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REVIEW ARTICLE

IMAGINATIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE LIFE IN WORKS OF WILLIAM GOLDING

Imaginative Reconstruction of the Life in Works of William Golding

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This novel is an imaginative reconstruction of the life of a band of Neanderthals. It is written in such a way that the reader might assume the group to be modern Homo sapiens as they gesture and speak simply among themselves, and bury their dead with heartfelt, solemn rituals. They also have powerful sense impressions and feelings, and appear sometimes to share thoughts in a near-telepathic way. As the novel progresses it becomes more and more apparent that they live very simply, using their considerable mental abilities to connect to one another without extensive vocabulary or the kinds of memories that create culture. They have wide knowledge of food sources, mostly roots and vegetables. They chase hyaenas from a larger beast's kill and eat meat, but they don't kill mammals themselves. They have a spiritual system centring on a female principle of bringing forth, but their lives are lived so much in the present that the reader realizes they are very different from us, living in something like an eternal present, or at least a present broken and shaped by seasons.

One of the band, Lok, is a point of view character. He is the one we follow as one by one the adults of the band die or are killed, then the young are stolen by the "new people," a group of early modern humans. Lok and Fa, the remaining adults, are fascinated and repelled by the new people. They observe their actions and rituals with amazement, only slowly understanding that harm is meant by the sticks of the new people.

The humans are portrayed as strange, godlike beings as the neanderthals witness their mastery of fire, Upper Palaeolithic weaponry and sailing.

All save the last chapters of the novel are written from the Neanderthals' stark, simple Stylistic perspective. Their observations of early human behaviour serve as a filter for Golding's exercise in paleoanthropology in which modern readers will recognize precursors of later human societal constructs, e.g., religion, culture, sacrifice and war.

The penultimate chapter employs an omniscient viewpoint, observing Lok. For the first time, the novel describes the people the reader has been inhabiting

through the first-person perspective. Lok, totally alone, gives up in despair.

In the final chapter, we move to the point of view of the new race, more or less modern humans fleeing in their boats, revealing that they are terribly afraid of the Neanderthals whom they believe to be devils of the forest. This last chapter, the only one written from the humans' point of view, reinforces the inheritance of the world by the new species.

One interesting anomaly is that the fleeing humans carry with them an infant neanderthal, of whom they are simultaneously afraid and enamoured.

The strings that bind Lok to Fa, Mal, Liku and the rest of the People "were not the ornament of life but its substance. If they broke, a man would die" (IN, 78). With the snapping of the communal bond, Lok is left in tragic isolation.

From the same vantage point of the dead tree, Lok looks at the fat woman's mouth. She was staggering. He could see her teeth. She was holding on to Tuami. Her teeth made Lok remember a wolf. The New People's sexual orgy is drunken, violent and wild: "Tuami was not only lying with the fat woman but eating her as well for there was black blood running from the lobe of her ear" (IN, 175). They have consumed each other rather than lain together. There was blood on woman's face and man's shoulder.

Lok comes across the stag's head hanging from the top of the stake at the deserted camp. It is reminiscent of the pig's head in Lord of the Flies. Lok and Fa inherit the honey drink from the New People and suffer a similar sexual and aggressive incontinence. The Neanderthals inherit savagery from the New People. It is subversive. As in Lord of the Flies, Golding's carnival is a "carnival of hate"¹. About Lord of the Flies and The Inheritors, Paul Crawford remarks:

"Combined carnivalesque and fantastic elements amplify a shock recognition of humankind's transgressive nature. These elements are integral, pivotal structures through which these novels

interrogate contemporary “reality”, its ideologies and cultural assumptions. They supply the impact of reversal, of turning established ideologies and viewpoints on their heads” (PHWG, 76). Crawford sees a clear parallel between the Cro-Magnon Men’s atrocities and those carried out by the Nazis. But he also points out that Golding attacks the whole mask of Western “civilization” that has a long history of racial violence.

