One's immediate impressions on reading *The Pyramid* (1967) are of how radically it differs from its predecessors. There is almost nothing here, for instance, of the sustained narrative drive that characterizes *The Spire* or Golding's earliest books. Indeed, two sections of *The Pyramid* were first published separately, and Golding presents the three parts of the novel as relatively independent units—each one centering on the relationship between the narrator and a different character—although of course the three parts in combination illuminate each other and, in sequence, chart a particular development in the narrator. But the surface itself of *The Pyramid* reveals little of the tension and apparent complexity which mark, in their different ways, the earlier novels—in part because Golding's narrator in this book is rather muted as a character and often imperceptive. One more new feature is a number of essentially comic passages in the first half of *The Pyramid*, although through the last segment of the story the eccentric Bounce Dawlish, a music teacher who might be treated comically in another context, is in fact represented as the pathetic victim of her father and of the village in which she lives. But the chief difference between what has gone before and *The Pyramid* is that its materials do not create the impression of being as tightly structured and thematically oriented as those of the preceding novels. The complaint which we have seen lodged by some against Golding's earlier stories—that their fictional worlds are too rigidly cut to a pattern of meaning which every detail must serve—can hardly apply to *The Pyramid*, where Golding seems intent on fostering an illusion of actuality and fleshing out his world with gratuitous detail.

In some ways *The Pyramid* resembles *Free Fall*: both are first-person narratives with the adult protagonist looking back over his past; both employ oblique narrative structures;
both are set in twentieth-century England and place their narrators firmly in a social context. But the differences between the two are more striking than their similarities. Sammy Mountjoy is involved in an agonizing search for the moment when he lost his freedom, whereas Oliver—the main character in *The Pyramid*—describes a series of relationships in which he has participated, often rather observing others than projecting his own consciousness for us. Sammy, driven to discover some pattern by which he can understand himself, keeps analyzing his experiences; Oliver simply re-creates his with little retrospective commentary. A universe instinct with divinity is one fact of Sammy's experience in *Free Fall*, and the novel as a whole focuses on his personal condition as the guilty human which he has become. But the divine never manifests itself in *The Pyramid*, and this novel—instead of treating the interior of its central character in preeminently moral terms—explores the social environment as much as it does Oliver and shows him fundamentally conditioned as a person by that environment. While Sammy remains haunted from first to last by an awareness of the riddling intermixture of the divine and the secular which defines his existence, Oliver comes to realize only at the end of the book how thoroughly his life has been determined by that world which he has exhibited to us all along.

There is one important respect in which *The Pyramid* may be regarded as moving on thematically from Golding's previous novels. They have charted for us, in their various fashions, the moral consequences to man of being enclosed within himself; and *The Pyramid*, as I understand it, presents us with a man who recognizes finally the degree to which he is enclosed within himself. But the limiting condition for the individual highlighted in the earlier books is
man's moral nature itself, whereas in *The Pyramid* the limiting condition seems to be the individual's social environment. In *The Spire*, we may remember, a Jocelin burdened by his sense of personal guilt thinks, "If I could go back, I would take God as lying between people and to be found there" (p. 212). The epigraph of *The Pyramid* refers directly to "love" rather than to God and offers it as the ideal that should inform the relations of the individual with his fellows: "If thou be among people make for thyself love, the beginning and end of the heart." But the story portrays an individual so deeply influenced by the social facts and attitudes of the world he matures in that he cannot break out of himself decisively in any of the three personal relationships which he depicts for us, even though he becomes conscious of his failure at last.

What I have said about *The Pyramid*'s lowering of narrative tension, the circumstantiality of its represented life, and its concern with a rather ordinary subject matter might be construed as evidence that the book betrays a lapse in that imaginative vitality so characteristic of its predecessors. And such may indeed be the case, for certainly this story never grips us as forcibly as do Golding's earlier fictions. Yet we have already observed him radically shifting both his materials and his manner from novel to novel, and *The Pyramid* tempts one to view it as Golding's move into what is for him a new fictional terrain, the thoroughlygoingly realistic novel. It might even be argued that the relative lack of narrative resonance in this story is expressive of Oliver's imperceptiveness, and that society in fact imposes its values on the ordinary individual so necessarily and indiscernibly that at least one accurate way of dramatizing his situation is to reveal him at point after point as already imprisoned by values to which he has been exposed. But in order to discover precisely
what *The Pyramid* accomplishes, we must examine it more closely: first, its narrative structure; then some of the figures who people this world and Golding's characterization in the novel; finally, his meaning.

*The Pyramid* comprises three sections, each of them dwelling largely on the relationship between a younger Oliver and some other person in Stilbourne, the English village in which he has grown up before succeeding as a chemist. The first part describes the course of his involvement at the age of eighteen with Evie Babbacombe, the Town Crier's daughter, who ranks low in the social hierarchy so carefully preserved by Stilbourne but excites "every male for miles round." ¹ The second section takes place several months later, on Oliver's return after his first term at Oxford, and records his encounter with Evelyn De Tracy, an outsider who has come to direct a production of the Stilbourne Operatic Society. In the third portion a middle-aged Oliver is drawn back to Stilbourne once more, where he learns of the death of Bounce Dawlish, relives several segments of his childhood when she was his music teacher, suddenly realizes as an adult what his feelings as a child about her were, then finally catches sight of the person he has become. Each section, while revealing a good deal about Stilbourne and Oliver's parents, themselves firmly imbedded in the life of the village, takes its governing shape from the progress of Oliver's acquaintance with another person to a significant event which ought to engender insight and sympathy in him. But in the first two events Oliver fails to comprehend the evidence before his eyes—in part an expression, I take it, of the degree to which his imagination is bound by the norms of Stilbourne—and, if he is temporarily moved by the third event, it does not essentially alter his response to the person
in question. Although from time to time he reacts against Stilbourne's values, speaks as a social critic, or seems on the verge of breaking out from the self constituted by his family and society to engage immediately with another human, the trajectory of the novel as a whole shows Oliver arriving only at a perception of his inadequacy—in spite of the good will he so frequently displays and his normality, in spite of his successful career and the presumably happy marriage that we glimpse near the end of the story.

