

# Pincher Martin: An Impressionistic piece of literature

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**Abstract** - Sigmund Freud rightly said in his Psychoanalytical theory that a person is only able to present some percentage of what he truly is, in front of the world. The rest of his behaviour is always buried within himself and hidden from the rest of the world. When we, as literature students, sit to examine, we realize that there are many characters, both in fiction and in real life, who very well illustrate this particular theory. This theme of appearance and reality also features in Impressionistic pieces of literature. Impressionism is not only about the play of light on a particular object, it also equally emphasizes on the darkness which is made more visible when put in contrast to light. In other words, it focuses on what a character wants to show and what he wants to hide from the world.

The research paper is based on one of the extremely famous novels of William Golding, namely, Pincher Martin, and seeks to highlight the artistic treatment given by Golding to it and in this way, painting it from an Impressionistic point of view.

**Index Terms** - Impressionism, Emotional landscape, Strategic selection, Fleeting.

The novel *Pincher Martin* written by William Golding, which seems to be a simple story of Christopher Hadley Martin's sinful past and his eventual death at sea, has a lot of hidden layers when carefully analyzed. Christopher in this novel represents all human beings who are Christophers (born in the image and likeness of Christ and called to carry the virtues of Christ in their hearts) but who eventually become Pinchers (always jealous of other people's lot and destiny and making all possible efforts to pinch or snatch from them, whatever they deserve).

Just like many other works of literature, even this novel showcases what Christopher is in reality and what he pretends to be in front of the others, but, apart from the story, there is something more interesting to emphasize upon and that is the narrative technique used by Golding. Golding has made the use of certain hallmarks while writing this piece, namely, "Strategic

*selection of details", "non-chronological sequence of the narrative", use of an "Emotional landscape", "personal point of view" and "ambiguous meaning" regarding different aspects of the novel, and to our surprise, all these techniques are the jewels of an Impressionistic piece of literature.*

The term "Impressionism" was coined by Louis Leroy, a French artist and critic and was used to describe a nineteenth century art movement which focused on a desire to capture the fleeting, sensory effect of a scene or subject matter; in other words, the momentary "impression" that it left on the artist or that it leaves on the viewer.

This movement first began in paintings and people like Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Paul Cezanne, Mary Cassatt and the like became famous impressionistic painters, who always focused on the ordinary subject rather than idealizing beauty. They always tried to focus on the effect of light on a particular object and what optical impression it created. They often blurred the outlines of the objects or shapes in their paintings in order to give them an ambiguous meaning. This movement was slowly and gradually introduced into literature and impressionistic pieces of literature included certain similar features. Their narrative style, for example, was non chronological, they often described the action through the lens of the main protagonist rather than highlighting the basic details themselves, they emphasized on the emotional landscape rather than a physical one. They wanted to paint the natural backdrop in such a manner that it looks ambiguous, pale and strange when the character is suffering. They often took into account, a "strategic selection of details", where the readers had to go back to the first page in order to get a full picture and better understanding of the entire piece of literature. All these features become very evident when we view *Pincher Martin* through the same lens.

For instance, the narrative style applied in the novel is NOT CHRONOLOGICAL. It does not have a beginning, middle and an end just like the ancient

works of literature. Moreover, the novel keeps drifting between past, present and future. The novel opens with the lines:

He was struggling in every direction, he was the centre of the writhing and kicking knot of his own body. There was no up and down, no light and no air. He felt his mouth open of itself and the shrieked word burst out.

Help!

The readers are not able to understand, what is happening and who is the protagonist, they are not able to make the slightest guess as to what is going to happen next.

Slowly and gradually, we get to know that his ship sank in the Atlantic Sea and Pincher Martin has been struggling for life since then. He tells himself:

She sank out in the Atlantic. Hundreds of miles from land, sent north-east from the convoy to break WT silence She may be passing under me now, shadowy and shark-like, she may be lying down there below my wooden feet on a bed of salty water as on a cushion while her crew sleeps.

The novels keeps on drifting between the past and the present. Sometimes, we get to know the present position of Martin being stuck on the island and how he goes about making an entirely new world of his own and making different attempts to safeguard himself and somehow escape from the sea. He tells himself:

The end to be desired is rescue. For that, the bare minimum necessary is survival. I must keep this body going. I must give it food and drink and shelter.

