

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

## WILLIAM GOLDING'S "THE INHERITORS" APPROACHED VIA SOJA'S THIRDSPACE AND SEMINO'S MIND STYLE

**Clementina Alexandra Mihăilescu**

**Assoc. Prof., PhD, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu**

*Abstract: The paper expands upon William Golding's "The Inheritors", cognitively approached from a twofold perspective. Firstly, Soja's Theory of Thirdspace has been turned to good account through the implication that the Thirdspace is the locus of individual and communal emotional experience. Secondly, Semino's Mind Style spotlights the way one's perception is impaired by excitement, nervousness or a poor command of language and also how, little by little, a person's evolution can take place through acquiring a common structure of social understanding, thus transforming himself in terms of low and high sensibility and comprehension.*

*Keywords: William Golding, Soja, Semino, The Inheritors, cognitivism, Thirdspace*

William Golding's "The Inheritors" tackles an unusual type of relationship that exists between metaphor and mind style which signifies an impression of a world view. This relationship can be identified in the novel's first person narrative. The first person narrator is Lok and much of the narrative is revealed through his "uncomprehending perceptions" (Mc Carron, 7). Lok belongs to a small group of Neanderthals, the last survivors of the Neanderthal man, who are little by little exterminated by the more powerful members of the "New Men", Homo sapiens.

H. G. Wells in "Outline of History" depicts the Neanderthal man characterized by "an extreme hairiness, an ugliness, or a repulsive strangeness in his appearance over and above his low forehead, his beetle brows, his ape neck, and his inferior stature" in Oldsey and Weintraub, 45- 46.

For the reader not to be prejudiced by Lok's appearance, his description is permanently delayed and when we become familiar with him he appears as "a strange creature, smallish and bowed. The legs and thighs were bent and there was a whole thatch of curls on the outside of the legs and arms. The back was high, and covered over the shoulders with curly hair. Its feet and hands were broad and flat, the great toe projecting inwards the grip. The square hands swung down to the knees" (85).

In Well's "Outline of History" from which Golding takes the epigraph to his novel, already quoted within our presentation, Wells also writes "as the Fourth Glacial Age softened, towards more temperate conditions, a different human type came upon the European scene, and it would seem exterminated Home Neanderthals" (85). Wells further expands upon this topic

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

in his short story “the Grisly Folk”. He describes the adventurous life of the members of a tribe of hunter-gatherers, our remote ancestors, referred to as “the true men”. One of the children of the tribe was stolen by the “grisly folk”, mainly referred to as the “pre-men”, reduced to “animal or ‘thing’ status” (Mc Carron, 9). Golding alters Wells’ plot and in “The Inheritors” the “true men” do the kidnapping and are presented as cannibals. Wells’ “the Grisly Folk” presents an optimistic Darwinian approach to humanity that seems to have been progressing since the beginning of time, and as such, the Neanderthals, who are “pre-men”, not sufficiently evolved deserve little respect and consideration.

Golding’s “The Inheritors” has also been linked to evolutionary theories by the critics via colonialism. From this perspective, it follows that once one is at the top of the evolutionary ladder, one has no longer moral obligations to respect the rights, even the lives of the other lower-in-status people. It has been suggested a possible reading of the novel where Lok and his people are regarded as the colonized and the New Men as the colonizers. We will not follow such a reading, but we regard it as indicative of various ways of approaching modern novels.

Getting back to the relationship between metaphor and mind style, mention should be made of Golding’s main concern with tackling ways of projecting humanity’s internal evil onto something external. This sort of “projection” is turned to account by the novelist through the symbolic scapegoat, human sacrifice and even more dramatically, through cannibalism. If Wells presents the Neanderthals as cannibals, Golding grants this characteristic to the New Men, the “true men” who “in their fear, have projected their own evil impulses onto the gentler tribe, thereby justifying their extermination” (McCarron, 10). McCarron further assumes that by regarding Colonialism as a form of “devouring” (10) the colonized country, cannibalism can be viewed as “one of its most potent metaphors” (10).

