

## ARCHITECTURE MEETS TECHNOLOGY

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[Assignment: Write an essay on the relationship between Jocelin and the cathedral. This topic was generated by William Golding's *The Spire* which was used in this course.]

For want of a nail the shoe was lost,  
For want of a shoe the horse was lost,  
For want of a horse the rider was lost,  
For want of a rider the kingdom was lost,  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail!

George Herbert

(1) In William Golding's novel, *The Spire*, the central character, Dean Jocelin, a priest, wants very much to glorify his house of God by building onto it an immense spire. From the beginning of "his Folly," Jocelin realizes that he "must remember that the spire isn't everything" (5), but unfortunately for him, "at the moment of vision, the eyes see nothing" (20). During the construction of the spire, Jocelin comes to regard the spire as a living, breathing object, which must be sustained by many sacrifices that he must make for it. As the spire and the cathedral itself become more human, Jocelin begins to sacrifice the humanness of those around him as well as his own. Finally, Jocelin makes the ultimate sacrifice, the gift of his own life to the cathedral and spire, so that they may stand.

(2) Very early in the novel we can see that Jocelin has a special relationship with the cathedral. Even at the most basic levels of this relationship--for instance, in the manner Jocelin describes his cathedral--we observe a special intimacy. Jocelin views the cathedral as a living being possessing human characteristics. Before the onset of construction, Jocelin believes that the model of the cathedral looks "like a man lying on his back. The nave was his legs placed together, the transepts on either side were his arms outspread. The choir was his body; and Lady Chapel . . . was his head" (4). As the novel progresses, Jocelin makes reference to the human qualities of the cathedral more and more frequently. Thus he says, "now I lay a hand on the very body of my church. Like a surgeon" (9). The building sweats, while the pinnacles "had grouped themselves" (119), and the stones "screamed near him" (75) and were singing. The workmen build "a skin of glass" (112) and later, they "could hear the groans of the arcades as they stiffened their stone shoulders" (169). The transept develops a "wound" (108), and the steel band around the spire comes to be "alive and talking" (127).

(3) Jocelin's belief in the cathedral's gradual metamorphosis into a being is contrasted and emphasized by his dehumanization of his friends and peers. Jocelin is fascinated by other people, but he observes and loves them at a distance. He takes great pains to analyze the relationships between Roger and Rachael Mason and the Pangalls. He describes elaborately the strength of the feelings between Roger and Goody and the "tent" that they have come to be in together. Jocelin proclaims that these four people are "like four pillars at the crossways of the building" (57).

Later, Jocelin sees them more as "clock figures, frozen in attitudes of mechanical activity and waiting for the hour to strike" (73). He views them not as humans with emotions and opinions of their own, but rather as objects which he can manipulate at will. He views everyone as being tied to the cathedral in some permanent way, thus ignoring the free will of these human beings. Even the spire, in Jocelin's eyes, has a greater right to decide for itself whether to fall or stand than people do to live or die. The death of a workman does not greatly affect Jocelin or his motivation to complete construction. To him, it is just another necessary sacrifice. Furthermore, Jocelin begins to regard Roger as a tool and even an animal leashed by his wife Rachel. The most astonishing example of Jocelin's lack of faith in others and his drive to build the spire can be seen in his labeling of Father Anselm as Father Anonymous and his lack of concern over the break in their friendship. To Jocelin, the cathedral is the only thing of significance, the only life.

(4) Jocelin's immediate relationship with the cathedral is one of intimacy. At some points, it may appear that Jocelin is the mother figure of the cathedral, while at others, the cathedral is the mother of Jocelin. Still at other moments, the two appear as lovers. Nevertheless, they always seem to be one with each other. Early in the novel Jocelin feels surrounded by love in his cathedral: "He felt life," "the air around them was different" (51, 52). Jocelin begins to have dreams in which he, himself, is the cathedral. "It seemed to Jocelin that he lay on his back in bed and then he was lying on his back in the marshes, crucified, and his arms were transepts" (59). As the church tower had nurtured birds in their nests, it had also nurtured Jocelin, but during construction, "all nests were bare" (71). Here they begin to become one. When the church is under tension, Jocelin is under tension. Jocelin's laughing fits begin around the same time that the stones begin to sing. Subsequently, the stone head of Jocelin gets thrown into the great pit (76). With this action, Jocelin can never again turn away from his Folly; he has become a part of it. "There was a kind of necessary marriage; Jocelin, and the spire" (88). Jocelin only possesses a "little awareness of himself as human" (88). He watches his spire grow up as a mother would her child, and "he would climb eagerly, like a child that seeks comfort from its mother" (107). He endures as the pillars endure. He feels what the spire feels. He says, "This I have done for my true love" (132).

(5) Having experienced this oneness with the spire, Jocelin begins to lose his hold on life. Jocelin becomes "breathless" (145). Upon seeing himself reflected in a glass of the spire, "for a moment he thought of exorcism" (149). Soon after, he realizes that he has been "bewitched" (151) by the pagan workmen and his own love of his cathedral. "It was as if the slackening of one cable had been accompanied by the tightening of another" (154). In this give-and-take action, Jocelin donates not only his soul, but his very body to the cathedral. His notebook explains that he had wanted a oneness with the cathedral from the start. While the spire remains standing, Jocelin begins to "stink like a corpse" (199). He states, "I gave it my body" (204). He has consumption of the back, just as the back of the cathedral has been consumed by the great spire. One of Jocelin's final wishes is to be buried, "a prone skeleton, lapped in skin, head fallen back, mouth open" (211), in the position of the cathedral.

( 6 ) Father Anonymous' words, "life is a rickety building," are all too true in *The Spire*. With his dream, Dean Jocelin becomes consumed to the point of no return. Obviously, Jocelin's desire to build his spire is not rooted in good, as the appearance of the angel leads him to believe, but rather in evil, lust, and greed. The unholy transformation that occurs leads to the conclusion that proper and just motives in all actions are necessary. In the novel, the unholy mother and child that Jocelin sees in the spire, as well as his marriage to it, destroy the good mother in Goody, and destroy the marriages of both the Masons and the Pangalls.