



## **Religion and Trauma in William Golding's *The Spire***

Joyanta Dangar

Assistant Professor of English

M.U.C. Women's College, West Bengal, India

**Abstract:** *The Spire* (1964) is a novel about Jocelin, Dean of an English cathedral in the fourteenth century, who thinks that God has selected him to build a spire on his cathedral and carries it out to an impending disaster, despite his mason's warning that the cathedral is built without adequate foundations. This article is intended to explore Jocelin's madness in terms of moral trauma and/or what Marlene Winell calls "Religious trauma syndrome (RTS)." Besides experiencing delusions, dreams and hallucinations as symptoms of trauma, Jocelin re-enacts the dualities of psychomachy while building the spire. His insidious and chronic psychological suffering may be ascribed to the religious indoctrination of his age. His trauma also conforms to Lenore Terr's definition of "Type II" trauma.

**Keywords:** Delusion, medieval Christianity, re-enactment, the *Psychomachia*, "Type II" trauma

**To cite as:**

Dangar, Joyanta, 2020, "Religion and Trauma in William Golding's *The Spire*," *PsyArt*, pp. 152-177.

## 1. Introduction

William Golding's *The Spire*, published in 1964, relates the story of Jocelin, Dean of an English cathedral<sup>1</sup> in the fourteenth century, who madly believes that God has chosen him to build a 400 feet spire on his cathedral. Although everyone else opposes the idea of building the spire, Jocelin carries out the work to a looming disaster. Some of his fellow priests dislike the project because of their jealousy and distrust of the dean; some others apprehend both spiritual and financial losses due to the interruption of regular church services. Even the master builder, Roger Mason, warns the dean that the cathedral is built on muddy soil without adequate foundations to support such an ambitious structure. Roger, however, begins the construction, partly because his workers needed employment, and partly because of his attraction for the young and red-haired wife of Pangall the old caretaker. A pit is dug at the centre of the cathedral to investigate the foundations, but it is hurriedly filled with anything that comes to hand as the pagan earth surges up to engulf the entire structure. The spire under construction groans and trembles—the masonry begins to crumble when the autumn storms come; but it miraculously still stands. One day Jocelin drives the nail at the top of the spire in the face of all adversities. It takes two years to build the spire; meanwhile, four human lives have been sacrificed and the Bishop has been called for to enquire into the Dean's mad pursuit. The story ends with Jocelin's vision, in his death bed, in which he sees the spire flying like a bluebird or pointing calmly towards heaven like an apple tree.

The novel has attracted varied critical responses. E. M. Forster (quoted in Carey 2009, 280) has found a parallel between William Golding's *The Spire* and John Meade Falkner's

*The Nebuly Coat*, but deplored the Christian edifice in Golding's novel. As he has noted, "A Hindu or Egyptian building wouldn't have created half that trouble or been so riddled with that sense of sin." Derek Roper (*ibid.*, 282) has opined that, despite its allegorical structure, realistic setting and psychological depth, *The Spire* is of inferior quality, especially in its second half. Critics like Martin Seymour-Smith have, however, hardly failed to perceive its "haunting power" that has made it a grand success. Virginia Tiger (1974) has seen *The Spire* as a fable structured on two opposing movements: the construction of the spire (Chapters I-X) and a scrutiny of the motive that shatters Jocelin's illusions (Chapters X-XII). Denis Gauer has attempted to study Jocelin's nightmares and visions in terms of Freudian theories. Indeed, no comprehensive study of Jocelin's visions, nightmares and behavioural problems and their psychological and physiological bases has been made so far. This article is intended to explore Jocelin's madness in terms of moral trauma and/or what Marlene Winell calls "Religious trauma syndrome (RTS)." It also draws on the works of Roy porter and of Michel Foucault because their observations on the subject of insanity in medieval Europe appear to be pertinent in the present context. The hypothesis of the article is that Jocelin's psychological and behavioural difficulties are attributable to his traumatic encounters in the psychomachy dominated Christian world in the medieval period.

## **2. Moral Trauma and/or Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS)**

Morality, needless to say, is closely allied to religion, and the medieval period in Europe was the very battleground of the conflict between good and evil. Latin poet Prudentius' *Psychomachia* left a tremendous impact on the medieval people.<sup>2</sup> In England, it has been exemplified in the development of the morality-plays. On the subject of madness and psychomachy in the medieval Christian world, Roy Porter (2002, 17-18) writes:

In Christian divinity, the Holy Ghost and the Devil battled for possession of the individual soul. The marks of such ‘psychomachy’ might include despair, anguish, and other symptoms of disturbance of mind. The Church also entertained a madness which was holy, patterned upon the ‘madness of the Cross’ (the scandal of Christ crucified) and exhibited in the ecstatic revelations of saints and mystics. Holy innocents, prophets, ascetics, and visionaries too might be possessed by a ‘good madness.’ But derangement was more commonly viewed as diabolic, schemed by Satan and spread by witches and heretics.

Commenting on the Greek legacy of the rift between the psychological and the somatic theories of madness, he (1999, 13), in addition, writes:

The culture of medieval Latin Christendom absorbed and made use of both of the Greek alternatives (madness as moral trauma, madness as disease). But it also fitted them within a cosmic Christian scheme—madness as divine Providence—which could impart a higher significance to either. Christian theology could also, of course, treat madness in quite distinctive ways, ones essentially alien to Greek man-centred philosophy; this lay in seeing mental disorder as a mark of the war for the possession of the soul (the ‘psychomachy’) waged between God and Satan. Medieval and Renaissance minds could regard madness as religious, as moral or as medical, as divine or diabolical, as good or bad.

