

William Golding's Great Dream

'All sleepers are poets while they dream'—John Hollander

In the morning of 19 August 1971, a month shy of his 60th birthday, William Golding had a dream that would change his life. It was, he later claimed, as near to a 'great dream' as any he had ever experienced (15 March 1972).¹ A personal crisis that dated back many years, perhaps even decades, had recently become 'unendurable', and at first Golding concluded that the dream had 'not ma[d]e much difference' to his suffering ('History of a Crisis').² Before long, however, there were signs of respite: 'some of the crisis has been and is being resolved; tho' it's not really possible to do more than guess how or why' (6 November 1971). By the time that Golding lent his dream in modified form to Wilf Barclay, the anti-hero of his novel *The Paper Men* (1984), he was certain of its therapeutic properties: having borne a long crisis of his own, Wilf wakes up after the dream to find that 'the boil had burst, the pain and the strain had gone'.³ Golding's recovery may have been less sudden, but he gradually recognised that the dream had allowed him to take a first essential step towards renewed health.

To understand the dream, it is necessary to understand the immediate crisis that provoked it. Since the late 1960s, Golding had been suffering from a severe case of writer's block, and growing increasingly frustrated that the next book seemed such a remote prospect. *The Pyramid*, his sixth novel, had been published in 1967, just thirteen years after his first; the seventh, *Darkness Visible*, would not appear until 1979. Golding's was a writing career with a black hole in the middle. Projects had been started and abandoned; family anxieties caused insomnia; life seemed 'pointless'; and in those bleak circumstances, he reached for what he called 'the old, old anodyne'—alcohol. This was the emergency in 1971, when the 'raw intensity' of 'daylight perception' could only be withstood by heavy drinking ('History of a Crisis'). Yet for all his despair over lack of productivity, Golding retained one continuing outlet for an

imagination finding shelter from the unforgiving glare of waking hours: 'He said he couldn't write but had these amazing dreams'.⁴

During the summer of that year, he and his wife Ann holidayed in Italy. It was in Rome, at the Hotel Hassler above the Spanish Steps, that Golding dreamed his great dream. He gave an account in an unsent letter to his friend Wayland Young, before copying it into a journal (see Appendix).⁵ Thus began what soon became a daily exercise, in which he would write descriptions of any dreams he could remember from the previous night. Sometimes one or two, sometimes as many as eight, proved retrievable by the conscious mind. Numbering every one, and recalling as many details as possible, Golding finished each day's entry with a section titled 'Comment' (eventually abbreviated to 'Comm.') in which he attempted to tease out their meaning and significance. His dream journal for the calendar year 1972 amounted to more than 300,000 words. So successful was this cure for writer's block that Golding began to worry that he would have no time for 'experiencing at all—only writing about experiencing' (9 January 1972).

Golding kept a journal for the rest of his life, although its emphasis gradually changed; in later years, the events of his daylight hours took much more space. Even early in 1972, not long after starting to record his dreams, he considered the possibility of maintaining two journals—one marked 'w' for 'wake', the other 's' for 'sleep'. But in the initial stages of recovery, the act of writing dreams was a priority because it became a guarantor of wellbeing, repairing the link between the imagination and the page. Golding was wryly aware of his journals' value to a future audience: he was being 'far too kind to scholars' (9 January 1972). Still, the main beneficiary was the author himself. Prescribed mandrax for his insomnia along with antabus to treat alcoholism, he no longer dreaded 'a haunted night of wakefulness' ('History of a Crisis'), but looked forward to exploring the creativity of the unconscious mind.

Golding's guide through this dreamworld was Carl Jung, on several occasions quite literally: 'Dream ego is either following Jung or listening to him', he begins his account of one such dream (26 June 1976). Golding consistently preferred Jung's methods and interpretations over the 'reductive' Freud: Freud may have known that the mind had a 'cellar', but Jung gave proper consideration to the 'attic', too (13 January 1972; 22 January 1972). Golding admitted in 1970 that he had never read any Freud, but that did not stop him later from grouping Freud with Marx and Darwin as 'the three most crashing bores of the Western world'.⁶ His appreciation of Jungian psychology was deeper and of long standing. Reading Jung again in 1971, Golding found that his work 'had an immediate and most powerful relevance', and in an 'admission of discipleship' he travelled alone to Switzerland in October that year to see the places where Jung had grown up. It was, Golding reported, 'one of the most exciting, fruitful and also happy experiences of [his] life' ('History of a Crisis'), from which he arrived home invigorated for the new year's resolution to record his dreams daily.

