute to the relationship between Golding’s *Pincher Martin* and the philosophy of existentialism and confirm the claim that this novel is an existentialist one though William Golding rejects to be identified with the existentialist authors.



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