Paul Crawford has, thus, tried to bring a new, radical understanding of Golding’s fiction. This historicised and politicised reading of Golding’s “literature of atrocity” has countered the timelessness of his work. Old formalist exclusion of history from literature no longer exists. There is a warning to “civilized” English and Western people to reform themselves. For Crawford, the novels like *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors* make an oblique reference to Holocaust. But in *Pincher Martin* and *Free Fall*, Golding strengthens his reference to broad or popular conceptions of fascism and the totalitarian personalities (PHWG, 79).

Reason, logic and deduction are unknown to the Neanderthals. The Ice women are still left in the gully indicating that the winter is not completely gone. Yet it never occurs to them that they have returned rather too early. Their mental exertion is seen only when they have “pictures”, but they cannot piece them together. Pictures are, of course, visualisations, not conceptualisations. Mime becomes far more than an attempt to compensate for linguistic insufficiency; it becomes a method of imaginative sympathy and a mark of natural, instinctive love. The pictures are the memories of the past or sometimes a vague idea of what they propose to do in the present to meet an eventuality. Ha says, “I have a picture of this stone. Mal used it to cut a branch” (IN, 31). Fa says to Lok, “I have a picture of us crossing to the island on the log” (IN, 120). Occasionally the people are capable of seeing pictures which are more significant. Mal sees an apocalyptic picture of the forest burning. Fa, brooding over the disappearance of Ha, exclaims, “Here is a picture. Someone is—other. Not one of the people” (IN, 71). Pictures or dreams suggest that Neanderthals have an intuitive grasp of reality. The “pictures” attributed to Lok and his people are ambivalent to some extent but this ambivalence has not been totally depicted by the narrative. As Michael Bell observes “Golding uses the “pictures” for the rudimentary mental processes of his Neanderthals whose ‘cleverness’ resides by contrast in their bodies and their senses”¹.

People themselves use pictures as a means of thought. In this way, the real sophistication of the human capacity to consciously “picture” is recognised. Under the pressure of his experience “Lok discovered Like” (IN, 194) and, as the narrative goes on, this was possible because “He had used likeness all his life without being aware of it”. This foreshortening of mental evolution leads to a few slippages as when Fa attributes the concept of “thinking” to herself, but on

the whole it works effectively within the dual convention of the narrative medium. Hence, even from within the logic of the narrative convention, the notion of the “picture” transcends its initial, supposedly naive, implication.

The “picture” renders, as no other device could, the life of the senses and instincts. The impression the reader receives of the outside world is of a series of still images. Thus, we are confused and frightened in a way which we cannot quite grasp. For example, fearsome suspense and tension are built into the New People’s last activity on the terrace as they try to escape, precisely because, even though the action is intense and concentrated, it is pictured by Lok in a series of stills, each devoid of motion like moments caught in past-time. They appear to be random events without the causality of one action leading to another. Lok cannot imagine how to connect the actions together or stop them.

According to the theory of Signs, the signs used by the Neanderthals can be termed as natural. It is different from the conventional or man made signs of the New Men. The artificial signs owed their power only to the fidelity to natural signs. In the seventeenth century, this way of assigning meaning to signs was inverted. A natural sign was the sign constituted by our knowledge. “It is therefore strictly limited, rigid, inconvenient, and impossible for the mind to master.” On the other hand, a choice of a conventional sign could provide simplicity, easy remembrance and opportunity to combine with other signs. This man-made sign separates a person from animal, transforms imagination into voluntary memory, and instinct into rational knowledge. Foucault writes: “Natural signs are merely rudimentary sketches for these conventional signs, the vague and distant design that can be realised only by the establishment of arbitrariness.”¹

In classical thought, the sign system “introduced into knowledge probability, analysis, and combination, and the justified arbitrariness of the system.” The sign system linked all knowledge to a language and sought to replace all languages with a system of artificial symbols and operations (FOT, 69).

Foucault, in his book *The Order of Things*, observes that from the seventeenth century the arrangement of signs became binary. At the Renaissance the organisation remained ternary, “but since resemblance is the form of the signs as well as their content, the three distinct elements of this articulation are resolved into a single form” (FOT, 70). With the end of the Renaissance, the three levels of language—raw and primitive being or the signs or the marks visible to all, the commentary and the text whose primacy is presupposed by commentary—also came to an end.

