

### **“Scenes From a Life” (ca. 1992)**

There are several autobiographical accounts written during and just after the war. Then in the early 1960s Golding wrote the two essays about his childhood “Billy The Kid” and “The Ladder and the Tree” (both published in *The Hot Gates* (1965)). In the mid 1960s he wrote an account of his relations with women, a process which led him to write his novel *The Pyramid* (1967). Then from 1971 onwards he kept a daily journal. Its last entry is the evening before his death.

In the last few years of his life he began to reflect on his very early childhood in an account he called “Scenes From a Life”. Part of this has been published in *Arete* (Issue Two, Spring-Summer 2000). Golding was particularly interested in the distinction between memory and imagination, and throughout this account he attempts to separate these processes. He is aware that his story-telling eye can ‘see’ more than actually happened.

Internal evidence suggests that “Scenes” was written in 1992. The opening of his last novel *The Double Tongue* has a close relationship with the opening of “Scenes”.

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### **Extracts from “Scenes From a Life”**

It was awareness, I think, unadulterated sense of self, so pure it had neither time nor motion nor process. It was not thought for that implies connection of one state of awareness with a similar state before or after. There may have been colour. On the other hand I may be colouring a memory as one does. But if so there is little I can do to get beyond a memory. Oh yes I can! There are two memories, one monochrome, black and white, or rather non-light, i.e. strange darkness, not like darkness now, but related, as slate is to ebony. That surrounds the light which is dull. The other is primary. It is more important, more living, and so for those reasons, and qualities I decide that it is earlier though in the time sense they occupy the same bit of time, or alternatively are outside time. There was colour, red mostly, but everywhere, and a sense of a wind blowing, buffeting, and there was much light. It is hard to stop myself importing a sense of glory to the experience; but the bare fact is that the fact was bare of all but colour, brightness and buffet. There was no distance and there were no shapes and of course something else was present, the awareness. Was that sufficiently developed to call it “I”? I do not think so. It, the awareness, did not recognise time, though time passed since there was movement in the colour.

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I remember I could read but I don’t remember how old I was when I learnt. I remember knowing how to read and knowing too that my parents were not aware of my ability. I tried to tell them but could not get through to them or convince them, so I went off, puzzled, and continued reading. I don’t know whether I was preposterously young for that skill or not. It would have been easy for me to learn early since there was a difference of about a yard between me and anybody else and I had to entertain myself. Many years later when Ann my wife came with me to share some leave or holiday, she proposed to my mother (I think it was Christmas) that we should play a game of some sort, charades perhaps. But my mother said, grimly and sadly “You don’t understand this family my dear. The four of us usually spend Christmas in separate rooms.” It was a shock to Ann, who as one of ten children was used to

a tribal life. So I must have learned in the awareness of my own solitude that reading was a sort of companionship.

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[Later in his childhood]

I swung the bat in a semicircle, missed the ball but hit José with the wooden bat across the side of the head. Instantly he turned and ran for home, one hand holding the side of his head. I was the one who made a noise, anguished to think of the awful thing I had done. But he made not a sound. He always was the silent one. I trundled after him, whimpering and wondering what I should tell mam and dad, or what he would.

I trundled back across the Common and down the road to the Green, my fears growing deeper. I can just remember them. I ended at the house, terrified and now as silent as my brother. I remember no more. But years later my parents told me that José had described the whole scene to them. He wasn't really hurt they said. But I crept in to the house with my terror and hid from everyone else under the dining room table.

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