Expounding on the matter of madness in the medieval Christian world, Michel Foucault (1965, 24) has, although passingly, mentioned twelve dualities of psychomachy:

The Middle Ages had given madness, or folly, a place in the hierarchy of vices. Beginning with the thirteenth century, it is customarily ranked among the wicked soldiers of the psychomachy. It figures, at Paris as at Amiens, among the evil soldiery, and is among the twelve dualities that dispute the sovereignty of the human soul: Faith and Idolatry, Hope and Despair, Charity and Avarice, Chastity and Lust, Prudence and Folly, Patience and Anger, Gentleness and Harshness, Concord and Discord, Obedience and Rebellion, Perseverance and Inconstancy, Fortitude and cowardice, Humility and Pride.

These conflicting sites of psychomachy were, in fact, the foundations of the medieval mind in Europe. From around the middle of the seventeenth century, there was, however, a tendency within Christianity to deny the rationality of conventional forms of religious madness, seeking reformation. The second half of the seventeenth century onwards, the so-called church leaders became thoroughly sickened by the carnage and chaos these endless conflicts of good and evil spirits had caused. As Porter (1999, 15) writes, “Even the pious admitted that claims to speak with divine tongues had to be treated with extreme suspicion. Most such ‘rangers’ were probably mere enthusiasts, blind zealots, suffering from credulity and superstition. ‘Pretended inspiration’ was most probably just delusion or even disease.”

Although no theorisation of religious trauma has been made so far, Marlene Winell, a California based psychologist and specialist, has propagated the idea of “Religious trauma syndrome (RTS).” As she (2015) has told Valerie Tarico, “Religious trauma syndrome (RTS) is a set of symptoms and characteristics that tend to go together and which are related to harmful experiences with religion. They are the result of two things: immersion in a controlling religion and the secondary impact of leaving a religious group.” She has further argued that religious teachings and practices may cause serious mental

health damage. Besides, sexual and physical abuse in a religious setting, emotional and mental treatment in authoritarian religious groups also can be harmful because of 1) toxic teachings like perpetual damnation or original sin, 2) religious practices or outlook, such as punishment, absolutism, or sexual guilt, and 3) neglect that stops a person from having the information or chances to grow usually. Commenting on trauma caused by “religious indoctrination,” Winell (2007, 59) also touches upon the issue of psychomachy:

In the fundamentalist view of the world, there is a tremendous and continuous battle going on between good and evil. Even though God is present and will win in the end, the forces of darkness led by Satan are formidable. They are considered stronger than ordinary human strength. Therefore the help of God is always necessary. God and Satan are perceived to be constantly fighting over the souls of human beings.

Put another way, Christian fundamentalism is based on “fear manipulations,” and the most prevailing method of fundamentalism is “a terror tactic” (Winell 2007, 64). To “live in fear about being right with God at all times” is a common source of trauma in the Christian world (ibid., 67).

### **3. Symptoms of Jocelin’s Trauma**

Jocelin in *The Spire* is evidently a psychotic character with relevant diagnostic features, although some of his psychological and physiological experiences can be ascribed to general medical conditions. This section takes into account especially his visions or hallucinations, delusions, nightmares, and behavioural re-enactment as possible symptoms of psychological trauma. Besides, such predictors of his trauma as despair, anguish, and other forms of disturbance of the mind have also been considered here.

### 3.1. Visions, Delusions and Nightmares

Dean Jocelin who claims that God has chosen him to his cathedral with a spire wants to fashion his vision in stone. As he tells Roger, ““God revealed it to me in a vision, his unprofitable servant. He chose me”” (Golding 1964, 133). His strange belief convinces the discerning reader that he is delusive in nature. Evidently, his claims to carry out God’s order to erect the spire arouse extreme suspicion in the reader’s mind. He is a mere fanatic, a blind zealot, suffering from credulity and superstition, and his pretended inspiration is just a delusion. Notably, James Scott et al. have found a significant association between trauma exposure and delusional experiences along with symptoms of PTSD. Jocelin, in addition, experiences a somatic delusion or a tactile hallucination. He feels a warm sensation at his back, although he does not see or hear a presence: “He felt it, like the warmth of a fire at his back, powerful and gentle at the same time; and so immediate was the pressure of that personality, it might have been in the very spine” (Golding 1964, 18). He regards the presence as his guardian angel and believes that it has been sent to comfort him: “I do Thy work; and Thou hast sent Thy messenger to comfort me. As it was of old, in the desert” (ibid.). Here, one might be prompted to call it a religious delusion or a command hallucination<sup>3</sup> as well. Jocelin, so happy with the prospect of a new beginning, however, apprehends that his angel has been sent not only to strengthen and console him, but also as a warning (ibid., 45). At night, when he kneels by his bed to offer his prayer before sleeping, his angel comes back and stands at his back “in a cloud of warmth” to comfort him a little (ibid., 50). On another occasion when there has been a rumour of plague in the city and the people are worried, Jocelin never joins them, since his own angel sometimes comes to comfort, warm and sustain him. Again, while supervising the construction work, he whispers: ““Therefore Thou didst send Thy Angel to strengthen