From the seventeenth century, the binary organisation or level of language posed a different

problem. In the sixteenth century we could ask how the sign designated what it signified. In the seventeenth century we began to ask how a sign could be linked to what it signified. The classical period explained it through the analysis of representation whereas modern thought did so through the analysis of meaning and signification. The primacy of the written word and interweaving of the visible and expressible vanished. Foucault writes about this change from the seventeenth century:

Things and words were to be separated from one another. The eye was thenceforth destined to see and only to see, the ear to hear and only to hear. Discourse was still to have the task of speaking that which is, but it was no longer to be anything more than what it said (FOT, 48).

Unlike Lok, other protagonists in Golding's other fables 'understand' as it were but do not 'perceive'. But in *The Inheritors*, as Mark Kinkead Weekes and Ian Gregor remark, there is an interesting variation for "Perception is itself, no more; not what we normally expect it to be, a stepping stone to an idea rapidly transferred from the eye to the mind" (WG, 67). The arrow that has sunk in the tree beside Lok's face, about which he is wholly unconscious, is rendered through the physical sensations. Lok's senses merely report a series of fragmentary events and a dislocation of self. It tears him from the People. It also fragments him between an inside-Lok with a "tidal feeling", and an outside Lok that grows tight fear like another skin. Finally, the new People look gruesome to Lok. They have bone faces, are log bodied and use bird fluttering language. They are strangers to the Neanderthals' land and "walked upright... as though something that Lok could not see were supporting them, holding up their heads, thrusting them slowly and irresistibly forward" (IN, 144).

The evolutionary advance attributed to Lok in his discovery of Like shows a general process of human thought which specifically invokes metaphorical, or symbolic, modes of art and religion. Liku's doll is a "little Oa". Michael Bell aptly remarks

In *The Inheritors* the traditional belief that the thinking of primitive man was an artistic thinking is given a specific kind of expression. The "primitive" here is created by a backward projection, not from a modern, but from an artistic consciousness (MB,87).

The Neanderthals live through their senses. They can infer to a limited extent from their own experience but they cannot deduce or reason. As Mark. Kinkead Weekes and Ian Gregor remark, "Golding seeks an imaginative response from us in an effort to look through eyes empty of thought, innocent of judgement and free of hatred, suspicion and fear" (WG, 67). To live through sense and instinct is to break the barrier of 'modern' consciousness. Analysis and judgement are

not the sole objects of reading here. Understanding and complex contrast between the Men and the People come slowly and mysteriously from 'a distillation of experience.

The People's existence is communal. They not only protect and warm Mal with their bodies but also involve themselves through mime and picture, in sharing his sickness and awareness of death physically as well as imaginatively. Are Neanderthals civilized in matters of sex? The sexuality among the people is certainly promiscuous in our terminology. It is 'animal', yet as Fa pats her hair when Lok touches her, it is recognisably human, too. If we call it promiscuous we simply reveal our different assumptions about relationships. Again, the depth of Lok's feeling for Ha is manifested in a sense of his 'Ha-ness' no less physical than his feelings for Fa and we can make no useful distinction between the mourning of Fa and Nil for him, and the mourning that breaks from Lok's mouth. So, when Lok the tracker, feels that "the other had tugged at the strings that bound him to Fa and Mal and liku and the rest of the people, the strings were not the ornament of life but their substance. If they broke, a man would die" (WG, 76). We see that though Fa comes first on the list, it is the 'strings' as a whole that are the vital substance of living. The baby is not 'Nil's baby' but the New One for them all.

The New Man's face looks totally unlike his own to Lok : "white bone things above his eyes and under his mouth so that his face was longer than a face should be" (WG, 88). But soon a poisoned arrow comes towards Lok which he cannot understand: "A stick rose upright and there was a lump of bone in the middle Suddenly Lok understood that the man was holding the stick out to him but neither he nor Lok could reach across the river" (WG, 88). Innocence cannot hope for continuity; it must change, or be destroyed.

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