Since the narrative is revealed through Lok’s “uncomprehending perceptions” (McCarron, 7), it is relevant to focus on the fact that he is introduced to the readers as early as page 33 as having difficulties with perceiving the meaning of metaphorical constructions, called by Golding “pictures”. For instance, when Lok utters “I have a picture”, the people “laughed too because this was Lok’s picture, almost the only one he had, and they knew it as well as he did” (33). Then Lok becomes specific about the picture that referred to finding the little Oa.

Metaphorically charged images can be hardly measured, because their intrinsic values keep on multiplying themselves, sometimes acquiring religious or allegorical connotations. The religion of the Neanderthals is matriarchal. They worship a female deity who inspires protection, fecundity, joy and lack of bloodshed. She is referred to as “the great Oa”. Christianity reverberates from Mal’s metaphorical description of the Great and gentle Oa: “there was the great Oa. She brought forth the earth from her belly. She became sick. The earth brought forth woman and the woman brought forth the first man out of her belly” (35). Moreover, when Lok follows Ea in order to get into the cave of ice, where Oa is worshipped, he is overwhelmed by the religious powers surrounding her. So, Fa has to comfort him by claiming “It is too much Oa for a man” (35).

Mal’s metaphorical vision of Oa embodies a set of life-affirming values in total opposition with “the rutting, bellowing Stag God” (McCarron, 1) of the New Men. The latter

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

suggests “blood sacrifice” (11), aggressiveness and the patriarchal character of their religion. After Liku’s being kidnapped, Lok and the woman Fa, follow the New Men to their camping place, noticing their actions from behind a dead tree, itself a “realistic” (11) symbol with theological connotations. Lok can hardly understand the progress of the events and the dramatic implications of their actions while gazing down on the clearing together with Fa.

What we see is revealed to us through Lok’s limited comprehension and it amounts to the New Men’s Stag God and to an extremely violent and “sexually orgiastic” (11) manifestations, in total opposition with the moderate yet primitive behaviour of the Neanderthals. Moreover, we are offered a shred of evidence regarding the fact that the New Men killed Liku and ate her. As concerns the quotation “out of the churned-up earth the right fore paw picked a small, white bone” (91), Lok’s unperceptive nature hardly realizes what has happened. It is Fa, who, in a hopeless attempt to find and rescue her, realizes the truth.

While running away from the clearing to save their own lives, Fa is hit by a rock and falls into the river water. Although she clutches onto a tree, the current speeds up, slides souldlessly and drops over the fall forcing her to drown engulfing her and Liku’s little white bone. All that has remained of Liku after having been devoured by the New Men can be related to the metaphorical connotations of the “lived space” (Bachelard, 201) and the “causality of the little” (201). Bachelard claims that the “causality of the little” touches all the senses, adding that “for the senses like taste, smell, the problem can be even more significant than for that of sight” (201).

According to Bachelard’s line of thinking, the problems related to the “causality of the little” have been psychologically examined and the psychologists have identified various thresholds regarding the body senses. The paradoxical metaphors are overabundant in Golding’s novel and they deserve special attention to be paid to.

Every incident within the novel is seen through Lok’s eyes and our sympathy for him can not be destroyed either by his physical appearance or by his limited perception. Mostly relevant is the fact that Lok’s identity is closely related to his People and its collective, tribal background.

Equally important for understanding Lok and his people is their past experience. Once a large tribal community, flourishing in a primitive and somehow familiar environment, they have become rather passive, lacking the intelligence to adjust to the new conditions of living. Their number has been reduced to eight members who are completely at the mercy of the new harsh realities. Mc Carron assumes that even if the New Men had not arrived Lok’s people could not have survived because they were lacking those qualities which could have enabled them to control the environment.

At the beginning of the novel, Mal introduces us into the history of his people, its suffering which are in total opposition with its capacity to create or to survive. Surviving is related to “pictures” of what is to be done, pictures (ideas) charged with material facts, such as that of providing wood and food. Generally speaking, facts do not explain the values attached to them. However, Lok “who had fewest pictures” (37) points out the fact that he figures himself running along the side of the mountain, carrying a deer that had formerly been killed by a hyena,

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

under his left arm and, under his right one, “the quarters of a cow”. In spite of his enthusiasm, people shouted with laughter, adding that “Lok has a mouthful of words and no pictures”. Metaphorically speaking we can say that Lok’s soul “dreams and thinks, then he imagines” (Bachelard, 203). Golding leads us to a “sorry plight” which can be hardly surpassed.