Golding suffered recurrent nightmares well into old age about the cellar in his childhood home in Marlborough, having realised as a boy that the garden of his house had been reclaimed from the graveyard of the neighbouring church. The terror erupts several times in his fiction, notably when the eponymous villain of *Pincher Martin* (1956) remembers how his mind would 'go down three stories defenceless... down the terrible steps to where the coffin ends were crushed in the walls of the cellar'.⁷ The Freudian 'cellar' to which Golding is so perversely drawn, and that he is so desperate to avoid—even if it means avoiding Freud's work altogether—is therefore not merely the usual repository for sexual taboos; it holds deep fears of death and of a primeval malignity that must remain buried at all costs. Like the chestnut tree that he had once been in the habit of climbing as an 'escape' from 'the darkness of the churchyard',⁸ the Jungian 'attic' promised hope of salvation from those fears. Golding was particularly attracted to Jung's theory of the 'God-Image' as a reality present in the unconscious mind of all people. The God-Image was no proof of a deity's objective existence, but it was

psychologically valid (2 November 1971), an undeniable part of felt experience. Jung provided a convincing answer to Golding's exasperated belief in God, which was not a sustaining or uplifting faith but—as he put it on one occasion—a sense of 'why am I lumbered with this?'⁹

Golding's comments on his dreams are dotted with Jungian terminology: 'individuation', 'compensation', 'personal and collective unconscious', 'archetype', 'synchronicity', 'anima' and 'animus'. Even were he only to have read the texts named in his journal—*Aion*, 'On the Nature of Dreams', *Man and His Symbols*, 'The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales', a book of interviews—his knowledge of Jung's thought would have been detailed and appreciative. Dipping into Jung's letters, Golding found himself 'continually astonished by their fluency, volume, and a kind of massive scholarship that is nevertheless carried lightly'; Jung seemed like a 'magician' who held 'the key for our poor century' (27 June 1976). This admiration brought certain conspicuous risks. Picking up a coffee table book on Jung, Golding was reminded of 'how strange, the first time I read it, I found coming across whole sentences that I had originally thought of as written by myself!' (6 April 1972). He was also worried that by reading Jung he would inevitably dream Jung. Preferring to dream his own dreams, Golding briefly turned to what he called 'trivial' books instead, but abstinence did not prevent him from having Ann read Jung's 'The Aims of Psychotherapy' aloud (7 November 1971). Jung was the means by which Golding aimed to heal himself, and in doing so, to produce the work of which he was still capable.

Even Golding's criticism of Freud as 'reductive' was Jungian in origin. Jung had also called Freud's method reductive, by which he meant, specifically, that it was causal and backward-looking, finding sources for adult neurosis in childhood trauma. This, Golding agreed with Jung, was a satisfactory way of dealing with many dreams: 'wallpaper dreams', as Golding repeatedly called them in his journal. Yet, for significant dreams, it proved inadequate. Golding decided that although Freud and Jung were both 'dream people', Freud 'came short on the

question of value' because he did not allow for any distinction between 'one dream and the Great Dream' (27 July 1977). Jung wanted a method of understanding these major dreams—drawn, as he believed them to be, from the collective unconscious—that was constructive and forward-looking: dreams were the work of a self-regulating psyche attempting to compensate for an imbalance in the self, and by bringing a problem to the attention of the conscious mind they could help to restore wholeness and map a path into the future. As Golding put it after writing down one of his dreams, cryptically but in recognisably Jungian fashion, 'An awareness in the conscious [sic] appears to allow the appropriate psychic mechanism to act. There is compensation all right; I must look to see if any "forward" movement is hidden there' (6 January 1972).

Golding acknowledged the difficulty of communicating the force of dreams. As a context-bound message from one part of the mind to another, expressed in symbols from the personal and—were it a great dream—the collective unconscious, it was never intended for a wider audience. Jung may have been less willing than Freud to approach dreams as the distorted and disguised product of repression, but Golding did freely admit that even the conscious mind could struggle to make sense of dreams. In the first place, there was the problem of trying to recall them: 'the extent of preservation is a function of the speed with which you remember to remember. There are a few seconds during which memory is possible' (26 December 1971). Then, language was anyway insufficient for the task, because '[d]reams seem to present a strange mixture of the pictorial and the pictorially impossible' ('History of a Crisis'). Thirdly, the brutality of which dreams were capable encouraged a form of self-censorship: as Jung famously said against theosophy, 'One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular'.¹⁰ Finally, and relatedly, there was the temptation, hard for a creative artist to resist, to prettify dreams by portraying them as more coherent and aesthetically pleasing. That specific temptation is frankly admitted, even embraced, several times in Golding's journals:

‘since I’m writing more than a thousand words a day on dream experience it had better be good!’ (9 January 1972).¹¹ But no matter how much care he took, Golding was never persuaded that other people would find his dreams valuable. When his friend Anthony Storr, the prominent psychoanalyst, showed a keenness to read the dream journals, Golding remained doubtful: ‘I wonder if even he understands how boring wallpaper dreams are?’ (1 January 1974). And in 1991, passing judgement on the latest book by Anthony Burgess, Golding confided to his journal that it was ‘as little entertaining as my account of my dreams!’ (29 March).

These reservations probably explain why Golding changed his mind about sharing the Rome dream with Wayland Young. Life-changing though it may have been, the dream is described in embarrassed terms: it means ‘everything and nothing, like Bosch—or it might be bosh’. Besides lending his name to a useful pun, Hieronymous Bosch stands here for a dreamlike art replete with a complex symbolism to which the key remains elusive, but which may just as likely be nonsensical. The dream leaves Golding ‘happy and moved to tears’, but it is also ‘absurd’ because its effect (or *affect*, to use the psychoanalytical term favoured by Golding) seems so incomprehensibly disproportionate. As if the magic might be dispelled by inquiry, this time there is no section underneath the dream marked ‘Comm:’; Golding’s explanations, scattered across more than a decade of writing, remain unusually tentative and even evasive. Although, months later, Golding notes, ‘I half understood even then what the dream was about’ (‘History of a Crisis’), he never shares that knowledge with his journal. The Rome dream keeps its mystery while its thousands of successors are summarily itemised and investigated.