Although *The Pyramid* begins with a quickly paced adolescent escapade, the narrative movement through the opening of the novel's first section is rather leisurely as Golding, while detailing Oliver's fumbling attempts to win Evie for his pleasure, also sketches in the inhabitants of the village and its ways: the kindly father and waspish mother, thoroughly conventional, to both of whom Oliver is deeply attached; the Ewans next door, felt by all to be superior because the father is a doctor, a fact which young Bobby never forgets; Henry Williams, the friendly garageman (whom we shall see more of in the book's final section), and Captain Wilmot, wounded in the First World War and pensioned, who lives opposite Evie's family down in Chandler's Close and seems suspiciously fond of her; Sergeant Babbacombe, the violent father whose punishments Evie fears, and Mrs. Babbacombe, a joke to the village because she persists in greeting those above her—an utterly stratified society, in short, so fixed in its attitudes and intent upon all which goes in Stilbourne that Oliver, the son of a dispenser of medicines, cannot bring himself to walk along the main street with Evie. Oliver's pursuit of Evie itself is often treated comically by Golding through these opening pages, as in the episode at the start of the book where Oliver, inveigled by Evie, helps her current boyfriend, Bobby Ewan,
rescue a borrowed car from a pond at midnight and return it to the village so that Evie may not be found out, or in the later scene of the fight between the rivals, where Bobby, who rather ridiculously feels insulted, dances scientifically about, only to be thrashed by an awkward Oliver as surprised by his victory as is Bobby. This initially comic effect, however, owes most to the reflections of Oliver himself, our point of view in the story: his extravagant reactions, heated imaginings of Evie, absurd plottings to secure her, and sense of guilt in lusting after her establish him as typically adolescent. But the tone darkens somewhat as social and familial pressures begin to mount along with Oliver's desire for Evie: because she lives in Chandler's Close, Oliver needs continually to avoid being seen with her; as Oliver discovers, Evie herself has masked her adventures with Bobby Ewan by pretending to her family that Oliver is really courting her, for they can just conceive of her gaining Oliver as a husband but not aspiring to Bobby; and Oliver must constantly cope with his attentive parents, who at one point forbid him to buy the damaged motor bike on which Bobby has taken Evie riding (in part, because Oliver's mother intuits his interest in Evie), whereupon the frustrated Oliver smashes his fist into the piano which his parents treasure primarily because he plays it. In the pages that follow, the narrative tempo itself speeds up through the series of sexual engagements between Oliver and Evie which are crucial to our understanding of The Pyramid's first section.

In the prelude to Oliver's initial possession of Evie, he is so gripped by a combination of anger at Bobby's past successes with her, mortification at having broken the piano, and sheer physical need that he grabs her and tows her up a hill into a clump of trees, paying no attention to what she says. Evie does in fact cooperate, though at first with a "grin
that was at once knowing and avid and contemptuous” (p. 55), and Oliver’s immediate reaction to their designedly incomplete love-making is of his own physical relief. Then “Triumph and delight began to burgeon and spread in me,” and, when Evie accuses him of regarding her merely as a sexual object, he toys with her possessively, apparently incapable of imagining her as anything else, and keeps relishing the egotistical thought that “I had had this sulky, feminine, gorgeous creature” after she returns to the village (pp. 56–57). On their second meeting in the clump of trees Evie, suddenly excited by the appearance of her father in the village below, begs the naïve Oliver to “Hurt me” while making love, but then retreats into a sexual world of her own in which “a partner was necessary but not welcome,” and the spent Oliver quickly moves away from her to lie “with my face in the dead leaves” (pp. 62–63). As a result of this undesignedly completed experience, however, each of them starts blaming the other for Evie’s possible pregnancy, apprehensive of its social consequences. After Evie utters her hatred for the town, Oliver is momentarily stirred to sympathize with her plight as a girl and say, “Cheer up. It may never happen,” at which Evie “gave a kind of sob” (p. 64), a fact that conveys to Oliver her anxiety alone, though the reader may sense in it a feeling on her part that she has been rejected as a person in a new way by Oliver’s words. In any case, during the next days Oliver can only brood on the impossibility of going on to Oxford if he has fathered a baby, or the sniggers that would be provoked if he were to pay maintenance for an illegitimate child, or the essential horror of marrying Evie because “it would kill” his parents “To be related, even if only by marriage, to Sergeant Babbacombe” (p. 65). But after a time he learns from Evie that they are safe and learns also (in a scene that I shall come back to
later) that she has been beaten—by Captain Wilmot, as Oliver thinks—in a perverse sexual exercise. Oliver uses the knowledge to pressure her into new meetings—he regards her now as "my slave" (p. 73), a phrase that duplicates Bobby Ewan's earlier words to Oliver which have made friendship between those two impossible—but Evie counters by offering herself to him only out at the edge of the escarpment, in plain sight of the town, requiring at least this public acknowledgment from him. Oliver, though fearing "the eyes of Stilbourne on my back," is mastered by his desire, so takes her once more in an act marked by their alienation from each other: "She neither resisted nor co-operated; and afterwards, when I was gasping face downwards, she went away flushed, silent and ashamed" (p. 79). And they are indeed seen by Oliver's father, who has been peering through his binoculars at the escarpment because of a remark made to him earlier by Evie about the bestiality of all men, and whose parental reaction of muted shock confirms Oliver in his feelings of utter shame.