The slightest noise prepares a catastrophe, while the wind blowing announces in terms of sound metaphors the chaotic character of things and events. As the paradoxical metaphors related to body senses, every detail is a shred of evidence before “turning into a phenomenon in this cosmos of boundaries” (Bachelard, 203). The weaker or more significant a sign is, the more meaning it possesses because it points to “origins” (203). The most significant metaphorical construction is introduced on page 35 and it refers to the “great Oa” who brought forth the earth, the earth brought forth woman and the woman brought forth the first man out of her belly.

The religious origins of mankind in Neanderthals’ view are related to the matriarchal representation of their goddess. From a cognitive perspective, it can be interpreted as thinking embodied in a mental image. This image covers a certain reality happily transmitted to us by Mal’s creative mind. The word “picture” is systematically associated with Mal’s mind, with direct reference to the Neanderthals’ basic needs and concerns. His weak physical and psychic conditions make all his People share a picture inside their heads of Mal “a little removed from them, illuminated, sharply defined in all his gaunt misery. They saw not only Mal’s body but the slow pictures that were waxing and waning in his head. One above all was displacing the others, dawning through the cloudy arguments and doubts and conjectures until they knew what it was he was thinking with such dull conviction” (39).

Golding is clearly preoccupied to offer an “active gravitational centre” (Bachelard, 198) through the image of Mal, who although was on the point of dying, was settling issues regarding who was about to get wood or food from the forest, firmly concluding “I have spoken”. Although Mal announces them that he will die the next day or the day after, Golding brings about an important variation and renders it functional in both senses. Mal is the pivot of a series of innovating actions such as those mentioned before, namely of getting wood and food in order to ensure the stability of his small community of people and to offer them the illusion of stability and continuity.

Consequently, the old woman of the tribe ensures him that they will get food and wood the next day so as to prevent the image of the dying man to stand stock-still. It seems that Golding’s concern was to offer to his characters the illusion that their world gravitates around some value, no matter whether that value consists of “the great Oa” or of the great Mal. While approaching Mal’s thinking embodied in language-objects (Sandu, 40) such as food and wood, this sort of thinking is somehow transferred to Lok who becomes “tense with pre-hearing” (Bachelard, 203), trying to grow aware of the feeblest details or signs that might announce danger or disaster for the People.

Golding emphasizes the “miracles of perception” performed by Lok’s ability to identify various scents related either to “honey” on page 50, or to food (under the form of a doe killed and half devoured by hyenas, on page 53), or to various forms of wickedness, on page 54. The

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

highly symbolical island where the Neanderthals' supreme values are food and intense fellowship is a mixture of real sensations and real hallucinations which together with forms and colours reflect various psychological phenomena that the characters are hardly aware of.

For instance, Mal's approaching death is tackled in a very concrete manner. The acquisition of meat makes them contemplate the idea that it might strengthen him up so as to continue to be their leader. On the other hand, Lok and Fa's visitation of their goddess, the great Oa, is emblematic of the fact that religion also plays an important part in their community as they implore the goddess to take care of Mal. Sound symbolism is turned to account by Golding through Fa's uttering "Oa", "Mal" and "sick" as individual words, while the rock walls as if rejecting those words, bound them back, forcing them to throw the words again. Then they no longer uttered separate words but sang "O" and "A" at the same moment. "The sound rose like water in a tidal pool, smoothed like water, became a ringing that beat on him, drowned him. 'Sick, sick', said the wall at the end of the sanctuary. 'Mal' said the rocks behind him, and the air sang with the interminable and rising tide of 'Oa'. Such auditive hallucinations terrify Lok, while Fa concluded "It is too much Oa for a man" (101). The auditive hallucinations are increased by visual hallucinations associated with the sudden disappearance of Ha, one of the members of their community.

Sent by Mal to get food, Ha is finally discovered to have fallen from a cliff into the river water and to have died. The paradoxical metaphors employed by Golding to suggest two deaths – that of Mal and Ha – activate various language-objects as vehicles turned into profound emotional tenors which reveal profound vibrations. The choosing of "haunches of meat" for the dead one when he is hungry, and of "water trickled over the dead face" when he is thirsty, convert the "transcendence of what can no longer be" and the "transcendence of what can no longer be seen" into "the transcendence of what can be tasted and of what can be seen through the "ritual of memory" (Bachelard, 208).