The description of the Rome dream begins unprepossessingly with some relevant context. Golding and Ann had arrived at the Hassler late the previous day, and Ann being too tired to bother eating, Golding had headed off alone down the ‘violin-shaped’ Spanish Steps in search of a restaurant. On his way, he had passed ‘beautiful young things of all sexes’, who had illuminated the Steps with ‘fairground lights’ and strewn them with ‘costume jewellery’ [sic].

Wearing a suit, Golding had felt ‘a proper charlie’, the only man in Rome dressed that way, he surmised, except for doctors and undertakers’ mates. After his meal in the Via Barberini, he had returned soberly to bed. There, the next morning, his dream took him back to the ‘great, violin shape of the Spanish steps flamelit and noisy as they were’. But unlike his waking experience, which had accentuated a distance in age and dress and attitude from those beautiful non-binary youths, now Golding’s dream ego found a welcome. He was ‘related in space’ to the Spanish Steps, this curious phrase preparing for the immediate introduction of a blood relationship: ‘My father was one of the long-haired young men’. Later in the dream, ‘There was a very, very old man there who was related as closely to me as the steps were’. And in the dream’s unexpected coda, Golding himself becomes the father figure, suddenly transported into the dining-room of his childhood home in Marlborough where he is ‘putting up a vast doublebed’ for his newlywed daughter and son-in-law, Judy and Terrell. These different kinds of relatedness, running through the account from start to finish, provide a unifying motif amidst the instabilities of dream logic. They emphasise the impulse to build bridges—across generations, with the past and the future, with the dead and the living, with spaces and places, with the abandoned ideals and ambitions of youth.

Two principal figures appear among the *dramatis personae* of the Rome dream. The first is the father, here not merely resurrected but rejuvenated. Alec Golding is portrayed throughout his son’s writings as brilliant, saintly and entirely rational—in fact, a ‘Wellsian rationalist’, whose life was ‘a parallel in many ways with Wells’.¹² Small wonder that a dream about his father should have been preceded by an evening meal at what Golding called ‘a vast H.G. Wells’ Self-Service joint’, or, for that matter, that he should have described the Spanish Steps three times as ‘violin-shaped’, given that Alec was a highly accomplished violinist. Golding’s essay ‘The Ladder and the Tree’ describes Alec as ‘incarnate omniscience’, a man who could ‘carve a mantelpiece or a jewel box, explain the calculus and the ablative absolute’,¹³ who wrote textbooks in several of the sciences, painted, botanised, and even invented his own cosmology.

The father in the Rome dream appears equally impressive, even if his arcane knowledge fails to stand up to waking scrutiny:

He was explaining that the Norse gods couldn't build a proper temple at Åsgaard [sic], because they couldn't solve a particular geometrical proposition. He solved it for me or us, in a flash on a piece of paper explaining that the solution was why it was possible to build the proper temple of Santa Euphemia at Spoleto.

Meaningless though the conjunction of Valhalla and a small Umbrian church may seem to be, this demonstration touches on an age-old area of dispute between father and son, and in a gesture of atonement, generously gives the victory to the father's worldview. Golding wrote extensively about the conflict between scientific and religious belief systems, arguing that each on its own is inadequate. Strict rationalists in his novels—Piggy in *Lord of the Flies*, the science teacher Nick Shales (based on Golding's father) in *Free Fall*—fare badly because they place their faith in a well-ordered universe, and are destroyed by forces they cannot understand. There is, then, an irony in the dream-father's ability to solve with a 'geometrical proposition' a problem that even the Norse gods had proven powerless to overcome. This invades Golding's own creative territory: his fifth novel, *The Spire* (1964), describes the medieval construction of a 400-foot spire on a cathedral that lacks adequate foundations, so that the spire itself becomes a miracle in stone for as long as it stands. The Rome dream firmly reasserts the primacy of mathematics over such reckless acts of faith: geometry explains why buildings—even religious buildings—stand and fall.

If Alec's rationalism is vindicated by the dream, so, too, is his politics. 'The Ladder and the Tree' had established another abiding characteristic of Golding's father: 'He hated nothing in the whole world unless it were a tory, and then only as a matter of principle and on academic lines. He stumped the country for the Labour Party' (p. 168). Golding *files* inherited the affiliation

but little of the passion. He had first met Ann at a London gathering of the Left Book Club, but over decades she retained her political enthusiasm while his waned. 'Slowly but surely', he confessed in a journal entry of 21 March 1974, 'the labour party [...] are losing my vote'. Asked the following year if he was a party member, Golding disclosed that he had 'always voted labour but with increasing irritation' (26 January 1975). None of that irritation contaminates the dream. The party taking place on the Spanish Steps, Golding's dream ego is informed, 'was the Labour Party which was the Poetry Party'. (This is not the Labour Party of contemporary disappointments and betrayals, but something younger and unblemished: dream ego incites 'rollicking laughter' when he asks whether 'any of the high up labour leaders' are present.) In this most restorative of dreams, painful interlocking losses—the father, youth, left-wing idealism, artistic inspiration—are all made good.

