LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

Intertextuality and William Golding's Lord of the Flies

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Abstract

No literary text can be studied in isolation. It is an automatic unconscious connection. It has been operative in literature through ages, and in which sense every text is an intertext, an echo-chamber or echoic space. Intertextuality is like a dense web of allusion. It is made of readymade formulations, catch phrases, slang, jargon, cliché, commonplaces, unconscious echoes, and formulaic phrases- out of which individual texts are constituted. The connectivity between one text and another has particularly surfaced since the postwar years. It came as the context of postmodern/ postcolonial/ feministic and other emerging discourses and practices. Intertextuality – a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to denote the interdependence of literary texts; the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it. The present paper analyses William Golding's Lord of the Flies in the light of intertextuality.

Keywords

Intertextuality; Metatext; William Golding; Lord of the Flies; Ballentyne; The Coral Island.

Jeremy Hawthorn in his *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory,* defines intertextuality as alteration between two or more text which has an effect upon the way in the intertext (that is, the text within which other texts reside or echo their presence) is read (154). Intertextuality sometimes indicates a more diffuse speculation of the individual text by memories, echoes, transformations, of other texts. But transtextuality means overt relations between specific texts or between particular texts. Hypertext and hypotext refer to the intertext and the text with its connection with another text, e.g., James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Homer's *The Odyssey* are such kind of hypertext or hypotext.

Intertextuality is mainly based on the relationship of a text with another text. But the idea to read an individual text is determined by its relations with other texts and the commentaries on literary works from the earliest times which have associated with cross-references to other texts which may play as models or contrast.

In her *Desire in Language*, Julia Kristeva defines the text as 'a permutation of text, all intertextuality, in the space of a given text, several uttrances, taken from other texts, interest and neutralize one another (36). Intertextuality is not restricted to genesis, and that each new reading may involve a different set of intertextual relations. Intertextuality has thus to be seen in association with the whole complex issue of the reader's varied expectations as formed by Ideological generic and other factors.

Intertextuality – a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to denote the interdependence of literary texts; the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it. Her contention was that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon but is made up of a mosaic of quotations, and that

any text is the absorption and transformation of another; she challenges traditional notions of literary influence, saying that intertextuality denotes a transposition of one or several sign systems into another or others. But this is not connected with the study of sources. Transposition is a Freudian from, and Kristeva is pointing out merely to the way texts echo each other but to the way that discusses or sign systems are transposed into one another – so that meaning of one kind of discourse is overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse. It is a kind of new articulation. For Kristeva the idea is a part of a wider psychoanalytical theory which questions the stability of the subject. According to Charles E. Bressler:

> Intertextuality is a term denoting that any given text's meaning or interpretation is related or interrelated to the meaning of all other texts. Hence, no text can be interpreted in isolation, and all texts are intertextual. (1346)

M. H. Abrams in his epoch-making book, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, explains the term as follows:

> The term intertextuality, popularized especially by Julia Kristeva, is used to signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text is made up of other texts, by means of its open or covert citations and allusions, its repetitions and transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier texts, or simply its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistic and literary conventions and procedures that are 'always already is place and constitute the discourses into which we are born. In Kristeva's formulation, accordingly, any texts is in fact an "Intertext" – the site of an intersection of number less other texts, and existing only through its relations to other texts. (317)

Peter Verdonk and Jean Jaques Weber are of opinion that intertextuality is "the way any spoken or written text, literary or non-literary, is produced and

interpreted through our conscious or unconscious experience and awareness of the texts. Their texts in turn will have their own intertextual dimension, and so forth. Obviously, the texts in such are intertextual network can relate to each other for all sorts of reason" (*Twentieth Century Fiction: From Text to Context* 248).

No literary text can be studied in isolation. It is an automatic unconscious connection. It has been operative in literature through ages, and in which sense every text is an intertext, an echo-chamber or echoic space. Intertextuality is like a dense web of allusion. It is made of readymade formulations, catch phrases, slang, jargon, cliché, commonplaces, unconscious echoes, and formulaic phrases- out of which individual texts are constituted. The connectivity between one text and another has particularly surfaced since the postwar years. It came as the context of postmodern/ postcolonial/ feministic and other emerging discourses and practices.