Then all of a sudden, the novel jumps into the past life of Martin and we as readers, get to know, what a horrifying and brutal life Martin has led. His life totally revolves around himself and he doesn't consider the others as humans, in front of himself. He is a man with a very good appetite (sexual).

Thinking about women then or eating. Thinking about eating women, eating men, crunching up Alfred, that other girl, that boy, that crude and unsatisfactory experiment, lie restful as a log and consider the gnawed tunnel of life right up to this uneasy intermission

Another important technique applied by Golding in this novel is the portrayal of an EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE rather than a physical one. The kind of imagery that Golding offers his readers, appeals more

to the feelings experienced by Martin the smell sensed by him and the noises that he hears rather than the literal location specifying where he actually is.

For instance, when Martin is almost drowning in water and is trying to order his hands and legs to make all possible swimming movements which they fail to obey, then Golding has portrayed very beautifully as to how his mind still remains active and how he imagines swimming movements:

He began to think swimming motions but knew now that his body was no longer obedient.

Even later on, when Martin somehow reaches to this strange island and becomes unconscious due to his struggle for survival at sea and starvation thereafter, he comes back to consciousness only after hearing the sound of the gull, water and the wind.

Yet it was not the pain nor the white and black pattern that first brought him back to life, but the noises All these noises made a language which forced itself into the dark passionless head and assured it that the head was somewhere, somewhere- and then finally with the flourish of a gull's cry over the sound of the wind and water, declared to the groping consciousness: wherever you are, you are here.

There are several instances in the novel that highlight the fact that Martin's emotions and his mind are more active than his body. Even while staying on the island, he is never able to understand the exact location of the island and so is the case with the reader. Martin looks around in astonishment and questions himself:

Where the hell am I.

His mind continuously forces itself to be active. He tells himself-

Think, you bloody fool, think.

There are several other extracts which talk about the same activeness of his mind, for example, the following one -

But inside, where the snores were external, the consciousness was moving and poking about among the other pictures and revelations, among the shape-sounds and the disregarded feelings like an animal ceaselessly examining his cage.

He could see this fire in his mind's eye because his body was a second and interior crevice which he inhabited.

From the above references, we can conclude that this struggle for survival is going on in the mind of Martin rather than being a physical one and his mind seems to be the only thing that is active or existing in the novel.

The third important technique to be noted here is, that the novel not only encompasses omniscient narration but is also written from Martin's PERSONAL POINT OF VIEW. Golding in this attempt often deliberately omits all crucial details which create a momentary image of the events. We as readers, get to know that Christopher Hadley Martin is a British Navy Lieutenant. His nickname is 'Pincher' which is the standard nickname for Martins. Before joining the navy, he was an actor with a predatory kind of a behaviour. Christopher Martin is a womanizer and has tried his seducing stunts on every woman he has come across, including the producer's wife. He is the very embodiment of all the seven deadly sins, namely, pride, envy, lust, gluttony, sloth, greed and wrath and Pete describes him in the following ways-

He takes the best part, the best seat, the most money, the best notice, the best woman. He was born with his mouth and his flies open and both hands out to grab. The readers also get a little idea about how Christopher is the huge, surviving maggot who can swallow everybody else in order to survive.

We maggots are there all the week. Y'see when the Chinese want to prepare a very rare dish they bury a fish in a tin box. Presently all the lil' maggots peep out and start to eat. Presently no fish. Only maggots. It's no bloody joke being a maggot.

There are two secondary characters as well, namely, Nathaniel and Mary. Nathaniel stands as a perfect foil to Christopher and is chosen by Mary as a life partner. This infuriates Christopher who is planning to kill Nat at the time when the ship is torpedoed.

And love? Love for Nat? That was this sorrow dissolved through the hate so that the new solution was a deadly thing in the chest and the bowels.

In the same way, even Mary the very symbol of innocence and Christopher wants to destroy her honor just for the reason of choosing Nathaniel rather than himself.

As long as she lives the acid will eat. There's nothing that can stand that. And killing her would make it worse.

