MATERIAL ECOCRITICAL PATTERNS IN WILLIAM GOLDING'S LORD OF THE FLIES

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Abstract: This paper aims to establish an onto-epistemological connection and continuity between the act of communication and context within the fictional narrative discourse of Lord of the Flies. The concept of Material Ecocriticism applied to the novel under scrutiny, comprehended within the larger background of New Materialism(s), sublimates both the structuralist - linguistic turn, by which language enslaves reality through epistemic conditioning, and the poststructuralist – cultural turn, by which reality is a social construct and nature is dematerialized. Thus, an equilibrium between context, pragmatically apprehended here as environment, and communication and text, apprehended as culture, ought to be obtained. The binary and essential opposition between the ecology of culture and the ecology of nature, civilization and wilderness, good and evil, subject and object, text and context is transcended in order to acknowledge a discursive homogeneity of narrative characters, social constructs and perceived environment. A direct aftermath of this episteme relates to the fact that there is a discursive and consubstantial exchange between the agency of textual culture and the agency of contextual nature through the immanent dynamics of communication.

Keywords: Material Ecocriticism, agency, (con)text, immanence, Lord of the Flies.

Introduction

The novel *Lord of the Flies* depicts the adventures of a group of English children marooned on a remote island and their struggle for survival. The bare narrative line is nevertheless doubled by an internal cultural and ecological conflict. The title is very suggestive in terms of its mythical and symbolic connection to the fictional universe, the idea of evil and the brutality of war. The Lord of the Flies or Beelzebub represents another name for Satan or it is the name for one of the seven princes of Hell, just beneath Lucifer. He is historically and biblically associated with the Philistine Baal (Lord), a pre-Christian god who symbolizes the physical and moral gluttony, sickness, rottenness, jealousy, idolatry, tyranny, waste, dung, murder, and even war. According to the Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchies and to the Jewish-Christian traditions, he was a seraphim, which is the highest rank of angels. Their noetic appearance is hypostatized by an angel with six wings, two of them covering the eyes; this iconography is relevant due to the fact that these seraphic beings live beyond the light of the creation and energies, and contemplate the apophatic and non-essential darkness of God. The symbols mentioned above are encrypted within the social-natural crisis unfolded in the novel.

From another point of view, which is to be merged with the former, an epistemological relationship between the text, context and communication ought to be questioned. Starting from the premise that the discursive meaning comes out from the dichotomy of text and context and from an ecocritical perspective, one can argue that the spatial-temporal continuum, here the remote island, represents the surroundings or environment of a given text, here the children's social-cultural background and behavior. Having established these methodological connections, the space of openness relates directly to the mediated experiences between the generic author and the reader; post-structurally

speaking, the text is not stable or fixed, but it undergoes a process of becoming and negotiation between the author, the reader and context, through the agency of communication and exchange. Thus, the textual meaning is not a finite product of its transcendent cause and it is continuously reshaped by the circumstantial effects. In this manner, a transfer of agency can be observed and debated from the transcendent societal structures to the immanent and holistic threads of Nature.

An Onto-Epistemological Perspective: Beyond the Dialectics of Text and Context

This interplay of text and context or of civilization and nature is illustrated in *Lord of the Flies* as an initially "libertarian society" and a "classless community" (Bookchin 3). From a social-ecological perspective, a society in which all are equal and share the same opportunities represents the cultural paragon to be obtained. Nevertheless, the struggle for domination is unfolding from the very beginning of the novel, when the leader is elected, apparently through a democratic process. The dynamics of structuring hierarchies of power displays an image where the strong are considered superior to the weak, where someone's will is imposed by the use of force, and where the immediate and egoistic need is no longer inferior to the general commonwealth: "Use a littlun" (Golding 102). Furthermore, the societal domination is exported to the natural environments and its creatures because "the very domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human" (Bookchin 65). As seen in the novel, the boys "outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taking away its life like a long satisfying drink" (Golding 59).

Symbolically speaking, the civilization – nature dichotomy is extended through farther oppositions between society and savagery, order and chaos, reason and impulse, law and anarchy, good and evil, strong and weak. These abstract concepts are materialized through the agency of the main characters, because the narrative discourse unfolds through their eyes, they are elected as leaders, and the plot gravitates around them. Firstly, Ralph represents the so-called instinct of civilization and the impulse of living by rules. For him, to act peacefully and to follow moral commands are values which transcend the mere and egoistic need for survival, the group identity and structure being superior to segregated individuals. On the other hand, Jack represents the opposite instinct of wilderness, savagery, immediate desires, violence and supremacy. He acts as if the world should subordinate unconditioned to himself, including here the human beings. After seeing the moral features of these two characters and their symbolic objectifications into the natural surroundings, one can observe that the coherence of the initial opposition between the goodness of civilization and the malignancy of nature has diluted within the larger background of Nature.