These three scenes are carefully framed to keep the reader conscious of Stilbourne and its pressures in the immediate background, pressures that always impinge upon and ultimately enclose the meetings of Evie and Oliver. His violence in the first one derives from his physical need, but also from his contempt for himself at pursuing Evie to satisfy that need, as well as from his guilt at just having struck the piano, a deed of brief rebellion against his parents; in the passage following the meeting, Oliver apologizes to his parents for the piano and overtly reconciles himself with them again. The second encounter is quite literally framed by two references to Evie's father in the village below, a man who may stir Evie in one way but who is for Oliver simply a part of that world in which "the depth of my offence was to
be measured” (p. 64). And their final engagement, out in the open, is bounded on the one side by what Oliver thinks “an irrational fear” of being seen from Stilbourne “that laid a hand on my flesh, but a real one,” and on the other by his sight of an “odd figure that moved here or there” down by his home, the father who in fact has observed him (p. 79). Informed as they are by the various pressures of Stilbourne, these meetings between Oliver and Evie—far from representing any experience of love that they share—chart their increasing separation from each other. The fundamental incapacity here, as I read The Pyramid, is Oliver’s. Not that Evie is a lower-class angel in disguise, for she exhibits both malice and perversity; but Oliver is so conditioned by his world that he can hardly conceive of Evie as a person in her own right—and that he quite misconstrues the evidence of her real situation when it is revealed to him.

The misunderstood revelation occurs shortly after Evie has told Oliver that she is not pregnant, “mimicked . . . savagely” his “Thank God,” and declared, “That’s all you want, just my damned body, not me,” to all of which Oliver responds in a kind of parody of mutual involvement, “wanting her to share” his delicious sense of “joy and freedom” (p. 70). Although recognizing that “She wanted tenderness” and “So did I; but not from her” (p. 71), Oliver starts after what he does want from her by flicking up her skirt, only to find her body covered with welts. He immediately believes Captain Wilmot to be responsible—despite the association of Sergeant Babbacombe with beating earlier in the story, Evie’s constantly heightened reaction to the naming of her father, or her manifest sexual excitement on hearing his voice just before she begs Oliver to “Take me” and “Hurt me” at their second meeting on the hill—presumably because nothing during Oliver’s life in Stilbourne has prepared him to imag-
ine a depraved relationship between father and daughter. Even given his misinterpretation, Oliver can only utter "a laugh of sheer incredulity" initially. Then, although Evie blushes, thus acknowledging the normal response to the situation that she supposes Oliver to see clearly, yet also half defends that situation in saying "I was sorry for 'im," Oliver reacts by further detaching himself, first looking down at his parents in their garden, then back at Evie, "this object, on an earth that smelt of decay . . . life's lavatory" (pp. 72-73). When she offers to buy his silence by doing "Anything you want" (p. 73), however, Oliver is ready enough to exploit his power over her.

What I have just said no doubt makes Oliver himself appear too villainous, whereas the novel merely represents him as the prisoner of attitudes imbibed through growing up in Stilbourne. They determine his insensitive treatment of Evie—still apparent when he meets her for the last time, in a coda to the first section of The Pyramid, some two years after their affair has ended and Evie been eased out of Stilbourne—and they undermine the glimpse he finally catches of the relationship he might have had with her. At first, while the two drink together in the Crown at Stilbourne, Oliver regards Evie as he always has: sexually exciting—"this evening might be led," he speculates—and socially inferior—to her claim about looking up some people in Stilbourne Oliver replies, "You? What people?" (p. 87). He even mentions Captain Wilmot without a qualm, as if no one like Evie could resent the intended innuendo. But she caps all his leading remarks by announcing to those present that Oliver has raped her two years earlier; and, though she soon apologizes, she also berates him for his sense of social superiority and consequent ignorance, as well as accuses him of "telling" the whole town "an' laughing" about "Me 'n Dad" before
she walks away. Not really understanding her accusation, Oliver is nevertheless startled by her criticism into almost escaping his social preconceptions and seeing her clearly: "It was as if this object of frustration and desire had suddenly acquired the attributes of a person rather than a thing; as if I might—as if we might—have made something, music, perhaps, to take the place of the necessary, the inevitable battle" (p. 90). But Oliver, although "tempted for a moment to follow her," sees a light come on in his parents' house and so goes home "to brood on this undiscovered person and her curious slip of the tongue [in mentioning her father rather than Captain Wilmot]" (p. 91), his last phrase indicating how imperceptive Oliver remains despite his temporarily altered view of Evie.