me” (ibid., 64). The marks of his psychomachy become manifest as in the very next moment he realises that there have been no angels but “only the tides of feeling, swirling, pricking, burning—a horror of the burgeoning evil thing, from birth to senility with its ghastly and complex strength between” (ibid., 64-65). His anguish continues as he feels that the four people—Roger, Rachel, Pangall and Goody—are dancing and clamouring in place of the angel at his back (ibid., 65). His feeling of the warm sensation at his back is often attributed to spine tuberculosis. Jocelin on his death bed clearly hears the ministers administering the unction talk about his consumptive spine with disgust: ““It is a wasting, a consumption of the back and spine—”” (ibid., 246). If it be a possible explanation for his hallucinations involving the image of the angel, Jocelin must be the suffering from a psychotic disturbance that is etiologically related to tuberculosis. In psychotic disorders due to another medical condition, prominent hallucinations or delusions are, in fact, judged to be the result of the direct physiological effects of a medical condition (APA 2015, 115-18). Still, what might impel one to judge Jocelin’s problem as PTSD is his experience of a nightmare (which is one of the key symptoms) besides behavioural re-enactments.

At the end of the third chapter of the novel, Jocelin experiences a dream, which inevitably draws our attention. Late at night when a feeling comes back, he flings himself on his knees again, and water runs out of his eyes. His angel finally appears and warms him to make him feel comforted, and stays with him, but, as if to keep him humble, allows Satan to afflict him with “a meaningless and hopeless dream”:

It seemed to Jocelin that he lay on his back in his bed; and then he was lying on his back in the marshes, crucified, and his arms were the transepts . . . People came to jeer and torment him . . . and they knew the church had no spire nor could have any. Only Satan himself, rising out of the west, clad in

nothing but blazing hair stood over his nave and worked at the building, tormenting him so that he writhed on the marsh in the warm water, and cried out aloud. (Golding 1964, 67)

Very soon he wakes up in darkness and horror, and lashes himself hard, seven times, one time for each devil. Denis Gauer (n.d.) has viewed this disturbing dream of Jocelin as a “nightmarish odyssey,” and explored it in terms of Freudian theories:

This is very clearly what today would be called an erotic, or more vulgarly a “wet” dream. The whole Freudian arsenal is there, making the interpretation quite easy, if not obvious, to the reader: Jocelin becomes the cathedral, or even a Christic, martyred figure (spiritual dimension at first), and the missing spire symbolizes his erected penis, which Satan (wearing Goody Pangall’s red hair) “works at,” that is, masturbates—no need to insist on the nature of the “warm water.” The spiritual has swiftly given way to the sexual, that is, the base and sinful in Jocelin’s medieval view (he is a priest, moreover obsessed with God and purity, not to say sainthood). In other (Freudian) terms, here are the themes of libido, repressed desire (for Goody Pangall), castration (the spireless church): a perfect example of post-Freudian writing.

Taking the cue from Gauer, it may be said that like a lucid dreamer (i.e., one who realizes that one is dreaming and can control one’s dreams) Jocelin waits for a comforting dream featuring his angel, and the angel accordingly comes, although his dream denies his expectation and turns into a nightmarish or traumatic one. The angel visits him several times later on. This intrusive symptom may be attributed to his trauma caused by his apprehension about being always right with God and his lust for red haired Goody Pangall.

### 3.2. Behavioural Re-enactments

Behavioural re-enactment, needless to say, is one of the key symptoms of psychological trauma. Here, Jocelin's mind manifests the paradoxes of the medieval psychomachy, and his act of building of the spire may be viewed as an unconscious re-enactment of "the twelve dualities"<sup>4</sup> of psychomachy: Faith and Idolatry, Hope and Despair, Charity and Avarice, Chastity and Lust, Prudence and Folly, Patience and Anger, Gentleness and Harshness, Concord and Discord, Obedience and Rebellion, Perseverance and Inconstancy, Fortitude and Cowardice, Humility and Pride.

#### 3.2.1. Faith and Idolatry

In the Middle Ages, the lives of most Europeans, as notes Stephen Currie (2007, 87), combined both pagan culture and Christian ideas. The onset of Christianity could not, he adds, eradicate pagan superstitions altogether; paganism was rather embedded in the rites and rituals of the established church, more or less.<sup>5</sup> As the action of *The Spire* begins to unfold, the conflict between Jocelin's Christian faith and paganism<sup>6</sup> arises. Despite Pangall's apprehensions, Jocelin justifies the construction of the spire on the grounds that the house will be even more glorious than before. Putting aside all differences of opinion, Jocelin arrives at the practical solution that they will build the spire. Since he can read the thoughts in Pangall's mind, as clearly as if they have been written there: "*because there are no foundations, and Jocelin's Folly will fall before they fix the cross on the top,*" he accuses Pangall of having no "faith" (Golding 1964, 16; italics in original). Jocelin chastises Roger several times for being a man for a very little dare and asks, "'Where's your faith?'" (ibid., 89). Then, the workers who have begun to dig a hole in the middle of the cathedral's body unlock the doors of an uncanny part, and from the nether region of the pit emanates a force that animates even inanimate substances: "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, turning, seething, coming to the boil. . . . Doomsday coming up; or the roof of hell down there. Perhaps . . . the living, pagan earth, unbound at last and waking, Dia Mater” (ibid., 83-84). This uncanny force poses a major challenge to Jocelin’s Christian faith and darkly hints at the loss of his religious entity.