Thus, although Jack is associated with the dark side of Nature or the human nature, he was in the beginning the leader of the school choir and he tried to behave like a gentleman, who knows his place in society: "We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages" (Golding 34). Indeed, there is a hierarchy, but this tool of exerting power is not essential, but a constructed societal behavior, and the guilt belongs to the strong who want to export their will to other human beings and to nature. Simon, with his calm and innocence, displays a non-hierarchical attitude and behavior towards the openness of human and non-human beings. He intuitively perceives reality as it is: fragmented, illusory, with non-linear and intricate connections, in other words, in a rhizomatic way, "without beginning", "always

in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (Deleuze, Guattari 25). There is no universal and univocal truth through the agency of which the surrounding reality is organized and the society is structured; the logic of the evergreen opposition between the cultural text and the contextual nature is continuously negotiated by the discursive actors within the play: "maybe there is a beast…maybe it's only us" (Golding 77).

This beast is conceptualized as the primal instinct of evil and it is related to the fear felt by those who are alienated from themselves, from others and from nature. The anxiety is growing in a direct relation to the instinct of savagery and it finally becomes a totemic god to which the boys offer animal and human sacrifices. The fear represents a fringe zone, where the clear distinction between the textuality of Civilization and the (con)textuality of the Environment is overcome by the changing agency of "the ecology of mind" (Bateson 1). Because of the fact that the media of the human psyche, culture and nature are interdependent within the larger cybernetic system of cosmos, "the creature that wins against its environment destroys itself" (497). Having established hierarchies of power within society and also nature, the human has caused a "schismogenesis" (71), a departure from the" logoi" which sustain the overall system. The only path to equilibrium consists in obtaining "homeostasis" (354), an ecological state of marrying heterogeneous discourses of civilization and wilderness or, from our point of view, of text and its environmental (from the verb to environ or to surround) context.

Thereby, there is an active interplay between the human mind and one's exterior, culture and nature. "We need to apprehend the world through interchangeable lenses of the three ecologies: "social ecology", "mental ecology", environmental ecology" ("The Three Ecologies" 134). When the ecology of mind associates oneself with "the desire to squeeze and hurt" (Golding 101), "the world, that understandable and lawful world" is "slipping away" (79), in this way the ecologies of culture and nature being epistemologically displaced from their ontological locus. The text is negotiated by the human mind, damaged or not, within the proper context through multiple and rhizomatic processes of "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" (Deleuze, Guattari 63), the wild territories of the environmental context being impregnated with becoming textual subjectivities. Thus, the ecology of mind exports one's psychological and cultural texts to the context of Nature, in this sense the human subjectivity undergoing a non-essential becoming of identity. The ontic condition of cybernetic communication of these subjectivities between apparently incompatible ecologies is that the human being and the world to be situated within a "plane" of "pure immanence" (282).

This plane of immanence means that all the realms of existence ought to extract their meanings from the same contextual and natural background and the body ought to horizontally transcend its limits in order to deterritorialize and reterritorialize itself into the nature. Thus, it becomes plural and rhizomatic, oriented towards environment, becoming "more-than-human" (Iovino; Oppermann "Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity" 76). In this manner, the civilized and urbanite Jack has no fixed identity as he might initially think; his fluid identity is continuously shaped and structured by society or by nature. In the beginning, he tries to establish a hierarchical difference between him and others, between his mind and the environmental exterior, but, as the narrative discourse is unfolding, he objectifies rhizomatically his identity into the natural background,

becoming a hunter and a killer, features incompatible to the previous state: "Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his Blood!" (Golding 135). The same process, even though to a lesser degree, occurs with Ralph, who believes, after experiencing multiple textual-cultural and contextual-natural identities, that "over-mastering" (101) the environment represents a franatic feeling.

The paradigm of "neo-materialist renaissance" ("Models of Narrativity" 75) is against both the linguistic – structuralist perspective, by which reality is epistemologically enslaved by the human mind and its extended textual structures, and the cultural – poststructuralist perspective, by which reality is socially constructed and the world is dematerialized. In cognitive terms, it rejects the Cartesian binary oppositions between mind and body, observer and the observed, discursive and material, text and context. This non-Hegelian deconstruction has no an imperative third term and it is not limited to an epistemological/methodological path; the epistemic field of knowledge merges with the ontic one. Thus, the abyss between the human – cultural – textual ecology of mind and the non-human – natural – contextual ecology of wilderness becomes a non-essential and fluid substance of becoming materiality, in which the observer identifies oneself with the observed, and the text is one with the context. As Piggy says: 'Life…is scientific…there isn't no beast…there isn't no fear" or others say about him: "Pig. We eat pig. Piggy" (Golding 72), there is no clear distinction, narrative and epistemic, between the scientific world and the natural life, between the objective mind and the illusion of nature, between a real person and the object of eating, between the discourse of text and the discourse of context.