Golding's first publication had been a slender volume of poetry that appeared in 1934 while he was still an undergraduate at Oxford. Preparing a second collection three years later, he found that his publisher, Macmillan, was 'no longer interested'.¹⁴ This became another loss to regret. Towards the end of his life, Golding shared with his journal the lugubrious belief that 'Even a first class novelist is second class. At the top of words there is only poetry' (13 August 1989). What more appropriate location than the Spanish Steps, yards from the Keats-Shelley Memorial House, to rejoin the Poetry Party after such a long exile? Fittingly, the dream's second principal character is another poet, of sorts. He turns out to be neither Keats nor Shelley, perpetually young as they were fated to remain, but a senex figure, a 'very, very old man' to whom Golding's dream ego is somehow closely related:

He had been famous as a great singer and/or maker of folk songs, ballads and the like.

He was Yeats, perhaps, or perhaps no one. He explained that he was too old now to sing; and he began to go away down some steep narrow steps at the side of the violin-shape.

He became older as he went and more crooked; but as he went down into the darkness
he began to sing.

The old man may be heading down towards the Keats-Shelley House, which is at the bottom and to one side of the Spanish Steps, but this journey has more to do with mortality than geography. Ageing visibly, he rediscovers his great gift of song, and in doing so, entrances the youths of the Poetry Party who rush over to the railings to listen as he begins his katabasis into the underworld. There is no description of his song—only the report that the memory of it is enough to move Golding to tears after he wakes. For an author with writer's block, who feels his creative powers waning as he edges towards death, it is a gloriously hopeful vision.

Why 'Yeats, perhaps'? Along with Tennyson, Yeats—*early* Yeats—had been the biggest and most baleful influence on Golding's poetry, and there are scattered references to him and his work throughout the journals. But in the dream Yeats represents, as Keats and Shelley cannot, an artistically potent old age: who better to embody the Jungian archetype of the Wise Old Man? Yeats is also central to the dream for more particular reasons that Golding nowhere acknowledges, and that—in a paradox possessing all dreamers—he seems to have known unwittingly. The journey of an 'aged man' to a 'holy city'; his alienation from 'the young'; his finding refuge in song even as his body is dying—Golding is dreaming his own strange revision of 'Sailing to Byzantium', a poem that speaks to his darkest fears. Yeats wrote 'Sailing to Byzantium' when he was sixty or sixty-one: poet and dreamer are the same age. Yet for all the thematic similarities, Golding's Rome does differ from Yeats's Byzantium in essential respects. While Yeats's protagonist leaves behind the 'generations' (and, for that matter, degenerations) of the natural world, and escapes to a holy city of timeless art, Golding's dream reconciles youth and age through a song that overcomes death's terrors. And whereas Yeats's protagonist looks forward to being alchemised into gold and perching on a bough, Golding's old man deteriorates

physically and goes down into the dark as he sings his final song. In an answer to Yeats that gratefully incorporates Yeats as inspiration, Golding dreams an artifice of mortality, not eternity.

‘What does it mean’, Jung wondered, ‘that my father returns in dreams and that he seems so real?’¹⁵ In Jung’s case, it meant that he started to think about life after death. Golding’s recovery in a single dream of his two fathers—the biological and the poetical—is also forward-looking, but with a focus on life *before* death. The dream lays bare existing anxieties about advancing age and declining artistic powers; about loneliness and loss; about the relinquishing of the youthful ideals embodied in poetry, politics and music; about mortality; and about the need to provide for the next generation before ‘going away in the dark’. More importantly, though, it is a dream of restitution, responding to those anxieties rather than merely replaying them. Golding’s ‘very, very old man’ is a textbook Jungian psychopomp, mediating between the unconscious and the conscious mind and guiding by example; in doing so, he shows the dreamer the possibility of an unexpected triumph against diminution even as death looms inescapably. He comes in the guise of a ‘great singer and/or maker of folk songs’ because the form taken by this triumph will be a revived creativity.

Golding’s prolific late phase comprises six novels finished before his death in 1993, each of them bearing visible traces of the Rome dream and its affect. A new and—given his daily habits—unsurprising preoccupation with journal-writing shapes the next two novels: *Darkness Visible* (1979), in which Matty records visitations by angels, intending, as he innocently puts it, ‘to show I am not mad’;¹⁶ and the Booker-prizewinning journal-as-novel *Rites of Passage* (1980). Dreams occur regularly, and now have the potential to be transformative even when characters doubt and deny their value. *The Double Tongue* (1995), Golding’s posthumously-published novel, is among other things a disquisition on the nature of numinous experiences and their relationship to dreams. Its narrator, Arieka, the Delphic Pythia, remembers a time when she ‘took much account of dreams’, although she has since learnt ‘mostly’ to dismiss them as ‘the

rubbish of our minds'.¹⁷ So much for Golding's journal, notwithstanding that expedient 'mostly'. People who 'ordered their actions' according to their dreams, Arieka concludes, 'were trying to walk on water'. Whether this indicates the foolishness of the enterprise or its potential access to the miraculous remains moot. Arieka, after all, is a priestess who cannot account for her own inspiration; on one occasion, she discovers that her 'sleep' has been a mantic trance in which she spoke prophecies (p. 98).