The fourth important point to be noted here is that the narration and the THEMES in the novel are very AMBIGUOUS. The author has left it up to the readers to come out with their own conclusions through reading. The initial lines can be quoted to illustrate the above fact-

He was struggling in every direction, he was the center of the writhing and kicking of his own body. There was no light and no air. He felt his mouth open of itself and the shrieked word burst out.

Help!

The opening of the novel is so dramatic and sudden that it becomes difficult for the reader to understand what is happening. The novel does not have a definite and clear beginning. Even after progressing a bit in the novel, the reader wonders that Christopher will die, but quite to the surprise of the reader, Christopher reaches to this unknown island and makes a little world of his own-

I call this place the Look-out. That is the Dwarf. The rock out there under the sun where I came swimming is the 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---

Just like how God created everything out of chaos in the beginning and named it, in the same way, Christopher also creates a new world of his own from the chaos going on in his mind, which the readers are not able to understand at one go. There are a lot of hyphens used in the novel which themselves indicate that the author wanted to go on but deliberately stopped in order to make his readers arrive at the conclusion in an independent manner.

For example, it is worthy to note, how Christopher goes about making a conversation with the rock- Plenty of identity in here, Ladies and Gentlemen---

He cut his voice off sharply and heard the rock say, ---men----

It will rain.

---ain.

How are you?

--u?

I am busy surviving. I am netting down this rock with names and taming it. Some people would be incapable of understanding the value of that. What is given a name is given a seal, a chain.

In this way, Christopher personifies the rock and regards it as his friend with whom he can discuss his pains and agonies.

Slowly and gradually, the readers get to know about Christopher's past life, about how shameful, sinful, violent and selfish, his past has been. He broods over

injury, sacrifices others for himself and does not treat anyone more worthy than himself-

Thinking about women then or eating. Thinking about eating women, eating men, crunching up Alfred, that other girl, that boy, that crude and unsatisfactory experiment, lie restful as a log and consider the gnawed tunnel of life right up to this uneasy intermission

Sometimes the novel talks about Christophers hope of being rescued one day-

I shall be rescued any day now. I must not worry.

In this way, Christopher suffers a lot of internal conflicts with regard to the present and the past, sin and redemption, struggle to survive and submission to death and at last hears the voice of God saying-

Have you had enough, Christopher? and Christopher says-

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.

He realizes that he is Christopher (born in the image of God and called to follow him through the application of sacrificial nature and generosity) but he makes his own choices and becomes Pincher who always rejoices in sacrificing others for himself.

In this way, the narration is half baked and even the themes of the novel keep changing without giving prior notice to the reader. They range from the tragedy of Christopher to his struggle to survive, his past life and being the very embodiment of the seven deadly sins, his internal conflicts and his submission to the will of God at the end, and all this makes the meaning and the narration very complicated.

Another very interesting feature about the novel is, that the readers have to go back all the way to the initial point of the novel in order to get a complete picture and understand the difference between their presumptions and reality. Right from the very beginning, we keep on witnessing Pincher Martin struggling but not giving up his spirit to die.

I won't die! I won't!

He curses himself for letting go of his sea boots which could have prevented him from the chilled and lifeless water.

The seaboot slipped down his calf and he kicked it free Throughout, he struggles, and readers believe that he is alive but it is only at the end of the novel that we as readers realize that Pincher Martin died the moment his ship was torpedoed and he did not even get the time

to kick off his sea boots. This fact becomes clear by the conversation that takes place between Mr. Campbell and Mr. Davidson at the end on find Martin's body-

If you're worried about Martin—whether he suffered or not---

They paused for a while.....

Mr. Campbell sighed.

“Aye”, he said, “I meant just that”.

“Then don't worry about him. You saw the body. He didn't even have time to kick off his seaboots.”

From the above lines, it is quite clear that *Pincher Martin* died within the fraction of seconds after falling into the sea but the entire novel only talks about those few seconds when his mind was active. It is said that before a person can die, he reviews his entire life starting from birth till the last day and that is exactly what happens with Martin, but quite to the contrary, the readers get to know the reality only after reading the novel till its last page and then returning back to the first page.

Thus, we can conclude that through *Pincher Martin*, William Golding not only proves himself to be a great writer, who talks about the power of Martin's mind, that keeps the readers unaware about his death, right till the end of the novel but also marks himself as an Artist by painting *Pincher Martin* from an Impressionistic point of view.

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