There is a material continuity between text and context and between knowing and being, the former having been lost the prerogative of conditioning the latter. In this context, the ecology of mind represents the consubstantial unity of the self with the larger noetic entity of Nature. Although it rejects the postmodern dematerialization of the world, Material Ecocriticism uses its instruments to deconstruct the everlasting dichotomy between language – culture and material – nature, destabilizing, at the same time, the meta-narrative of power and hierarchy; this endeavor is materialized into an "ecological postmodernism" (Models of Narrativity' 78). Converging the epistemic perspective with the ontic one is the result of acknowledging the fact that there is no distinction between the human being and the world in which one lives, between the discourses of text and context; the human psyche is not transcendent to one's contextual environment, the latter not being something which surrounds the central thinking self. The human material self is consubstantial and, thus, immanent to the world which he or she perceives as exterior. The interior shares the same substance with the exterior and, of course, the textual fluidity is shaped and reshaped by the natural context and vice versa. This onto-epistemological perspective and the ecological thought that the plural human subjectivities are distributed all over the nature re-materialize and "re-enchant" (78) the forgotten Nature.

An Onto-Ethico-Epistemological Perspective: The Trialectics of Text, Context and Communication

The re-enchantment of Nature does not mean that the material-ecocritical approach has been polluted with ignorance, easiness and extra-mundane; the critical teleology lies in the transgression of the postmodern perspective and in the sublimating the so-called Cultural

Turn, by which the world is dematerialized into conceptual and ideatic fragments of the human beings' minds. In this manner, the natural background, in which the cultural discourses are formed and structured, begins to move and becomes fluid. The contextual nature in which (and within) the boys live is perceived and understood as not being static or as behaving as conditioned by an a priori observer. Thus, the interior merges with the exterior and the unknown is seen as a dread partner of discussion, communication or veneration: "This head is for the beast. It's a gift" (Golding 122); "It's come…It's real" (149). This process of identitary displacement goes together with the feeling of fear, because the boys do not externalize, towards a clear finality, their subjectivities into the context of Nature and, doing so, the subjective replacement does not occur and the dichotomic hierarchies between them and other(s) are still maintained.

As said before, the deterritorialized subjectivities, without a proper reterritorialization, associate the unknown or the other with fear, an affect which acknowledges the fact that the epistemic chasm between the human discourse and the natural one functions as a departure from the true nature of humans. This nature consists in sharing the existential substance with others and, at the same time, observing that others are different. By appropriating the episteme that they are the same with Nature and, simultaneously, different from it, the boys will be able to get rid of the fear of the unknown. In this way, the text will be epistemologically and ontologically embedded into the fabric of the real context. "It's real" (149) represents a non-essential distinction between the human being and the putative exterior, between the human agency and the natural agency. From a (post)structuralist point of view, agency has been conceptualized as a feature related to the human mind or as a force opposed to the construction of society; furthermore, the possibility to act or to perform has been considered a feature associated with intentionality and intelligence.

Therefore, from a Cartesian perspective, the only entity which (who) could carry out agentive characteristics has been (was) Man. Yet, with the ecosophic paradigm of incorporating the act of knowing within the act of being, this perspective has been changing towards acknowledging a continuity of discursive and existential substance between the cultural structures and the natural background. The marooned boys from that remote and isolated island insert the identities of culture and civilization into the wilderness, in this way becoming part of the Nature, along with their societal legacy. Expanding the boundaries of agency to Nature leads to the assumption that all ecologies within the overall cybernetic system have agency, without an explicit connection to personhood, consciousness, will, intentionality or intelligence. The boys recognize a force outside their imagined interior, which can manage to be an equal part of a dialogue. The world, conceived as a totalizing reality, including here the human beings, is not stable, but in a process of becoming and materialization. "Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative" ("Models of Narrativity" 77), not a fixed essence, but an agentive substance which can influence the in-side of the boys.