As a disbelieving mystic, Arieka joins a long line of characters in Golding's novels who move between the preternatural and the rational. To the question, 'What is the most interesting thing in the world?', Golding was once reported to have answered, "saints. I don't mean very good people. I mean people around whom miracles happen."¹⁸ Very few may be blessed with such access to the numinous in their daily lives, but Golding is fascinated by dreams because they make us all visionaries, receiving unbidden wonders from mysterious forces that leave us uncertain as to how (or whether) to act on them. They are at once commonplace and uncanny—bosh and Bosch. Golding offers another conspicuous example at the end of his *Sea Trilogy* (of which *Rites of Passage* comprises the opening instalment). Edmund Talbot, his late-Georgian hero, has a 'kind of dream' that threatens to overturn everything he has come to believe on his arduous journey from callowness to wisdom. Freshly landed in colonial Australia to serve His Majesty's Government, Talbot dreams himself buried to the neck in the earth, from where he observes the more politically radical of his fellow travellers riding into the unmapped interior to establish their pantisocracy: 'You would have thought from the excitement and the honey light, from the crowd that followed them, from the laughter and, yes, the singing, you would have thought that they were going to some festival of joy'.¹⁹ This may seem a long way from the Spanish Steps, but it shares the excitement and the crowd and the laughter and the singing. Perhaps through loss of nerve, or perhaps through the saving grace of commonsense—neither he nor the reader can be certain—Talbot chooses not to follow his dream.

Countless other echoes endorse the Rome dream as the primary (if not only) begetter of Golding's late phase, but it needs a still more thoroughgoing commitment—the writing of an entire novel—to do justice to its causes, meanings, and consequences. In a journal entry for 12 November 1979, Golding notes of a soon-to-be-abandoned novel, provisionally titled 'The Goat and Compasses', that it must contain

the great dream that positively whirls the man round to face away from the girl, and towards his own death: and of course he finds when he faces it that he becomes young again. This begins to look more and more like the spine so to speak, of the next book.

Several years later, he copies this passage into a manuscript notebook,²⁰ where it heads an early draft of what will indeed become his next (that is, ninth) published novel, *The Paper Men*. The lines stand as a signpost for what follows, as Golding attempts in fiction to take some measure of a dream that is capable of saving a man's life.

Derwent May called Golding's novel 'a public self-abasement of a particularly unpleasant and unnecessary kind'.²¹ Anthony Burgess considered it 'banal'.²² Even Frank Kermode, the most perceptive and persuasive of Golding's champions, acknowledged that it only amounted to 'a concerto for piccolo'.²³ Dismissed as an aberration by most reviewers, *The Paper Men* continues to baffle on those rare occasions when it is noticed at all. John Carey, Golding's sympathetic biographer, finds it incoherent: far from considering the Rome dream to be the 'spine' of the book, he groups it with 'supernatural' elements that 'seem extraneous'.²⁴ At the very least, this consensus overlooks the novel's importance to a wider understanding of Golding's late productivity. However minor, *The Paper Men* is also central, because it is Golding's most direct attempt to explain his own creative processes and their relationship to dreaming.

The novel is more carefully plotted than criticisms of its roughness allow: 'The difficulty with *The Paper Men* is neither more nor less than starting to write it!', Golding complains to his journal. 'You can go on planning forever' (16 March 1982). The plot, at first sight, may not seem complex enough to justify such meticulous preparation: this is the first-person story of Wilf Barclay, an English writer pursued by his indefatigable would-be biographer, Rick L. Tucker. But not for nothing do these two men pause together and listen to an Alpine stream:

There was the cheerful babble, a kind of frivolity as if the thing, the Form, enjoyed its bounding passage downward, through space. Then running under that was a deep, meditative hum as if despite the frivolity and surface prattle the thing sounded from some deep secret of the mountain itself. (p. 83)

As paper men, Wilf and Rick are inevitably reminded of James Kenneth Stephen's squib at the expense of Wordsworth's 'two voices': 'one is of the deep | [...] | And one is of an old half-witted sheep'.²⁵ The recording of the stream's disparate voices calls attention to the novel's claim for its own working methods: frivolous prattle on the surface cannot quite drown out the presence of something mysteriously profound. That profundity is Jungian in nature, so much so that Golding sets the scene in Jung country near Lake Geneva, the novel's descriptions having been inspired by his pilgrimage in 1971. Earlier in the chapter, Wilf dreams himself 'watching the great glacier on the other side of the valley; [...] I saw that it was my own consciousness that hung there' (p. 69). The mountain's 'deep secret' is its own nature: immense, firm, fixed, immutable, it becomes a symbol for the collective unconscious, from which a personal unconscious might hang or flow.