Commenting on the conflicting relationship between the spire and the pit, God the Father and Dia Mater, masculinity and femininity, Jesus Saavedra-Carballido (2014, 82) writes: “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’ . . .” Subsequently, a terrible dread falls on him, for he comes to learn that there are the fires of Midsummer Night lighted by the devil worshippers out on the hills in the direction of Stonehenge. His crew of “good men” join the pagans, abandoning their work—the erection of “a stone diagram of prayer” (Golding 1964, 175), which makes him feel the resultant terror of grief. Pangall the caretaker, who has been the butt of mockery of the workmen, becomes now a victim of the pagan ceremony meant to dispel the misfortune likely to arise out of the dean’s striving project. Following *Oxford English Dictionary* entries that suggest that “folly” also means “lewdness” or “wantonness,” S. J. Boyd (1988, 100) 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. Golding (1982, 149) himself assented to James Baker’s suggestion that “Jocelin’s spire, Christian in source, is every bit as primal and pagan in the building of it as Stonehenge itself might have been.” This duality in Jocelin’s heart may be ascribed to the novelist’s “sense of the proximity of those two great religious monuments, one pagan (Stonehenge) and one Christian (Old Sarum) which were part of

medieval Salisbury” (Crompton 1985, 49). Hence, Jocelin’s false Christian faith amounts to pagan idolatry.

### **3.2.2. Hope and Despair**

The dialectic between hope and despair<sup>7</sup> is also at work in Jocelin’s heart. It may be said that the angel that warms him symbolizes hope, and Satan who torments him during the night by “a meaningless and hopeless dream” (Golding 1964, 67) stands for his despair. In addition, his cherished hope of building the spire is countered by a sense of despair, or hopelessness, when the rain for three days interrupts the work. A midday without sun, because of the drizzling rain, is tantamount to a day “blasphemously without hope” (ibid., 54). Only church services continue day and night in the unpleasant odour emanating from the pit and half-dark where the candles illumine nothing but close aureoles of vapour and where the voices rise “in fear of age and death, in fear of weight and dimension, in fear of darkness and a universe without hope” (ibid., 55). Again, his sense of despair is quite apparent when the workers neglect their duties, especially when they join the devil worshippers leaving their work, and he cries out, not in terror but in grief, and weeps bitterly without knowing what he weeps for.

### **3.2.3. Charity and Avarice**

Charity, or generosity, is having a selfless attitude of kindness and understanding toward others, prompted by one’s love of God. In contrast, avarice is the desire for wealth, power and material things, or earthly treasures as well as another people’s property.<sup>8</sup> Jocelin unconsciously seeks to counterbalance his overpowering greed by developing a false notion of charity towards others. He claims that “[a]n infinite charity” must have sided with him and he has made little movements of aspiration as befitted his capacity (Golding 1964, 215).

Patricia Ráčková (n.d., 160) is of the opinion that Jocelin “mistakes his euphoric feelings and contemptuous attitude towards others for charity.” Despite his assumed saintly life, Jocelin is in reality a slave to material things. His acceptance of the money needed for the construction of the spire shows the hollowness of his claim of charity. Notably, the fourteenth century, as also represented in the works of Chaucer and Langland, was the great century of church corruption (Crompton 1985, 37). It has been suggested by Golding in his reference to the fact that Ivo, who is a great hunter, is elected as the new chancellor, because his father owns the forests from which the beams of the cathedral are made. Jocelin’s own appointment as Dean has been secured by an equally corrupt manner. It is revealed that his aunt Alison who has been a favourite mistress of the king influenced the royal authority in this regard. The money Jocelin needs for the construction of the spire comes from the aunt who is involved in flesh trade.

#### **3.2.4. Chastity and Lust**

Chastity is the opposite of lust and related to temperance, which helps one control and moderate one’s desire, enabling one to enjoy pleasure in good things as God wants. More than mere sexual abstinence, it is really the art of loving another rightly. Jocelin loves Goody—he has seen her playing games with other girls in the cathedral close—as his “daughter in God,” but her red hair blinds<sup>9</sup> him now. Once, having seen her red hair he shuts his eyes and groans; and at night his angel comes again, and after that, the devil also torments him a little. When he sees the fall of Goody’s red hair, it causes confusion in his head. In spite of knowing the fact that Pangall was impotent, Jocelin arranged the marriage between Goody and her man. Pangall was commissioned as a eunuch to protect the object of his master’s lust. Saavedra-Carballido (2014, 78) rightly sees Jocelin’s life as “more carnal than pious.” As he (ibid., 83) adds, “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.” In fact, Goody becomes Jocelin’s “whore” (Golding 1964, 150). The image of Goody, in reality, intrudes upon his mind again and again, and she haunts him even after her death: ““She’s woven into it everywhere. She died and then she came alive in my mind. She’s there now. . . .”” (ibid., 186).