The second section of *The Pyramid* contains no graded sequence like the meetings between Evie and Oliver, but it does advance, as did the initial movement, toward the revelation of another person in a reasonably extreme human situation, a revelation which Oliver again fails to comprehend. Returning to the village after his first term at Oxford and worrying a bit about seeing Imogen once more (an older girl, now married, whom he has idealized), Oliver finds a production of the Stilbourne Operatic Society in full swing and is soon badgered by his proud mother into taking a bit part as a violin player. The opening half of the section demonstrates how completely the production is governed by Stilbourne's social sense, while the rehearsal that we witness also exhibits a number of personal jealousies as Oliver's mother schemes to make the most of her son's role or quarrels with Imogen's husband, himself a ridiculously arrogant figure, over the military title by which Oliver should be addressed in the performance. Through all these pages, the life of Stilbourne is represented by details more exaggerated
than those of the first section; the characters are more thinly drawn; and the comic effects are prevalingly bitter. The character in the foreground here is less Oliver than Evelyn De Tracy, a professional in the theater who comes to the village intent only on his fee of "Ten guineas and a third-class return" (p. 120), views Stilbourne with a contempt manifest in the scarcely concealed laughter that constantly shakes him, and successfully manipulates everyone with excessive flattery. In the course of the actual performance, he repays to the Crown for drinks with Oliver, where De Tracy refers to Stilbourne's shortcomings and also begins to free Oliver from his "calf-love" for Imogen through analyzing accurately her vanity (p. 121), yet De Tracy is really interested in thus curing Oliver to win the young man for himself. When Oliver, liberated by his drink, momentarily breaks through the "walls" of his life to speak as a critic of Stilbourne himself ("the way we hide our bodies and the things we don't say . . . the people we don't meet"), to tell Evelyn of the affair with an Evie now almost regarded as a person ("she was just a country girl from Chandler's Close; though come to think of it, why on earth we—"), and to declare, "I want the truth of things. But there's nowhere to find it" (pp. 122–23), the hopeful producer hands him photographs of De Tracy dressed up as a girl in a "ballerina's costume" (p. 124). But the sheltered Oliver proves even less capable of understanding this evidence than Evie's welts, and again he responds with laughter. Although he is indeed freed by De Tracy to see Imogen as she is and although he befriends the drunken producer by helping him get out of town, Oliver's essential alignment with the world of Stilbourne is suggested by his incomprehension of De Tracy. Golding reinforces the suggestion, I think, by placing those talks with De Tracy in which Oliver's horizon expands some-
what between the scene of his public triumph at the performance—when, applauded on his appearance because he is "the dispenser's son . . . one of the right sort of people" (p. 118), Oliver forgets every instruction in displaying his musical virtuosity, much to the delight of his mother—and the closing paragraph of the second section, in which he returns, after putting De Tracy on a bus, "to receive my congratulations" at a party backstage (p. 130).

The final section of _The Pyramid_ is slightly more complicated in structure, the visit of an adult Oliver to Stilbourne and his ultimate assessment of his life framing a group of remembered experiences with Bounce Dawlish, his former music teacher. Generally speaking, those remembrances are shaped so as, first, to make progressively clearer to the reader the exploitation of the unattractive Miss Dawlish by a Henry Williams winning in manner yet intent upon succeeding in business, and second, to develop a subdued tension between the social formula which Oliver accepts as describing his own relationship to his teacher—"He's _devoted_ to Miss Dawlish—aren't you, dear?" (p. 143)—and the actual mixture of fear, superiority, and pity that he feels.