Intertextuality thus assumes the critical relationship between one text and another; and whether the anterior text (which is interpreted /criticized/ commented upon/ etc. in the posterior text) is explicitly cited or subtly evoked, does not matter. It becomes a kind of metatext. An intertext can be itself an implicit or oblique metatext of a text, which includes in interpretations and exegeses, editorial apparatuses and critical analyses.

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* can be considered in this light as a new metatext on Robinsonade fiction as such, or Aritha Van Herk's Places *Far From Ellesmere* as a refreshing metatext to take on the stultifying eulogies of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

An intertext usually offers a site for the dialogue between discourses and inter-discourses. Again, according to Dr. Rama Kundu, "Intertext involves not only a disruption of discourses but also a disjuncture of the time-space continuum of the parent text in various forms of sequal, prequel, etc." (*Intertext and Deconstruction: A Brief Outline* 12).

Golding is aware of the fact no less than his critic. Here he writes 'back' to

Ballentyne much in the same way as many postcolonial writers have been writing 'back' to canonical British texts since the sixties, or feminist writers to canonical 'patriarchal' texts. And it is from the 'difference' between the two texts that significance emerge and meaning explodes. Again, it is but a common feature of intertextual re-writing that it should express an attitude to, or opinion of the parent-text. It can be admiration or rejection or critical acceptance or revision. It could even be a parody of the text. But usually it explores the generator text, not so much to mock it as to use it for a premise to probe new possibilities of response. It does not intend to disrespect but can seek to disturb a conventional attitude. And, whatever be the attitude, intertextuality depends heavily on revealing its source, instead of hiding it (like plagiarism), for its specific end. This is what Golding does in *Lord of the Flies*. He registers an anguished perception of his own times, for which he uses the nineteenth century culture model as a frame, and he takes care to reveal his source early in the narration. The many evocative allusions and echoes interspersed in the text from the beginning till the end, invite and challenge the reader to identify the source and consider their relevance in the new context. Golding 'seems to have intended the reader to take into account the way in which one book uses the other. Ballantyne's boys could do both hunting and fire-making, shelter-building in perfect disciplined way, automatically accepting Jack 'the wisest' and 'boldest' 'hard-working' as their leader, and getting themselves 'into a very comfortable condition' with their self-improvised we; pons and equipment…But Golding's boys, though many more in number, do not do the right things; instead they soon split up on the issue of fire-making or hunting, rescue or pleasure, foresight or present fun. Initial efforts at order disappear soon; shelters remain incomplete; signal fire goes out with the first success at pig-killing; intelligence and reason lose appeal and senseless taboos and rites take over. So at the end when the naval officer stirs up the forgotten illusion of textuality once again, his jolly impercipience seems only too ironical.

The desert island persisted through literatures across ages, and particularly in European literature since the last four imperial centuries. The idea has resurfaced, especially in fiction, with notable frequency, and it is interesting to note the continuous intertextual reworking or recycling of the same idea from text to text. The entire range of Robinsonade can be thus considered as recycling of the same unit idea through changing and evolving discourses. Seen in this perspective Golding's *Lord of the Flies* appears to have sent its tentacles backwards not only to Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, but also to Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, to Swift, to Defoe, and the whole spectrum of the desert island fiction as such.

Neil McEwan in *The Survival of the Novel* (1981) expresses a little annoyance at the phenomenon that "the wish to establish *Lord of the Flies* as a modern classic by contrasting it with alleged Victorian delusions has produced, in the pages of Golding's critics, strange occurrences of what the French call intertextuality" (157). *The Coral Island's* actual relevance to *Lord of the Flies* can be quickly explained: there is the coincidence of names — Jack, Ralph and Piggy-Simon/Peterkin; also of certain activities like pig-hunting; there is the point that Ballantyne's characters fight against alien savages while Golding's become savage themselves; and there is the irony of the boys at the start and the officer at the end. . . (157). McEwan concludes, "If this counterpointing is examined closely, its validity weakens. Ballantyne wrote a different sort of book" (157). McEwan in fact seems to react against a common critical preoccupation which, he apprehends, would divert our attention from Golding's text as a masterpiece in its own right.