### 3.2.5. Prudence and Folly

In another duality, Jocelin’s prudence vies with folly,<sup>10</sup> or madness. As Roy Porter (1999, 14) writes, “At least in theory, if perhaps less so in practice, medieval and Renaissance Christianity thought that the voice of folly might be a medium for the voice of God and bade it have its hearing.” For Roger Mason, Jocelin’s spire is quite impossible and Jocelin is “a fool” (Golding 1964, 38). Jocelin, however, claims that his dares are big ones and orders Roger to start the construction of the spire. Finding him reluctant, Jocelin thinks Roger has no vision—he is blind. One day, when Roger reminds Jocelin that people call it “Jocelin’s Folly,” the latter ascribes it to “God’s Folly” (ibid., 133). As Jocelin tells Roger, people think him to be mad perhaps, but he hardly cares for them. Subsequently, he observes, ““Up here, we’re *all* crazy”” (ibid., 163; italics in original). Gradually he recognizes his slow insanity and doubts his own sanity, ““They think I’m mad.’ . . . ‘Perhaps I am”” (ibid., 183). At the end of the novel Roger visits Jocelin, lying on his death bed, and reminds him of his earlier warnings, ““You’re mad. I always said so”” (ibid., 236).

### 3.2.6. Patience and Anger

While patience requires love, anger does not produce the righteousness that God intends.<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding the claims of his saintly life, Jocelin is very much capable of impatience, or anger. When angry Pangall complains about the maltreatment of his wife by his fellow

workers, Jocelin asks him to be patient: ““We must be patient”” (Golding 1964, 15) and tells him that it will be a trial to them all for two years until the construction of the spire is completed. When Pangall expresses his doubt about the completion of the work, Jocelin suddenly gets irritated, and as he looks at the man eye to eye, the irritation comes back in a sudden flurry. He sets his teeth and impatiently he lets out his breath, and looks round for something to say. He remembers the workmen breaking up the pavement below the crossways and his irritation vanishes in return of excitement (ibid., 15-16). His annoyance comes back when he speaks to the Sacrist, who voted against the proposal to build the spire in Chapter. When the Sacrist makes a reference to the wheel and the shoulder in agreement with Jocelin about his project, the irritation in the latter’s throat becomes “anger.” The Sacrist’s argument that they do not feel uniquely chosen like their master brings “Jocelin’s blood to a rage” (ibid., 31). He knows that when he recovers from his irritation, he will mourn, remembering the cloister by the sea, the flashing water, the sun and sand (ibid., 33). While persuading the master builder to begin his work, the sight of the sun coming from the west makes him feel hungry, and it makes him “angry” as well (ibid., 44). On another occasion anger heats him when his feelings of joy arising from the thought of the Nail and his angel subside (ibid., 50). An anger further rises out of some pit inside Jocelin as he spies upon Goody and Roger—who eagerly long for each other. As he remembers how Goody’s face droops daily for his blessing and hears her singing in Pangall’s world, the word of negation bursts out over his chin from “an obscure place of indignation and hurt” (ibid., 59). Again, a “great anger” swamps Jocelin, when, from the top of the church, he spots the drunk man and the sot in the Three Tuns. He asks Roger to exercise authority on his behalf and send a man on a good horse with a whip in his hand to the Three Tuns (ibid., 120-21). Likewise, irritated at the absence of Roger and his workmen from their usual work at the top, he goes quickly down the tower, and by the

time he reaches the pavement his irritation has become “a mad anger” (ibid., 143). Thus, Jocelin’s irritation or anger, despite his patience, afflicts him time and again.

### **3.2.7. Gentleness and Harshness**

Gentleness is freedom from all harshness, or roughness, which is essential for a servant of God, especially one in a responsible position of supervision. When one speaks and acts with gentleness, it appears to be pleasant and conducive to peace. Harshness is divisive and drives others away, while gentleness attracts and unifies.<sup>12</sup> To carry out his project, Jocelin can be, on the one hand, so harsh that he refuses to release Roger from a sealed contract despite the latter’s earnest requests. He treats Roger as his slave for the work—“my prisoner for this duty” (Golding 1964, 94). On the other, he speaks and acts with gentleness to his workers: “. . . you have all become precious to me—you and all the rest—and I begin to live by you” (ibid., 135). So, Jocelin’s heart is also the battle ground for the conflict between gentleness and harshness.

### **3.2.8. Concord and Discord**

Concord is unity, or harmony in thought or action, whereas discord is the absence of harmony; variance leading to contention and strife; disagreement. The spire is also a re-enactment of the conflict between concord and discord<sup>13</sup> that is at work in his mind. As the spire grows up, the stones begin to sing under the huge pressure of construction. The singing of the stones pierces Jocelin, and he fights it with jaws and fists clenched. He feels confusedly and mutinously that it is “a kind of prayer!” (Golding 1964, 86). So, he kneels, stiff, painful and enduring; and all the time, the singing of the stones works inside his head. Late in December the stones begin to sing again, and with the onset of the spring the stones sing more frequently. Subsequently, Jocelin enters the nave and hears a little noise emanating

from between the services as “the great pillars sang—eeeeeeeeeeeeee—as if the strain had become intolerable” (ibid., 138). The spire further groans and trembles as the autumn storms come and the stones begin to crumble and fly (ibid., 195). In his death bed he attributes all discord to his delusion that he has been chosen as a spiritual man to build the spire: ““And from this, the rest followed, the debts, the deserted church, discord?”” (ibid., 219). Thus, Jocelin, despite his claims of erecting the spire in concord with God’s will, always sows discord.