The death of Mal turns Lok into their leader because there was no other male person to replace him. The words uttered by the old woman "Now there is Lok" grant him power and responsibility. If so far we have faced the "outside Lok" (141), from now on, his fragile and ephemeral voice will possess more firmness acquiring some of the certainties of a new inner reality which unites him with the world around him. The "inner Lok" (141), as Golding will call him, can be further approached through the phenomenology of the verbs "to listen to" and "to notice" the traces of otherness. Lok keeps on saying "the other is on the island" (97) or "with the scent of other I am other. I creep like a cat. I am frightened and greedy. I am strong" ... "Now I am Ha and the other. I am strong" (97). His people demand that he should find the other and speak to him: "Find the other, Lok, and speak to him" (98). They could not miss the signs of the other and conclude that since "there was smoke on the island, there was another man" (99).

Lok becomes determined to find the other, by himself, so he "hurried away downstream, circling into the forest" (100), until he reached a "very brown and firmer" earth than the one near the side of the river where their camp was. Suddenly Lok understands there's more than one person, and, sensing a "great strength" (101) within himself, he audibly addresses them

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

“Hoe new people”. He realizes that the new people have heard him “by the blinking of the fire and the shaking of the thick bushes that they would come into sight” (102).

Overwhelmed by fear and eager to find Ha, Lok desperately keeps asking “Where are you?” (106). While looking for Ha, Lok hears Liku screaming and realizes that the new men have got Liku and the new one. It is now that Lok and Fa start following the New Men and notice their orgiastic performance. While spying the New Men from the clearing, they realize that they have got shut in, that they know for sure that they are there and that they do not want Fa and Lok to go away. Both Lok and Fa are sharing “a general sense, a bitter smell, a dead silence and agonized attention, a motionlessness and tensed awareness” (141) and an agonizing fear. The full evidence regarding the New Men’s appearance, the way they call names (Tuami, Chestnut-head, Tuft, Bush, Tanak) make Lok and Fa continue to hang around still hoping that they could recuperate Liku, as they have hardly realized what has happened to her.

Golding carefully prepares Lok’s evolution from an unperceptive into a highly perceptive nature due to the threatening conditions as follow: “Inside Lok shared a picture of terror with Fa, but outside Lok was coldly brave and still as ice” (183). Meanwhile Fa also disappears, so he continues to call out both Liku and Fa’s names. Lok follows Fa’s prints and suddenly realizes that “the steps and blood came thus far; there was the scent of Fa and her terror, and after that, nothing” (188). All sorts of pictures pass through his brain. “This was an upheaval in the brain and he felt proud and sad and like Mal” and adds “Now I am Mal”. Golding insists on Lok’s changed mental condition and depicts it as follows: “All at once it seemed to him that his head was new, as though a sheaf of pictures lay there to be sorted when he would. The pictures were of plain grey daylight. They showed the solitary string of life that bound him to Liku and the new one; they showed the new people towards whom both outside-and inside-Lok yearned with a terrified love, as creatures who would kill him if they could” (191).

Golding has succeeded to make Lok “believable” without imposing to himself to achieve perfect “consistency” as he is concerned with depicting him in terms of the narrative or linguistic characteristics. He intuitively gains the quality of identification with the character by creating for him both a “secret dwelling of understanding and “a common structure of social understanding” (Gilder, 109). The former arises from his deep emotional attachment to his people, while the latter can be related to his acknowledgement of the threatening presence of the New Men.

Underlining both Lok’s positive emotions regarding his people and his newly acquired moral strength while watching the new men, Golding is enlarging Lok’s perceptual field. His personality is characterized by an emotional and intuitive configuration which includes: his loyalty to his people, his capacity to defend them and himself, his kindness, sincerity and capacity to follow and identify danger through his body senses.