The Coral Island can be summed up as a Victorian juvenile adventure story, *Lord of the Flies* is essentially a story of the post-war times—not only in terms of its setting, but also with regard to the theme or mood, "profoundly attuned to the contemporary sensibility". The critically rewarding thing, therefore, is not to make a judgmental comparison of the two texts or

underscoring the "shortcomings" of an earlier text—though that has, indeed, been operative behind one major trend in Golding criticism.

When Bond rewrites *King Lear* or Stoppard rewrites *Hamlet*, they travel away from Shakespeare; this is not to denigrate Shakespeare, but to break open the old text, and creatively re-inscribe it with their modern perception and thus make them relevant for the newer times. Similarly when Graham Greene writes *Monsignor Quixote,* he is but lovingly engaging Cervantes's premises to layer them with some new contents of contemporary relevance. Again, breaking open a canonical text in order to create new meanings through subversion and challenge of its unconscious assumptions has led to wonderful intertexts in postcolonial literature all over the world, and the list can run to any length. From Witi Ihimaera addressing Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand stories, to George Lamming questioning Prospero's offer of 'Water with Berries' on behalf of Caliban, Jean Rhys giving a voice to the silenced, absenced Jamaican wife of Bronte's Rochester, or Wilson Harris subverting the assumptions of *Heart of Darkness*, it is an exciting and challenging scenario that has been emerging since the last decades. Or, if one looks at the feminist writers, from Aritha Van Herk of Canada calling Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* to come away from nineteenth century Russia and its killing railroad to the imaginary place of the snowy islands in "Places far from Ellesmere" (1990), to Githa Hariharan of India convening a fresh series of story-telling sessions (*When Dreams Travel* 1999) to interrogate and subvert the patriarchal ethos of the *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, one is simply delighted by the wonderful experiments going on in intertextual writing at the moment.

Golding's Ralph is awed by the view of the island, and is happy. As Piggy sadly ponders about the bleak prospects of an indefinite stay in the island, Ralph said nothing, ignoring Piggy's ill-omened talk, he dreamed pleasantly. Even the flora (coconut palm and berries, the dandlebuds) and fauna (pigs) of the island, as well as the hillscape, the woods, the lush jungle, and the rugged hills at one

end of the island, the lagoon, the spring, seem to call back to the other. Soon the leading three, — Ralph, Jack, Simon — go round the place to know where they are, and realise that their guess has been correct. “There, where the island petered out in water, was another island; a rock, almost detached, standing like a fort...” (38). The boys shout out in immediate recognition:

> That's a reef. A coral reef. I've seen pictures like that." The reef enclosed more than one side of the island, lying perhaps a mile out and parallel to what they now thought of as their beach. The coral was scribbled in the sea as though a giant had bent down to reproduce the shape of the island in a flowing, chalk line but tired before he had finished. Inside was peacock water. . . (38)

Ballantyne's three boys, Jack, Ralph and Peterkin Gay (laughingstock like Piggy, young like “Simon—called Peter”) had also gone found the island, and found “the entire island was belted by a beach of pure white sand. . . the coral reef completely encircled the island”, while occasional narrow openings led into colourful lagoons. The triumvirate climbed up to “the highest point of the island, and from it we saw our kingdom lying, as it were, like a map around us”. The three Golding boys also go up to the top of the island, and Ralph exclaims: “This belongs to us”, and “we ought to draw a map”, thus evoking the same psycho-cartographic consciousness embedded in the psyche of an empire-building.

The paragraph sums up the tragedy of disillusionment by recalling the illusion first—the initial dream—and then the subsequent shattering of the same. As the officer mentions “the Coral Island”, the phrase seems to smite Ralph, first by stirring a great chord and then snapping it violently. Ralph looked at him dumbly. For a moment he had a fleeting picture' of the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches. But the island was scorched up like dead wood— Simon was dead— and Jack had. . . The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. . . great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. . . Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and

the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy (Golding 248).