### **3.2.9. Obedience and Rebellion**

Obedience is the opposite of rebellion, insubordination, insolence, betrayal, and disrespect.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, Jocelin claims to be obedient to God and refuses to change the decision to build the spire. On the other, his plan to carry out the construction of the spire beyond its limit amounts to his rebellion against God’s will. As Margaret Hallissy (1997, 47-48) rightly puts it:

What is important in this Tower of Babel image, as in so many medieval works, is the alteration made by the artist in the biblical material. In Genesis 11:4 the builders’ purpose in building “a tower with its top in the heavens” is not to honor God but to “make a name for” themselves. Their work is so impressive that God worries that His creatures are getting out of hand: ““This is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them”” (Gen. 11:6). To quell these disruptive impulses, God punishes the tower builders not by collapsing their structure but by confusing their languages, so that they might never again achieve the unity of purpose necessary for such an ambitious undertaking. In Scripture God permits the tower to stand, as if in grudging respect for his creatures’ efforts.

So the medieval artist's variation on the biblical theme shows a contemporary concern that the daring of medieval builders has gone too far.

Hallissy (1997, 48-49) adds that from a theological perspective Jocelin, like Bannadonna<sup>15</sup> and William of Sens,<sup>16</sup> has no apprehension of falling because he lacks the sense that he has climbed too high. In his own mind he need not fear that he is challenging the power of God, because he believes that his will and God's will are one. He wants his workers led by Roger to act in obedience to his law and, hence, the divine law. Thus, their sporadic unwillingness to build the spire is a form of disobedience, or rebellion.

### **3.2.10. Perseverance and Inconstancy**

Perseverance, or constancy, is the virtue of God's servants.<sup>17</sup> To build the spire, Jocelin has been showing great perseverance in the face of difficulties: "I do what I must do" (Golding 1964, 94). His perseverance is, however, constantly challenged by the inconstancy of his master builder and his labourers. He is expeditious in setting forth the spire according to the commandment of God, but gradually, through failure of the spirit of perseverance, his levity (or inconstancy) betrays itself. It may be said that Jocelin's devotion to the construction of the spire is a safeguard against his inconstancy—it is not genuine devotion.

### **3.2.11. Humility and Pride**

Jocelin's heart is also the site of the conflict between humility and pride. He thus overhears the two young deacons call him "proud" and "ignorant" (Golding 1964, 8). After his meeting with his guardian angel, he feels elated and excited and thanks God, for sending his messenger, in humility<sup>18</sup>: "Lord; I thank Thee that Thou hast kept me humble!" (ibid., 18; italics in original). He also takes pride in his humility while talking to the young man who views the former as an angel: "'Don't you think you might strain my humility, by

making an angel of me?” (ibid., 21). Jocelin’s avoidance of the sacrament, as Hallissy (1997, 40) notes, further questions the genuineness of his humility:

Why does Jocelin, himself a priest, avoid the sacrament? The reasons amount to a character study of the prideful man. First is the nature of the sin itself: “This sin of self is the worst of all sins. Until one’s self-image is lowered, he cannot feel humility, a prime objective of the confessional” (Braswell 40). A penitent of whatever rank, from peasant to pope, subordinates himself to his confessor. Whatever his rank with respect to the penitent outside the confessional, inside the confessional the confessor carries the full moral authority of the Church.

Again, the spire, built without solid foundations and hence likely to fall down, suggests that Jocelin’s prayer is not buttressed by humility and devotion. What he claims to be God’s will, is found to be his own pride.

### **3.2.12. Fortitude and Cowardice**

Jocelin sets up the final duality of psychomachy in which fortitude is poised against cowardice. Fortitude is a moral virtue to withstand even great obstacles and constancy in the pursuit of good.<sup>19</sup> It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and enables one to see an act or decision through to the end, notwithstanding difficulties. In addition, it helps one conquer fear, even fear of death, and face trials and persecutions. As a defect of fortitude, timidity, in contrast, makes us indisposed to endure hardships and leads us to violate divine law in order to avoid what we fear. Jocelin here often speaks of mental or emotional strength that enables his courage in the face of adversity. While building the spire, he not only rebukes Roger for being “a man for a very little dare” (Golding 1964, 89), but also

displays his fortitude: he faces the opposition of his master builder Roger and others and tolerates every pain and grief for it. His cowardice, however, manifests itself, when the pillars of the spire produce discordant notes under strain and when his workers abandon the site of the work.

#### **4. Conclusion**

William Golding's *The Spire* is a tale of a fanatic with false inspiration, whose thoughts and actions manifest the grim paradoxes of psychomachy in medieval Europe. The novel shows that immersion in an organised religion or religious fundamentalism can be a major source of psychological trauma. Jocelin's psychological suffering and the consequent debilitating condition in the end conform to Winell's definition of "Religious trauma syndrome (RTS)" that suggests that religious assumptions often provide structural support for violence. A victim of religious trauma, Jocelin not only experiences delusions, dreams and hallucinations, but re-enacts the dualities of psychomachy while building the spire. In other words, Jocelin's erection of the spire is a re-enactment of the conflicting impulses in his heart, which are attributable to the religious atmosphere of his age. Among the twelve dualities of psychomachy which Jocelin manifests in his action, the duality between Prudence and Folly seems to be of crucial importance. Jocelin's trauma, despite showing some pertinent symptoms, does not qualify for PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder), or Type I trauma, as there is an absence of an obvious threat or act of violence. However, his insidious and chronic psychological suffering caused by religious indoctrination may be regarded as structural and hence Type II trauma.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Jocelin is not only a victim, but also a perpetrator, whose insanity causes the anguish of many others, especially of Roger, Pangall and his wife. Golding's trauma narrative here suggests that exposure to such structural forms of violence as

induced by religious fanaticism may have several effects on the body and mind of the individuals involved, irrespective of whether they are victims, perpetrators, or bystanders.