Bounce Dawlish is the daughter of a "failed" artist, a man who has turned himself "into the portrait of a romantic musician" and so gives "Stilbourne a painless excuse to feel that it was in touch with the arts"—especially since he possesses some property and a little money (pp. 136–37). Thus her father and her profession as teacher confer a certain status on Miss Dawlish, though it becomes apparent that she is ill-fitted for her job and has been ruthlessly bullied by her father into taking up music. Heavyset, homely, mannishly dressed, she seems a typically forbidding teacher until the affable Henry Williams turns up in Stilbourne. Full of good will though he is, Henry yet plays upon her growing affec-
tion for him to sell her a car, settle in Stilbourne on the
death of her father, establish himself in business at her
expense, move into her house with his "quite unforeseen
wife and child" (p. 155), then move out—after making so
much noise in his work that Bounce can hardly hold her
lessons—to take over her father's cottage and "build a ga­
rage" (p. 160). Henry's exploitation of her is punctuated by
many indications of Bounce's frustrated love: her sudden
appearance dressed as a woman and made up at one of
Oliver's lessons, when she reads the "incredulity" in his eyes
(p. 154); the "ludicrously pleading" words that he later
overhears, "All I want is for you to need me, need me!" (p.
158); or the picture he sketches of her, on the night Henry
leaves the house, down on her knees before the fire, "trying
to learn unsuccessfully, without a teacher, how to sob her
heart out" (p. 168). The village itself, of course, views the
entire affair with a mixture of distrust for Henry, contempt
for Bounce's weakness in letting herself be used, and
triumph at her misery: the arrival of Henry's "unforeseen"
family, for example, proves "a most exhilarating time for
everyone" (p. 155). In the third section of The Pyramid,
Golding portrays Stilbourne as inverteately curious about its
inhabitants and less than sympathetically disposed towards
them, attitudes which Oliver himself reflects in some of his
encounters with Bounce Dawlish. When her pursuit of
Henry takes about the only form it still can—a series of
deliberate car accidents which enable her to call him for
help—Oliver's mother explains to him Bounce's actions, a
standing joke in the town; and for a moment this enlighten­
ment consumes him "with humiliation, resentment and a
sort of stage fright, to think how we were all known, all food
for each other," but shortly he can wonder, "amused and
cynical" as the rest, what Bounce's "next step" may be (pp.
173-74).
Oliver's own relations with her seem always strained, partly because, as a child, he often misses the full significance of her odd behavior, sometimes keeping details of it to himself, and partly because society's dictum that he is "devoted" to her inhibits his recognition of his true response. Oliver is also trapped by his world in another way through this closing movement of *The Pyramid*, which shows him yearning for a musical career, yet acceding to his parents' ideal of success, the "scholarship at Oxford" and study of "Physics and Chemistry"—"the real, the serious thing"—which will make the "world" his "oyster" (p. 162). Bounce need merely mention Oliver's mother and father for him to realize "the obscenity of erratic, unpensioned music," and the eccentric teacher echoes for once the sentiments of society, though bitterly commenting on her own situation, in remarking, "Don't be a musician... Go into the garage business if you want to make money. As for me, I shall have to slave at music till I drop down dead" (pp. 162-63). While Oliver fulfills all too well society's ideal in his ensuing success as a chemist, he also makes several discoveries about himself and Bounce which might promise to stir an acute personal sympathy in him for her, but leave him finally rather helplessly enclosed in the self he has become. The climactic step in her efforts to claim Henry's attention is to present herself on the street wearing hat, gloves, shoes, and "nothing else whatsoever"; although Oliver feels "a storm" within him at this revelation of her need—there's no question of his laughing here as he has at Evie's welts or the photographs of De Tracy—he instinctively tries to repress the sight ("No. No. Oh-No") even as he knows that it "was seared into me... ineradicable" (p. 175). Later, after having reviewed his past with her while sitting as an adult at Bounce's grave, he suddenly bursts out in "wanton laughter" at the realization that he has always hated her. But ironically even this seized
truth—of the dislike for her which society has conditioned him to repress—cannot be fully assimilated by Oliver, who first runs away from the realization, then can articulate it precisely to himself—"I was afraid of you, and so I hated you.... When I heard you were dead I was glad"—only when safely enveloped within a sense of "the security of my own warm life" in the conventional world (p. 180). Although he goes back to Bounce's house once more, he cannot exorcise the fear he has known as a child for her, and although he discovers—in the burned music and destroyed photographs at the end of her garden—proof of her continuing victimization by her father and ultimate rebellion against him, Oliver still cannot break out of himself into a thoroughly compassionate response: "I did not know to what or whom my feelings had reference, nor even what they were" (p. 182). If he thinks briefly, in the closing paragraphs of The Pyramid, of telling Henry that Bounce was her truest self—"calm and happy" for "the only time"—when she walked naked to Henry's garage, only to be "put... away" by Stilbourne "until she was properly cured and unhappy again," Oliver in fact remains silent, for "really, you could say nothing" (p. 182). And though he momentarily wishes for the chance to reshape his life, he realizes how firmly he is trapped within a being molded by society: looking at Henry, the well-disposed man who is yet committed to worldly success, Oliver sees at last "my own face" (p. 183).

The minor characters of The Pyramid, as well as some of the major ones, not only serve to flesh out the stratified world in which Oliver grows up but stand as instances themselves of Stilbourne's pervasive social consciousness. At the top of the scale are Imogen Claymore and her husband, owner of
the local paper; awareness of their position combines with their personal vanity to assure them that Stilbourne owes them homage: he cannot even mention his part in a pageant without exhibiting his superiority. "I had a sword, a horse and a whole troop of servants!" (p. 107), and Imogen is properly outraged when Oliver's awkward entrance with a halberd forces her husband to bend down on the stage. The family of Dr. Ewan also ranks high, with the result that Bobby continually patronizes the dispenser's son and responds to a ridiculously irrelevant insult by Oliver as if it were a serious challenge to his honor by an inferior. Old Mr. Dawlish has forced Bounce's career of music teacher on her as one way of acting out his role as Stilbourne's artist. In the lower reaches of the scale, social differentiation still obtains: Mrs. Babbacombe may be looked down upon by much of Stilbourne as "about our only Roman Catholic" and a greeter of those above her, but she herself will "not mix with the riffraff of Chandlers' Close" (p. 31), the section of town in which she lives. Henry Williams is regarded with suspicion and resentment during his first months in Stilbourne because he is an outsider, a nobody trying to establish himself in the garage business through using Bounce Dawlish. Although he often behaves with real good will and affection, as in helping Oliver conceal his interest in Evie or in treating Bounce herself as a "dear, kind lady" (p. 156), the novel represents Henry as above all a man who capitalizes upon his accommodating manner to get on, whether in mediating between his quarrelsome wife and the jealous Bounce while they all live together or in achieving—at Bounce's expense—his ultimate status as Stilbourne's leading businessman. He reveals his social awareness in the arrangement itself of the motto which he has had inscribed on Bounce's tomb, the "three words in small lettering" near "the foot" of the
memorial which convey to the adult Oliver Henry's "modest assurance, his sense of position, of who was entitled to do what" (p. 136). And Henry's fundamental commitment to a sort of success valued by the world is openly formulated by Oliver at one point, when he interprets the fact that Henry is impressed by an expensive car and by the implied prestige as marking an "attitude . . . typical of the deep thing lying in him, the reason for it all, tarmac, glass, concrete, machinery, the thrust not liked or enjoyed but recognized as inevitable, the god without mercy" (p. 133).