Dr. Rama Kundu observes:

> What a contrast this is to the other ending, that too about boys leaving the island for home. They left with "hurrah for dear old England" (Ballantyne 189), and "a thrill of joy", though slightly tinged with a fine sadness: "for we were at length 'homeward bound', and were gradually leaving far behind us the beautiful, bright green coral islands of the Pacific Ocean" (Ballantyne 192). (145)

Whereas at the end of *The Coral Island* the three heroes return to civilization—obviously meaning Europe—wiser, more mature, they tear themselves with difficulty from the dear island— "When the quivering lips pronounce the word— 'Farewell'" (190), in *Lord of the Flies* the land of the nightmarish memories is scorched.

At the end of Golding's novel Ralph looks at the officer dumbly, uncomprehendingly and his look measures the distance between generations as well as the distance between the fictional visions of 1857 and 1954. Ballantyne's book, indeed, belongs to the other world of the other island, the world of 'innocence', and thus hails back to a glorious line of such worlds of 'innocence', of Utopian vision, of charming optimism,—"the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches" of the 'text-ed' 'treasure' islands of Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver, and other celebrated adventure-heroes of British literature in the heyday of the imperial era.

But for Golding's evocations of Ballantyne's novel the latter would not have perhaps been remembered today in common critical or literary parlance; because he wrote a book which belonged essentially to his tune, with its own historical - cultural milieu and ethos. This also explains the immense popularity of the book in its own times. R.L. Stevenson acknowledged *The Coral Island* as "the formative influence of his own love of the South Seas".

According to Dr. Rama Kundu:

> It is in this sense that *The Coral Island* ceases to be just "a single adventure story" (McEwan 153), but emerges as representing one facet of the 'fictional vision' of the 1850s. It also represents an ethos and ideology of the times, which people like Livingstone, with the backing of the British military and economic power served; the exuberance and confidence of what has been called the "Coral Island mentality". The quality of this fictional vision is indicated by the boys' own library': Jack and Ralph are "great" and avid readers "of books of travel and adventure" (14); they are well-read in books about the South Sea islands, its plants (35) and cannibals (57), and can comfortably compare and apply the textbook information to their 'real' outdoor experience; Ralph is also fond of the story of David "slaying Goliath the Philistine" (31), and would look for "a Bible on board", even if it is a pirate ship (124). There is also an unmistakable echo of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", as Ralph sails along, the single survivor on a ship, 'alone, alone, all alone' On a wide wide sea', when "for fully a week after that [freedom from the pirates and death of Bill] a steady breeze blew from the east, and ... I made rapid progress" (128). The allusion is complete to the "albatross soaring majestically over the ship" (131), which is of course regarded with great affection (132).

Ballantyne's novel thus can be clearly placed in the cultural tradition of island books like Robinson Crusoe and Swiss family Robinson and the host of boys' novels. One sentence on the last page of *Lord of the Flies* serves as an ironic comment on this entire genre and the assumptions it carried, as the Captain sneers: "I thought a pack of English boys...!" It subverts the textuality of the colonial experience of successive imperial centuries and not just one particular novel. There is, however, one interesting perceptual link between the two island tales. At times in Ballantyne too there are horrifying descriptions of atrocities;

and Ralph feels simultaneously sickened and fascinated by violence.

Not only in theme, but in style too the two books are so appropriately different. One is linear, descriptive, realism; the other is symbolic and mythic in minute detail — what with the island, a microcosm representing' the world, the 'scar' — man's destructive force, the beast — the evil within, Piggy and his glasses — intelligence, Ralph and his conch — democracy, and so on. *Lord of the Flies* also celebrate the 'innocence' and "bliss" of childhood, and another long textual tradition— that of the child-god or child-hero.

Golding highlights the aggressive power-hunger and egoistical self-assertion as the source of evil and both individual and social violence. These are within man; so as soon as the children are isolated on a desert island a primitive society emerges and is immediately split into warring factions,—one marked by decency and reason, the other by force and violence.