In order to mediate such fragmented construct hierarchies into a well integrated whole, cognitively known under the name of gestalt, Golding firstly exploits Lok’s initial limited perception, then the more elaborated type of comprehension, focusing on well constructed cognitive instruments with metaphorical connotations. As such, Lok, as a limited character,

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

offers details which are either uninformative – “the steps and the blood came thus far; and after that, nothing” (188) or too informative – “Lok with a flash of Mal thinking remembered that there was another log and many bundles” (193).

In cognitive Gricean terms, Lok seems to be unable to cope with “the maxims of quality and relation” (in Semino, p. 12). The category of Quantity refers to the quantity of information which should be as informative as required to be and not more informative than required (Grice in Semino, 12). In spite of Lok’s sometimes irrelevant or inadequate information, as both character and narrator, he is still informative for the reader revealing why he behaves like this.

Following Grice’s theory, we posit that Lok’s behaviour does not violate the relevant maxims, but it rather “infringes” the maxim. Jenny Thomes in *Meaning in Interaction* cited by Semino relates infringement either to an “imperfect command of the language” (a prehistoric man) or to emotional impairment (nervousness, excitement) or to “cognitive impairment” (his inability to realize what normally stands for the “appropriate level of detail in communication” (in Semino, 12).

In addition, the cognitive limitation attributed to Lok can be further related to the “Theory of Mind” problem (Happe’s “Understanding Minds and Metaphors”). Her theory tackles the inability to construct the minds and mental states of other people (in Semino, 13). All the above-mentioned details arising from Grice’s and Happe’s theories have been employed by us to underline Lok’s mental limitations.

Golding’s genius endows the previously dull Lok “with a flash of Mal thinking” (193) embodied in newly acquired mental capacities. On page 194, we are informed that Lok has discovered “Like” and that “he had used likeness all his life without being aware of it ... Lok found himself using likeness as a tool as surely as ever he had used a stone to hack at sticks or meat. Likeness could grasp the white-faced hunters with a hand, could put them into the world where they were thinkable and not a random and unrelated irruption”.

Picturing the hunters, Lok metaphorically thought: “the people are like a famished wolf in the hollow of a tree”; “the people are like honey trickling from a crevice in the rock”; “the people are like honey in the round stones, the new honey that smells of dead things and fire”; “they are like the river and the fall, they are a people of the fall; nothing stands against them”; “they are like Oa” (196); “they are like a fire in the forest” (197); “they have gone over us like a hollow log; they are like a winter” (198). Lok shared most of these thoughts with Fa, still hoping that they can save Liku and the new one. They even decide to take one of the members of the New Men – Tanakil – so as to offer them in exchange for Liku.

Tanakil’s screaming, the white bones of Liku as evidence of the fact that she was killed and eaten up, Fa’s death due to her being followed and hunted by the New Men thwarts Lok’s plans. Alone and frightened he simply decides to lie down and die. He tries to get into Mal’s grave but he no longer possesses the physical strength to do it.

The pathos of Lok’s death is overshadowed by items of information about the history of the New Men. In the last chapter we learn their polysyllabic names (Marlan, Tuami) which are a linguistic instrument to emphasize their more complex nature compared to Lok’s people.

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)

**CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, 2016

ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4

*Section: Literature*

---

Moreover, Tuami's cry of despair "What else could we have done" has been interpreted by McCarron as suggesting "the growth of a new, more refined consciousness, one that could not have come into existence without the knowledge of evil and guilt". The same McCarron concludes that the presence of the New Men suggests "the possibility of a reconciliation between innocence and guilt" (14). Mc Carron's assumptions can be further cognitively and conclusively interpreted via Lakoff's conceptual metaphor "Life is journey", a journey from innocence to guilt and the consequent degrees of awareness associated with them.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Gilder, Eric. *Man and Mission: Constructing Wayne Booth's Theology of Literature as Rhetoric*, Lucian Blaga University Press of Sibiu, 2003.

Golding, William, *The Inheritors*, Faber and Faber, UK, 1955

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens. Încercare de determinare a elementului ludic al culturii*. Editura Univers. Bucureşti, 1977

Lackoff, G., Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980

McCarron, Kevin, *William Golding*, Northcote House, UK, 1994

Semino, Elena, *Mind Style*, Elsevier Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics, 2005

Soja, W. Edward, *Post-metropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1996