What Derwent May luridly condemns as self-abasement is a crucial correspondence between character and author. Golding's extreme capacity for shame seems to have been carefully honed. Of his earlier novels, the two most autobiographical—*Free Fall* (1959) and *The Pyramid* (1967)—are discomfitingly candid in their depictions of male cruelty, lust and

foolishness. Even so, *The Paper Men* easily outdoes its precursors in its author's degree of self-humiliation. Having been questioned about his similarity to Wilf, Golding noted in his journals his own 'refusal to allow himself to be thought good, or wise' (14 December 1986). Ann Golding had foreseen the problem, warning her husband to make clear in the novel that Wilf was not Bill, and suggesting that, for the avoidance of doubt, Wilf might even meet Mr and Mrs Golding in the course of his travels. Briefly, and not entirely seriously, Golding considered adding a one-sentence preface: 'No character in this little comedy resembles [sic] any living or dead person—not even the author' (18 April 1983). There are pressing reasons why a denial might have seemed advisable. Wilf is an ageing novelist whose alcohol-sodden journeys across Europe are bankrolled by the continuing success of his first book; in case that does not sound familiar enough, he shares with his creator a crippling acrophobia, a 'scraggy yellow-white beard' (p. 30), and a life-changing dream that takes place on the Spanish Steps. He is also a terrible (ex-) husband and father, cowardly, vain, callous. The characterisation remains so comprehensively vicious because Golding is writing and assimilating his shadow: 'for my part', he observes on 18 March 1973, 'I have learned through or from [Jung] to recognise my own shadow for the really murderous thing it is'. Wilf is Golding without the benefit of the doubt, his cruelties intensified, his kindnesses hidden. Yet for all these grotesque exaggerations, the Rome dream only yields its secrets if context is preserved: it must be dreamt, and can only be dreamt, by a character resembling Golding himself. As Wilf asks in another of the novel's drafts, 'How can I have been tormented and then by a dream healed of my torment and made happy quite unreasonably?'²⁶ This is Golding's own perplexed and thankful question, to which *The Paper Men* is itself the closest he comes to an answer.

As Wilf is not quite Golding, his dream is not quite Golding's, either. He keeps a journal like Golding, driven by a similar compulsion: 'the thing was terribly boring and made me feel faintly sick. But I always kept it even if only one sentence for a day' [sic] (p. 25). And '[f]or a man who doesn't normally dream' (p. 102)—as Wilf describes himself at one point—there are

frequent accounts of ‘nightmares or strange half-waking dreams’ (p. 54), dreams ‘suffused with worry’ (p. 102), ‘the same dream over and over again’ (p. 156), even dreams that ‘waited’ to pursue the dreamer into his waking hours (p. 157). On one occasion, Wilf dreams of Rick’s young wife, Mary Lou: ‘She was talking about solid geometry and explaining the three fundamental curves of the calculus by reference to the immense cone of mountain that stood over us’ (pp. 41-42). This is a remnant of Golding’s Rome dream, transferring to Mary Lou the geometrical expertise of the long-haired father. But her primary role in the novel is to be the ‘girl’ from whom, according to Golding’s manuscript note, Wilf must turn away and face his death. Golding relates the immediate effect of his own dream: ‘for years I had not accepted my age, and could only do so now because the crisis was resolving’ (‘History of a Crisis’). Wilf, too, admits that he had been ‘holding on to time’ as if to ‘stop the process’, but that the dream had ‘turned [him] round’: ‘I knew that the way I was going, towards death, was the way everybody goes, that it was—healthy and right and *consonant*’ (p. 172).

Wilf dreams his dream at a hotel unnamed in the novel, but clearly identified by a draft: ‘It’s the Hassler and very understanding’.²⁷ Exhausted by years of dodging Rick, unnerved by the worldwide influence of Rick’s multi-millionaire backer Halliday, tortured by invisible stigmata on his hands and feet, recovering from a stroke that doubles as a vision of his own damnation—Wilf is in the midst of a catastrophic mental, physical and spiritual breakdown when he arrives in Rome. On the Spanish Steps, Golding had passed ‘beautiful young things of all sexes’; Wilf finds the Steps ‘littered with dropouts, hippies, junkies, drabs, punks, nancies and lesies and students’ (p. 159). And where Golding had seemed to appreciate their fairground lights and costume jewellery, Wilf is loftily dismissive:

all of them were wearing guitars or playing them very badly or trying to sell the tin shapes they’d cut out and spread round on the stairs as necklaces or rings or earrings or noserings, there were carpets of artificial flowers and so on. (p. 159)

Wilf himself is hell. Retreating to his hotel bedroom, he sees (or hallucinates) Halliday standing atop a nearby church; he sits on his bed burning and trembling and shaking, and his pain gradually increases until he enters 'some mode of being that wasn't quite being awake or simply being mad'. This is the immediate context in which Wilf dreams; at least, he states uncertainly, 'You could say that I dreamed' (p. 160).