## Notes

1. William Golding's inspiration for *The Spire* comes from his childhood association with Salisbury Cathedral. In fact, the cathedral at New Sarum, or Salisbury, was built between 1220 and 1258. Since 1549, it has had the highest church spire in England, at 404 feet. For further information regarding its history, architecture, and people, see Boyle, Fairbairns, Noyes, White, et al.

2. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (AD 348-AD 405) was a Christian Latin poet, whose allegorical epic, the *Psychomachia*, represents the life of the soul as a series of battles. This theme of what John P. Hermann called "spiritual warfare" immensely influenced the medieval mind in Europe. Prudentius was not the first person to personify virtues and vices, but he represented the seven battles of virtues and vices for the possession of the human soul in a violent manner.

3. Medical dictionaries define command hallucination as a symptom, which is usually auditory but sometimes visual, involving an instruction, always from within, to do something. As Keith Hersh and Randy Borum (1998) write, "Command hallucinations are auditory hallucinations that instruct the patient to act in a certain manner. The actions that command hallucinations order the patient to perform range from the insignificant, such as making facial grimaces, to those as serious as suicidal or homicidal acts" (353). Notably, Judith S. Thompson, Gregory L. Stuart, and Carol E. Holden (1992) suggest that command hallucinations exist along with both non-command hallucinations (85%) and delusions (7%).

4. Foucault's mention of the dualities of psychomachy in *Madness and Civilization* is more a passing reference than something theoretical. In addition to Prudentius' the seven battles of virtues and vices, Foucault presumably takes into account Paul, Gregory (Gifts of Spirit), Evagrius, Dante (Seven Deadly Sins), Giotto, et al.

5. Stephen Currie further writes that the likenesses between the two traditions were not coincidental. The early Christians purposely created traditions and rituals similar to those of paganism. Drawing on Sharan Newman, he argues that the early church provided an alternate to the pagan gods responsible for healing with a view to eliminating paganism. Thus, the Christians introduced the idea of "intercessor saints, who filled much the same role as the pagan deities." (84)

6. Prudentius' *Psychomachia* describes the first battle between *Fides* (Faith) and *Veterum Cultura Deorum* (Worship-of-the-Old-Gods) (ll. 21-39). As John P. Hermann writes, "*Fides*' bare arms, untrimmed hair, and unstylish hair represent the ardor of her holy ambition. She is weaponless, seemingly defenceless against pagan gods and goddesses. But such literal vulnerability is tribute to Faith's power, which is made evident when *Veterum Cultura Deorum* bites the dust" (11).

7. In the fourth and central battle in the *Psychomachia*, *Spes* (Hope) offers the *Mens Humilis* (Humility) the *ultorem gladium* (the sword of vengeance) but ultimately flies away.

8. In the *Psychomachia*, the sixth duality involves the conflict between *Avaritia* (Avarice) and *Operatio* (Good Works), who disguises herself as *Frugi* (Thrift) (ll. 454-634).

9. In the second battle in the *Psychomachia*, Prudentius describes how *Sodomita Libido* (Lust the Sodomy) blinds *Pudicitia* (Chastity) with a pinewood torch that is suggestive of her (the vice's) fiery nature (ll. 40-108).

10. Prudence is one of the four cardinal virtues and Folly is the corresponding vice.

11. In the third battle of the *Psychomachia* by Prudentius, *Patientia* (Patient) encounters *Ira* (Anger), who is represented with her bared teeth and bloodshot eyes (ll. 109-77).

12. Gentleness is one of the nine “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-23) and is a significant Christian virtue (Eph. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; 1 Pet. 3:14-16).

13. The seventh and final battle in the *Psychomachia*, *Concordia* (Concord) receives a skin wound from *Discordia-Heresis* (Discord-Heresy) who is portrayed with a torn outer garment (ll. 631-822). *Discordia-Heresis* is the only vice to launch an attack in time of peace.

14. To choose Christ is to choose obedience (John 14:15, 21). Also, to become disobedient is to sin or rebel against God (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

15. In Herman Melville’s short story “The Bell-Tower,” Bannadonna is an eccentric architect who dreams of building the noblest bell-tower in Italy. After receiving approval from the town, this eccentric builder begins the work with pleasure, but the townsfolk eventually begin to complain about the uncanny events surrounding the bell-tower. Golding perhaps remembers Melville’s account of Bannadonna’s building of the tower: “Stone by stone, month by month, the tower rose. Higher, higher; snail-like in pace, but torch or rocket in its pride” (253-54).

16. William Of Sens was a pioneering cathedral architect in twelfth-century France. He rebuilt the choir of Canterbury Cathedral after its destruction by fire, and he began it most probably in 1175. Also see, King; Kahn.

17. “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways” (Jas. 1:6-8).

18. In the fourth battle in the *Psychomachia*, *Superbia* (Pride) rides about on an unbridled horse, until it falls into a pit dug by *Fraus* (Deceit) and *Mens Humilis* (Humility) severs the vice’s head with the *ultorem gladium* (the sword of vengeance) (ll. 178-309).