Oliver's parents are felt fairly continually by the reader as presences in The Pyramid, transmitting Stilbourne's attitudes to their son while they love him so genuinely and plan so attentively for his future that the occasions on which he resists them fill him with guilt—when in their affection they propose to have rebuilt the piano Oliver has smashed, for instance, he weeps in gratitude and shame. The father is an eminently kindly man, ready to think the best of everyone (he even defends Henry Williams against the attacks of Oliver's mother), yet so oriented to conventional ideas of success that he instinctively imagines "the profession of music," to which his son is naturally inclined, as "perilous" and necessarily involving Oliver's descent "through a course of indescribable bohemianism" to poverty (p. 138). In the one episode where the father is less than kind, driven by Evie's talk of man's bestiality to spy through his binoculars on his son (spying is an activity recurrently linked with society in the book), Oliver's father reproaches him by invoking the specter of venereal disease traditionally associated with a lower-class girl and then by speaking, "for all his professed but indifferent agnosticism," with "the voice of generations of chapel": "... these books—cinema—papers—this sex—it's wrong, wrong, wrong!" (p. 81)—a reproach
which Oliver takes firmly to himself in thinking, when he next sees Evie, "She was wrong, wrong, wrong; and so was I" (p. 82). Oliver's mother is as nasty as his father is kindly. She intuits every threat to the person she wants Oliver to become, so violently dislikes Evie, responding to Bobby Ewan's injury on a motorcycle with "Nobody else was hurt—more's the pity!" (p. 44). She reveals her foolishness and pettiness by admiring the light opera performed at Stilbourne, by bending every effort to put her son forward in the performance, and by preening herself on De Tracy's gross flattery at the same time that she scornfully notes it as De Tracy's means of manipulating the Claymores. Indeed, she epitomizes Stilbourne: resenting Henry Williams; maintaining that Oliver is "devoted" to his music teacher, even though the mother wonders with malicious delight—after another accident by which Bounce has contrived to meet Henry—what the frustrated woman will "do when she runs out of 'phone boxes" (p. 173); or spying at every chance on the other inhabitants of the village.

As I have already suggested in outlining the structure of The Pyramid, three characters in effect offer Oliver the opportunity to break through the attitudes ingrained in him into loving, or at least sympathizing with, another, and each of the three functions to some extent as a critic of Stilbourne. De Tracy is by all odds the thinnest of these figures, little more than a caricature of the sophisticated city dweller. Although he may guide Oliver towards a true estimate of Imogen, his motive is to secure the young man for himself. If his scarcely suppressed laughter at nearly everything that happens indicates his insight into and contempt of the village, he yet hypocritically flatters everyone, ready enough to live off the world that he despises.

Evie's reactions to life in Stilbourne are more variously
detailed than De Tracy's, and she strikes me as a much more complex character—despite what seem important obscurities in Golding's presentation of her, obscurities that perhaps owe something to the limitations of Oliver's insight. Her banal wishes for the future typify the longings of a lower-class girl who feels trapped in a small town: "Oh I should like to fly more than anything! And . . . to dance—and sing, of course—and travel—I should like to do everything!" (p. 41). As we have seen, she frequently reproaches Oliver for his upper-class treatment of her as a sexual object instead of as a person in her own right (Golding endows her with a musical talent and a desire to learn, if only typing, both of which imply that Oliver might properly value her in ways other than he does). And she accurately though somewhat inarticulately criticizes Oliver as well as Stilbourne at their final encounter: "You! Aren't you ever going to grow up? This place—you. You an' your mum and dad. Too good for people, aren't you? You got a bathroom. 'I'm going to Oxford!' You don' know about—cockroaches an'—well" (p. 90). Although Evie's sense of Stilbourne itself is clear enough, some of her motives and feelings appear to me obscure. Why has she talked about the bestiality of men to Oliver's father in such a way as to arouse his suspicions: unintentionally, because she is dominated by her experience with her father? or intentionally, because she wants revenge against an Oliver who has previously been overjoyed to find that she is not pregnant? What does she really feel for her father: the hatred suggested by her generalizations about men? or the sympathy explicit in "I was sorry for 'im" (p. 72)? or the dark pleasure implicit in the "sneering grin" with which she sometimes greets Oliver's advances (p. 55) and in the "faint smile" with which she recalls being beaten at fifteen, "as if she were remembering something shymaking
but good” (p. 73) ? or a combination of the three? Does she know that Stilbourne has expelled her because a trace of her lipstick has been observed on the face of Dr. Ewan’s assistant? or does she think—quite wrongly—that the reason is Oliver’s disclosure of her relationship with her father? And why, when she publicly accuses Oliver of having raped her, does she claim to have been “only just fifteen” (p. 89) : is she simply trying to blacken Oliver further? or is she enacting a private compulsion to clear her father, at least in her own eyes, by linking Oliver with her decisive experience at fifteen? Although Evie’s response to what has happened between her father and herself thus remains to some degree puzzlingly equivocal, her behavior at many moments reveals an integrated complexity. While she prefers Bobby Ewan to Oliver—relishing her escapades with the doctor’s son, blaming herself for his injury on a motorcycle, and praying for his recovery—she is yet physically attracted by Oliver, certainly desirous of entering into a personal relationship with him, and perhaps hopeful of finally winning him. Many of these strands of feeling are caught together in her response when Oliver first pulls her up the hill to the clump of trees: relief at the news she has just heard that Bobby is not seriously injured; an excitement responsive to Oliver’s urgent need of her body; the drive to advance her own claims as an individual, “What I’m trying to say is, everything’s different—see—if you could only—” (p. 55) —though Oliver does not even listen to the rest of her words. Similarly complex is Evie’s motivation when she later compels Oliver to take her, if he will, in plain sight on the escarpment. Her action represents simultaneously her own pressure in kind exerted against Oliver, who willingly uses his knowledge of Evie’s welts to force her to meet him; her sense that the upper-class Oliver is hardly likely thus to expose himself; her bitter determina-
tion that, if he should take her, he make at least this public
acknowledgment of her; and her general defiance of Stil­
bourne.