Wilf's dream is simpler and more straightforwardly compensatory than Golding's. Redeemed by his unconscious mind from his own intolerance, he now sees the young people as 'neither male nor female or perhaps they were both and it was of no importance' (p. 161). Everything tawdry is transformed into the beautiful: the artificial flowers become 'heaps of flowers all blazing inside and out with the radiance' (pp. 160-61); the tin shapes are replaced by 'the glitter of the jewels' (p. 160), and the bad guitar-playing by 'a music of the steps' (p. 161): the young people 'held hands and moved and the movement was music' (p. 161). What Golding had noticed the evening before his dream—that the Steps are 'violin-shaped'—enters Wilf's dream with the force of revelation: 'the steps had the symmetrical curve of a musical instrument, guitar, cello, violin'. (Without a violinist father, Wilf has no reason to be more specific.) As for the senex figure, major differences between Golding's Rome dream, the novel's drafts and the published version betray ongoing indecision about his identity and significance.

The old man in Golding's dream was 'Yeats, perhaps, or perhaps no one'. The uncertainty risks recalling Ezra Pound's exasperated annotations of Eliot's *Waste Land* manuscript: 'dam per'apsez', 'Perhaps be damned', 'make up yr. mind'.²⁸ Golding never does make up his mind. Even without the perhapses, a draft of the novel retains and, if anything, intensifies his original puzzlement:

I was standing on the next roof and looking down at the Spanish steps. [...] Then I knew that [Halliday] was standing beside me on the roof and we went down and stood among the people [...]. He stood on my left side. He wore a robe and he was old. He was very famous for music and singing and the people were asking him to sing and he would not, he said he was too old. He was me, I found, with the robe over me and my old head above it and at the same time he was he, he was Halliday. He turned and I turned. How can I use language to say that we were one and two? But we walked to the left, not down the steps but along them; and as we went he, or I or we, began to sing. It was of all songs and of all singing the deepest and the most beautiful. It turned the being of a man from looking with terror back at what was following him, to looking calmly and peacefully to the path at his feet.²⁹

Throughout *The Paper Men*, Halliday is a reclusive and faceless figure: more Howard Hughes than Christian saviour. Nevertheless, his invisibility, his supposedly global influence, and the holiness built into his name explain why Wilf's dream should have granted him this bizarre apotheosis. Halliday sings as the Yeats figure had sung, the curative effect being so sudden that, while still dreaming, Wilf overcomes his fear of death. Halliday and Wilf are 'one and two', and in that binity can be heard the healing and return to wholeness of a riven psyche.

Without knowledge of Golding's Rome dream or the novel's drafts, the reader of *The Paper Men* has little inkling of what has been learned on the Spanish Steps. In one of the drafts, Wilf wakes to a new understanding: 'My life was changed. I accepted my mortality and the acceptance was like the instant healing of a disease'.³⁰ Golding probably cut these lines because he worried about the suddenness of the transformation, but the finished novel is hardly less explicit in its Jungian insistence on forward movement: 'the pain and the strain had gone because I knew where I was going myself, or rather the direction in which I was facing and that there was no more need to run' (p. 161). Had Wilf dreamed Golding's dream, or even dreamed

the dream ascribed to him in the draft, this new knowledge may have been warranted. The dream of the final version, however, is a diminished thing:

I was standing on the roof next door where Halliday had stood. I was looking down at the steps. [...] I found that he was standing by me on the roof of his house after all and we went down together and stood among the people [...]. Then they made music of the steps. [...] I saw they were neither male nor female or perhaps they were both and it was of no importance. What mattered was the music they made. Male and female was of no importance for me, he said, taking me by the hand and leading me to one side. (pp. 160-61)

The journals reveal that Golding toyed with the idea of redrafting *The Paper Men* to address more explicitly the question of 'what Halliday may be', if only so as to admit his own 'ignorance'; his best guess was 'God or devil or demi-something' (2 June 1983). His editor at Faber, Charles Monteith, reached a similar non-conclusion, calling Halliday 'a sort of deity (second division)'. In manuscript, Halliday was an unknowable occult figure, a dark creative daimōn, a Wise Old Man who sings and inspires and therefore lives on despite his death. Now much of the mystery has been stripped away, and it is hard to explain why Wilf's terror of his own mortality should have been instantaneously overcome. There is no celebration of creativity in the face of impending death: the only music-makers are the sexless young people.

Golding responded to his Rome dream by keeping a journal until the day before he died: it totals 2.4 million words. Add to that the six novels, a collection of essays, and a travel book, and the prizes that this resurgence attracted—the Booker, the Nobel—and the extent of his indebtedness is plain. The dream offers a vision of a creativity that goes singing down into the dark. As Golding writes in his journal: 'to look forward down the small slope to death is proper;

and to find the work that should go with that look forward is proper' (13 January 1972). Poor Wilf has no such fortune. Saved though he may have been, and 'happy' though he repeatedly declares himself after years of pain and misery, he cannot recover his gift: 'I ordered a book for keeping a journal but when I tried to fill it with that same lucid prose which people will find in most of my books, my writing hand hurt like the devil and I had to stop' (p. 162). His Wise Old Man failed to sing.

Appendix

Dear Wayland,

Ann says I should write down a dream I had; and as I can't write it to her—she's sitting a foot or two away—I'm writing it to you.