Lord of the Flies has also an intertextual connection. It is from apparent point of view a reconstruction of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, the famous victorious adventure story of the boys. Ballantyne is directly used to refer in many ways in Golding's story when the children in their mirthful situation found everything on the island as book like but at the end when the naval officer who come to rescue them, ironically expressed his surprise, "Jolly good show, like the Coral Island."

Golding the author of *Lord of the Flies* took up the concept of landscape from Ballantyne, and his main protagonist, Ralph, like his another counterpart in *The Coral Island*, was very much happy at the splendid prospect of living on that particular island. In *The Coral Island* there are three major explores, e.g., Ralph, Jack and Peter. But Golding introduced as good number of boys in his novel. He selected only Ralph and Jack from *The Coral Island* and instead of Peter he added Simon the three boys walked slowly or the sound and the tide was low. The weed-strewn sea beach was so hard that it looks as firm as a road. They were all very happy to observe such beautiful scenario.

All the plants, the fruit trees – coconut, palm and berries and the animals, like pigs as well as hillscape, the forest, the woods, the lagoon and the fountain are nearly same in both the books. As if, Goldings wants to take this challenge. He might grant this tendency of intertextuality because of his own experiment with himself while in *The Coral Island* the shipwrecked school boys came to a forest that was a fictionalized ideal place with different trees and looked like a uninhabited island. In Golding's *Lord of The Flies,* the jungle appears to be more authentic, real, deep, dense and damply not. Golding, the master of fiction, blends both the reality and fantasy.

Golding's projection of Piggy's killing and its impact on the reader was very important for Golding because his message was nature is neutral and there is no evil(heart) outside; evil lies in the mind of man as Conrad presents in his *Heart of Darkness* through Kurtz and the projection of Congo.

In contrast to the boys of Ballantyne, Golding's boys had no sweet memory to carry home; nor did they have anything to bid farewell to. And the boys themselves were responsible for this end. The novel ends with this realization of the protagonist who became wiser at the cost of sacrificing his innocence. Ballantyne's book belongs to the world of innocence—of charming optimism and strange glamour of the imperial era. Golding's book, on the other hand, belongs to the post-World War period when the imperial glory has been diminishing.

Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature* (1995) places Ballantyne historically in the cultural ideology of British imperialism. This ideology was based on the assumptions that the colonial officers were diligent, filling their hours with building, mapping and exploration and they found the indolent Other in the natives, that the colonizers were self-confident like Robinson Crusoe and could resist the cannibals. *The Coral Island* represents an ethos and ideology of imperialism. As Boehmer notes, the three boy heroes of Ballantyne "are concerned from the beginning of their time on the island not to waste their days in idleness and play. They want for very little; the climate is

good and there is adequate land. Yet, like colonial officers in the making, or like Crusoe, they work assiduously, filling their hours with building, mapping and exploration" (39). It is further noted that the boy heroes are invincible and even "livelier embodiments of British imperial self-confidence" (39).

While Ballantyne's boys found the Other among the savages, Golding's boys found the Other among a group of 'civilized British boys' who turned into savages. By exposing the darkness in the boys' heart, Golding reverted the concept of civilizing and nation building Britons. He wanted to deliver his message that the European colonizers who were so proud of their civilization treated other races as savages while savagery lay hidden in their own minds that erupted in dropping atom bombs on their fellow men. Considered from all these aspects, the similarities between the two novels remain only on the surface level. To quote Neil McEwan:

> *The Coral Island's* actual relevance to *Lord of the Flies* can be quickly explained: there is the coincidence of names— Jack, Ralph and Piggy-Simon/Peterkin; also of certain activities like pig-hunting; there is the point that Ballantyne's characters fight against alien savages while Golding's become savage themselves; and there is the irony of the boys at the start and the officer at the end expecting things to be like *Coral Island.* (159)

Thus and therefore, there are some similarities and dissimilarities in both *Lord of the Flied* and *The Coral Island.*

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MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Mahapatra, Biswanath. "Intertextuality and William Golding's Lord of the Flies." *Literary Quest* 1.7 (2014): 26-39. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.