Bounce Dawlish is a comparably detailed character who
develops into more than a stereotype of a Stilbourne eccen-
tric just as Evie develops into more than a stereotype of the
town’s loose woman. Bullied by Mr. Dawlish into a career
for which she has no talent, Bounce may frighten her stu-
dents and amuse the spiteful village by her pathetic efforts to
attach Henry Williams, but she also compels our sympathy.
Attracted by Henry, she can rebel against her father to the
extent of buying a car, but she remains haunted by her fear
of Mr. Dawlish even after his death, crying out with terror
when she once discovers Oliver in the darkened music room
presided over by the photograph of her father; and much
later she shows a real similarity to her father in protesting
against Oliver’s listening to records by musical masters—“I
would never, never listen to anything so cheap, nasty, vulgar,
blasphemous—” (p. 156)—the passage harking back to an
incident in which Mr. Dawlish has smashed a phonograph.
To the family which Henry has moved into her home she
responds with a mixture of possessiveness and bitterness. An
expression of her frustrated love for Henry himself, long
after he has moved out to set up his own household and
expand his business, is shot through with emotional com-
plexity:

“He always services my car himself—changes the oil and
all those things, things inside, I don’t know what they are.
And he always cleans it himself, washes it, polishes it. He
puts on overalls and gets down to it just like he—” (p.
170)
Her words carry a suggestion of upper-class disdain for sheerly mechanical knowledge and a trace of pride as she describes the exertions of a social inferior. But it is clear that in the main she cherishes Henry’s care, interpreting it as the demonstration he allows himself of his affection for her. The last, uncompleted sentence precisely dramatizes an appropriate muddle of feelings in her: gratification that he should love or revere the car because it is a surrogate for her, as well as contempt that he should lavish such attentions on a mere automobile. Against the background of Stilbourne itself Bounce does indeed stand forth as an eccentric, compelled by her love for Henry to appear as her naked self, frightening, unattractive, pathetic. Unlike Evie and De Tracy, she does not achieve any real accommodation with the world. When Oliver last sees her, the house filled with birds and cats, she interrupts his hypocritically conventional attempt to “thank” her for all her lessons with “Don’t bother. It doesn’t mean anything, does it,” then goes on to tell him, “Do you know . . . ? If I could save a child or a budgie from a burning house, I’d save the budgie” (p. 179). And her final commentary on life in Stilbourne is her destruction, before dying, of her father’s photograph and of the music by which she has supported herself in the village.

In discussing the structure and characters, I have been maintaining that Stilbourne itself is the central power in The Pyramid, influencing all its inhabitants after some fashion and often shaping Oliver more thoroughly than he realizes. One indication of its dominance over him is that Oliver frequently returns to the town imagining himself somehow changed, yet rapidly sinking back into the ways of Stilbourne again. I use the word “indication” rather than “symbol” or
some such term because the verbal mode in this novel almost never encourages the reader—through some use of language manifestly charged in one way or another—to sense that any particular detail is fraught with special significance: Golding’s mode here—so prevailingly realistic that there seems no point in analyzing a sample of the prose—is tailored, I take it, to the essential imperceptiveness of his narrator, who for the most part re-creates rather literalistically a world out there, as it were, and reports objectively on the behavior of his more youthful self in it. Certainly Golding pursues his theme by showing his narrator so impregnated with or immediately responsive to the values of Stilbourne as to suggest that, for someone like Oliver, at least, the pressures of environment are inescapable.

Thus Oliver always considers his desire for Evie, as would the town, a proof of his wickedness. Or he understands “as by nature” why “the son of Dr. Ewan couldn’t take the daughter of Sergeant Babbacombe to a dance in his father’s car” (p. 9). Bobby Ewan’s comically triumphant description of his posture in making love to Evie is exactly the sort of account that the doctor’s son naturally gives and Oliver receives without demur because Evie is their social inferior. Amusingly enough, when Bobby will not answer his rival’s greeting after their fight, Oliver does not laugh at the ridiculous figure that Bobby cuts but feels “humiliated and ashamed,” so deep-seated is his conviction of Bobby’s superior station. Oliver’s family is for him so inextricably rooted in Stilbourne society that the two operate on him almost as one force. His marriage to Evie, he feels, “would kill” his parents: “To be related, even if only by marriage, to Sergeant Babbacombe! I saw their social world, so delicately poised and carefully maintained, so fiercely defended, crash into the gutter” (p. 65). And later, on the escarpment with
Evie, Oliver “felt the eyes of Stilbourne on my back; but they were distant, they wore pebble glasses, and we were two inscrutable specks” (p. 79)—the “pebble glasses” always worn by Oliver’s father here identifying him with the village itself in Oliver’s emotions. Even as a child Oliver is sufficiently aware of his status to refuse a tip for delivering medicine, “I knew I was not a Poor Boy” (p. 149). If he quite unwittingly betrays to Bounce Dawlish society’s judgment of her in saying that Henry is “using a sprat to catch a mackerel,” the young Oliver simply “delighted” at employing “a new phrase” (p. 151), his response of “incredulity” to her appearance in feminine attire at one of the lessons exhibits precisely the reaction to be expected from Stilbourne at large. Indeed, the influence of the town on Oliver is never eradicated: during his final return to the village as a success, he is “conscious of impressing” Henry and walks about “accepting this deference” even though “contemptuous of the way in which our social antennae had vibrated” (p. 133).