We got here latish yesterday and Ann was too tired to eat; and I went off slumming down the Spanish steps, which perhaps are only now fulfilling their proper function, violin-shaped as they are and full of beautiful young things of all sexes. The lights were fairground lights and the steps strewn with costume jewellery. I felt a proper charlie—the only bloke wearing a suit in Rome except doctors and undertakers' mutes. I got myself a meal in a vast H.G.Wells' Self-Service joint in the V. Barberini and went soberly to bed. Believe it or not, all that is important background stuff.

Late this morning—7?—8? I had a vivid dream, meaning everything and nothing, like Bosch—or it might be bosh.

I was related in space to the great, violin shape of the Spanish steps flamelit and noisy as they were. My father was one of the long-haired young men. He was explaining that the Norse gods couldn't build a proper temple at Åsgaard, because they couldn't solve a particular geometrical proposition. He solved it for me or us, in a flash on a piece of paper explaining that the solution was why it was possible to build the proper temple of Santa Euphemia at Spoleto. Then he or you perhaps or perhaps Ann explained that this party going on was the Labour Party which was the Poetry Party. There was a very, very old man there who was related as closely to me as the steps were. He had been famous as a great singer and/or maker of folk songs, ballads and the like. He was Yeats, perhaps, or perhaps no one. He explained that he was too old now to sing; and he began to go away down some steep narrow steps at the side of the violin-shape. He became older as he went and more crooked; but as he went down into the darkness he began to sing. Immediately the whole mass of the Poetry Party rushed to the railings by the steps to listen, as the great voice went away into the dark.

I ought to add that I asked you or Ann or my Father or someone if there were any of the high up labour leaders present at the party and the answer was rollicking laughter.

I woke up happy and moved to tears at the memory of the old man's voice going away in the dark. I still am; and that's why this absurd dream must be communicated. At the end we were all in the dining room at Marlborough putting up a vast doublebed (brass) for Judy and Terrell.

Notes

¹ Unpublished journal entry, 15 March 1972. The journals are in private hands, and I am grateful to Judy Carver and William Golding Ltd. for permission to quote from them. Dates are given in the text for all subsequent quotations from the journals.

² Golding wrote this unpublished autobiographical account across blank pages of a 1971 diary. Internal evidence places the date of composition some time in the months immediately after October 1971.

³ *The Paper Men* (Faber, 1984), p. 161.

⁴ Liz Young, quoted by John Carey, *William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies* (Faber, 2009), p. 334.

⁵ Golding copied the letter onto diary pages for 19 August 1971. The dream in the Appendix, transcribed with the kind permission of William Golding Ltd., is from this source.

⁶ Interviewed by Jack I. Biles, *Talk: Conversations with William Golding* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), p. 18. Golding, 'Belief and Creativity', *A Moving Target* (Faber, 1982), pp. 186-87.

⁷ *Pincher Martin* (Faber, 1956), p. 139.

⁸ 'The Ladder and the Tree', in *The Hot Gates and Other Occasional Pieces* (Faber, 1965), p. 170.

⁹ 'William Golding talks to John Carey', interview recorded on 10-11 July 1985, in *William Golding: The Man and his Books*, ed. John Carey (Faber, 1986), p. 175.

¹⁰ 'The Philosophical Tree', *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 13: *Alchemical Studies*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 265-66.

¹¹ Golding erroneously wrote the date as 9 January 1971.

¹² 'William Golding talks to John Carey', pp. 171, 172.

¹³ In *The Hot Gates and Other Occasional Pieces*, p. 168.

¹⁴ Quoted by Carey, *William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies*, p. 62.

¹⁵ *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Vintage, 1989), pp. 96-97. First published in English 1963.

¹⁶ *Darkness Visible* (Faber, 1979), p. 86.

¹⁷ *The Double Tongue* (Faber, 1995), p. 33.

¹⁸ Quoted by Stephen Medcalf, 'Bill and Mr Golding's Daimon', in *William Golding: The Man and his Books*, pp. 30-44 (p. 43).

¹⁹ *To the Ends of the Earth: A Sea Trilogy* (Faber, 1991), p. 752. The dream appears in the third part of the trilogy, originally published as *Fire Down Below* (Faber, 1989).

²⁰ University of Exeter Special Collections EUL MS 429/WG E 40 MS. A blue hardcover notebook with an early draft of *The Paper Men*.

²¹ Quoted by Carey, *William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies*, p. 438.

²² 'A Gesture of Humility', *The Observer*, 5 February 1984, p. 53.

²³ Quoted by Carey, *William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies*, p. 438.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

²⁵ 'A Sonnet', ll. 1, 5. *Lapsus Calami and Other Verses* (Cambridge: Macmillan & Bowes, 1896), p. 106.

²⁶ University of Exeter Special Collections EUL MS 429/WG E 34. Typescript pages from drafts of *The Paper Men*.

²⁷ University of Exeter Special Collections EUL MS 429/WG E 31. A typescript draft of *The Paper Men*.

²⁸ *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (Faber, 1971), pp. 31, 45, 47.

²⁹ University of Exeter Special Collections EUL MS 429/WG E 34.

³⁰ University of Exeter Special Collections EUL MS 429/WG E 40.