19. Fortitude is another cardinal virtue and Cowardice is the mirroring vice.

20. The history and definition of trauma may be extended to even common experiences of violence. Lenore Terr (1994), for example, speaks of “Type II” trauma (the consequences of chronic, repeated trauma, often caused by multiple events or forces), whereas “Type I” trauma is the consequences of a single traumatic event (Craps 1992). Likewise, Dominick LaCapra (2014, 79) makes a distinction between “historical trauma” and “structural trauma” and holds that “everyone is subject to structural trauma.”

## References

- American Psychiatric Association (APA). 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- The Bible*. 1998. Authorized King James Vers. Introduction and notes by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett. Oxford: Oxford UP. World’s Classics.
- Boyd, S. J. 1988. *The Novels of William Golding*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester; New York: St. Martin’s.
- Boyle, George David. 1897. *Salisbury Cathedral*. Illustration by Alexander Ansted. London: Isbister.

- Carey, John. 2009. *William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Craps, Stef. 2014. "Beyond Eurocentrism." *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*. Ed. Gert Buelens et al. Oxon: Routledge, 45-61.
- Crompton, Don. 1985. *A View from the Spire: William Golding's Later Novels*. Edited and completed by Julia Briggs. Oxford, New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Currie, Stephen. 2007. *Miracles, Saints, and Superstition: The Medieval Mind*. Detroit, New York, London: Lucent-Thomson Gale.
- Fairbairns, W. H. 1900. *Salisbury*. London: S. P. C. K.
- Foucault, Michel. 1965. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gauer, Denis. n.d. "Two Literary Dreams: Some reflections on pre- and post-Freudian literature." Accessed 29 July 2019. [http://angellier-biblio.univ-lille3.fr/ressources/article\\_gauer\\_freud.doc](http://angellier-biblio.univ-lille3.fr/ressources/article_gauer_freud.doc).
- Golding, William, and James R. Baker. 1982. "An Interview with William Golding." *Twentieth Century Literature* 28 (2): 130-70. Accessed March 27, 2019. doi:10.2307/441151.
- Golding, William. *The Spire*. 1964. Introduction by John Mullan. London: Faber and Faber.
- Hallissy, Margaret. 1997. "'No Innocent Work': Theology and Psychology in William Golding's 'The Spire'." *Christianity and Literature* 47 (1): 37-56. Accessed March 27, 2019. [www.jstor.org/stable/44312608](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44312608).
- Hermann, John P. 1989. *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Hersh, Keith, and Randy Borum. 1998. "Command hallucinations, Compliance, and Risk Assessment." *J Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 26 (3): 353-59.
- Kahn, Deborah. 1991. *Canterbury Cathedral and Its Romanesque Sculpture*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- King, Richard John. 1861. *Handbook to the Cathedrals of England*. Part II. London: John Murray.
- LaCapra, Dominick. 2014. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. 2001. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Melville, Herman. 1923. "The Bell-Tower." *The Piazza Tales*. London: Constable.
- Noyes, Ella. 1913. *Salisbury Plain, Its Stones, Cathedral, City, Villages & Folk*. London, Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons / New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Porter, Roy. 1999. *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane*. London: Phoenix Giant.
- . *Madness: A Brief History*. 2002. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Prudentius, Aurelius Clemens. 1949. *Prudentius*. 2 vols. Edited and translated by H. J. Thomson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann.
- Ráčková, Patricia. n.d. "The Angel with a Hoof: Metamorphosis in Golding's *The Spire*." Accessed 9 Feb. 2015.
- Roper, Derek, and Golding. 1967. "Allegory and Novel in Golding's "The Spire"." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8 (1): 19-30. Accessed March 27, 2019. doi:10.2307/1207127.

- Saavedra-Carballido, Jesús. 2014. "Will, Suffering and Liberation in William Golding's "The Spire" / Voluntad, Sufrimiento Y Liberación En "The Spire", De William Golding." *Atlantis* 36 (1): 71-85. Accessed March 27, 2019. [www.jstor.org/stable/43486082](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43486082).
- Scott, James et al. 2007. "Association between trauma exposure and delusional experiences in a large community based samples." *British Journal of Psychiatry* 190 (4): 339-43. Accessed March 20, 2019. doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.106.026708.
- Terr, Lenore. 1994. *Unchained memories: True stories of traumatic memories, lost and found*. New York: Basic Books.
- Tiger, Virginia. 1974. *William Golding: The Dark Fields of Discovery*. London: Marion Boyars.
- Thompson, Judith S. et al. 1992. "Command hallucinations and legal insanity," *Forensic Reports* 5 (1): 29-43.
- White, Gleeson, ed. 1896. *The Cathedral Church of Salisbury: A Description of Its Fabric and a Brief History of the See of Sarum*. London: George Bell and Sons. Bell's Cathedral Ser.
- Winell, Marlene. 2007. *Leaving the Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion*. Foreword by Steve Allen. Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press.
- . 2015. "Religious Trauma Syndrome: How some organized religion leads to mental health problems." Interview by Valerie Tarico. *Rawstory* 6 July 2015, Science Sec. Accessed 9 Feb. 2017. <https://www.rawstory.com/2018/10/religious-trauma-syndrome-organized-religion-leads-mental-health-problems/>