Although most of the instances just cited show an Oliver unaware of Stilbourne’s grip on his being, he is moved periodically towards a more objective view of the town that can sometimes enable him to criticize it—but in each case Stilbourne retains its hold on him. After seeing Evie’s welts and then looking down at his parents in the village, Oliver discovers in himself “a tremendous feeling of thereness and hereness, of separate worlds, they and Imogen, clean in that coloured picture; here, this object, on an earth that smelt of decay, with picked bones and natural cruelty—life’s lavatory” (p. 73), and the very colors of his words make clear that it is the Stilbourne world with which Oliver links himself instinctively. Helped on by a drink, he may complain to De Tracy that “Everything’s—wrong. . . . There’s no truth and there’s no honesty. My God! Life can’t—I mean just out
there, you have only to look up at the sky—but Stilbourne accepts it as a *roof*" (p. 122), yet Oliver proves as unable as the rest of the town to see De Tracy for the man he is. If he decides in a corner of his family’s garden—"where I was not only away from people, but as nearly as possible away from the pressure of them"—to pursue a musical career, Bounce has only to speak of his parents for Oliver to feel the "obscenity" of his desire and abandon it (p. 162). He even comes, we may remember, to regard Bounce’s accidents with the town’s mixture of amusement and cynicism, although on first learning of her motives from his parents Oliver has been “consumed with humiliation, resentment and a sort of stage fright, to think how we were all known, all food for each other, all clothed and ashamed in our clothing” (p. 173) —significantly, Golding here allies the Fall of Man and its tonalities with the functioning of a social organism rather than with an exercise of will by the individual.

Late in the novel, confronted with the pathetic wreck of womanhood in Bounce Dawlish, Oliver tells us of his "fierce determination" that his own daughter shall "never know such lost solemnity but be a fulfilled woman, a wife and mother" (p. 179), yet in fact we never see enough of his family to make any informed guess about how his children may develop. The evidence on Oliver himself, however, is unambiguous: freedom for him from the influences of society is, practically speaking, a hypothesis and no more. His voice—even when he is surprised into declaring the reality of his unacknowledged dislike for Bounce while standing alone at her tomb—can only cry out "as if it could make its own bid for honesty," and Oliver quickly suppresses the realization as his social self reasserts its mastery (p. 180). On the last page of the novel, he may perceive how Stilburne has enclosed his own life:
I stood, looking down at the worn pavement, so minutely and illegibly inscribed; and I saw the feet, my own among them, pass and repass. I stretched out a leg and tapped with my live toe . . . and suddenly I felt that if I might only lend my own sound, my own flesh, my own power of choosing the future, to those invisible feet, I would pay anything—anything: but knew in the same instant that, like Henry, I would never pay more than a reasonable price. (pp. 182–83)

But he also recognizes that, even if he could somehow purchase the freedom to re-form the life that Stilbourne has shaped, he would make no sacrifice for that freedom, so dominated is he by the attitudes of the man he has become.

It may seem fanciful to describe the Oliver represented in *The Pyramid* as stillborn, incapable of emerging into a substantially personal life because his self is so thoroughly constituted by his parents and the surrounding world. Yet surely the name of the village functions in part as a pun to suggest the essential deadness of life in Stilbourne and the stultifying effect of the town’s conventions on its inhabitants. Similarly, although the only specific mention in the novel of a pyramid—Oliver remembers “how the Ewans,” more highly placed than his own family, “always gave me a present at Christmas. They also vibrated in time to the crystal pyramid” (p. 150)—allies it with a social structure that narrows sharply from base to apex, the pyramid embodied in the world of Stilbourne also proves to be a tomb for Oliver. Perhaps even his narrative itself might be regarded as a pyramid of sorts in that Oliver re-creates for us a group of experiences which enshrine the past of a successful man yet reveal him as entombed within it. However that may be, *The Pyramid* is decidedly somber in depicting the power of
the human environment to mold imperceptibly the values of the individual and in effect annihilate him. Yet it would be rash, I think, to interpret the book as an absolute statement by Golding about the helplessness of the individual in the face of society, for Oliver, though normal in many respects, is at times so radically imperceptive as to seem a special case. And his consciousness, both as a narrator of what has happened and as an adult who has succeeded in the world and made an apparently happy marriage, is not sufficiently detailed for us either to feel that we really know the whole Oliver, so can see him clearly as an Everyman, or to identify his plight with our own as human beings. But certainly in *The Pyramid* Golding has broken with the earlier novels in concerning himself with the social rather than moral pressures exerted on man. What this shift in theme may signify for Golding's future work, however, or what the realistic mode of *The Pyramid* may portend for his artistic development, only the novels to come can tell us for sure.

1. *The Pyramid* (New York, 1967), p. 7; this is the edition to which I shall give further page references in my text.