The influence of the dichotomic agencies of Man and Nature is mutual, reality having a "degree of sentient experience" (78), this performativity occurring on the same immanent territory of inter-subjective confluence. The act of communication within the interplay of the textual domain of civilization and the contextual domain of environment augments the continuum epistemic-ontic with a third variable: the ethic component. The communicative

ethics represents, in fact, the process of "doing", aside from the processes of "knowing" and "being". Therefore, the natural context has a greater and almost intentional influence on the becoming text: "I'm the beast…I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? ...The Lord of the Flies was expending like a balloon" (Golding 128). Nature is the Other which communicates with the boys, especially with Simon, alterity being here a premise for engaging into a dialogue between a heterogeneous and agentive entity, but, at the same time, sharing the homogeneous substance of materiality with the boys. This plane of immanence and the consubstantial interplay of agentive subjectivities are explained by the fact that animality is a force which animates both sides of the world, human and nature.

The closeness actually represents the intimacy of two equals, situated on the same axiological level, and sharing the same ontic openness. Their epistemic and ontic parts are interchangeable, text becoming context and vice-versa. The expending experience of communication symbolizes a bridge between two partners which (who) know/are/do each other. "The agency of matter, the interplay between the human and the non-human, in a field of distributed effectuality and of inbuilt material-discursive dynamics" ("Models of Narrativity" 79) relates to the act of narrativity, in terms of negotiating the process of communication and its process of decoding by the reader. Being agentive, the contextual matter produces its own meanings and it "is telling" its own story (79), without an exterior or transcendent observer or agent. There are two ways of performing agentive acts: the first consists in describing the natural agency in the cultural narratives/texts, whereas the second consists in the narrative power of the nature itself; thus, "matter itself becomes a text" (80). Thereby, referring to the novel's events, Simon's dead body is imagined as it follows: "the line of his cheek silvered and the turn of his shoulder became sculptured marble" (Golding 137). "The sea, as a pulsating nonhuman agent, functions as a vital force" ('Models of Narrativity" 81), its openness absorbing all beings, human and nonhuman, objects, "things", natural phenomena, mineral particles, exothermic process of fire, in other words, everything.

Simon's subjectivity is diffused into the intimacy/closeness of the material world, becoming one with the world. The material-narrative imagination is twofold because, even though the human has a specific perspective on the material nature, the imagining person and the processes of imagination are captured in the totalizing world, in this manner imagination itself becoming material and immanent to the contextual locus. The boys' imagination acts as a fringe heterotopic momentum, in which all the threads of reality, textual, contextual and communicative, are to be assembled within a rhizomatic mesh. Nevertheless, the disruption of this onto-epistemic continuity, by establishing artificial hierarchies of power, leads (for most of them) to the impossibility of acknowledging the unity of the world with their fragmented minds; "the compulsion to track down and kill" (Golding 42) represents, indeed, a barrier for merging the knower with what is known. By sublimating the essential fear, Simon is seeing the true "nature" of the deterritorialized nature, as a projection of itself in the guise of a meaningful text. A common error of interpretation stems from the process of anthropomorphism, which does not mean that the nonhuman nature is linguistically and culturally conditioned by the human psyche. In fact, it stresses the horizontality of communication in the same plane of existence, against, of course, the anthropocentric perspective ("Models of Narrativity" 82). The boys imagine different scenarios, being afraid

of the unknown, but there is an objective reality which exerts and modifies their behavior and identity.

Isomorphism, as an axiological-ethical and epistemological-ontological similarity between equal realities, in this case culture – nature or text – context, is methodologically a path to identify the text with the context in their inner contiguity and substance. The "storied matter" (83) unfolds its own meaning and narrativity, becoming a text, alike the textual-discursive human psyche or civilization. Thus, the "material self" (83) becomes part of the "world wide web" and the intra/inter-subjectivities are continuously materialized in the process of becoming. "The corporeal dimensions of human and nonhuman agencies… are inseparable from the very material of the world within which they intra-act" (84). Merging knowing with being in a "differential becoming" of discovering alterity represents a "partnership between different agents in creating reality" (84). The body, alive – in experiencing the illusory transition between the interior and exterior, or dead – in integrating the everlasting subjectivities within the natural context or within the minds of the boys, bridges the in-side and out-side, becoming post-human; conversely, Nature becomes post-natural.

Conclusion

The "material ethics" (Models of Narrativity" 85) "re-elaborates the horizon of human action according to a more complex, plural, and interconnected geography of forces and subjects" (86). The materialization of the world consists in "matter as a form of "emergent" agency that is combined and interferes with every "intentional" human agency" (86), within the larger picture of a quasi-non-intentionality. The post-humanist space represents a reconciliation of "the materiality of our lives and the life of the environment" (87), the relational ontology, by which existence – relation - becoming is more important than essence – individuality – stability, having an axiological effect. Seeking for otherness equals to a "material liberation"; its teleology is "to bridge the discursive and the material, the logos and the physis, mind and body" (87).

This liberation relates symbolically to the novel's myths of "loss of innocence" and "Paradise lost". "Which is better – to have laws and agree, or to hunt and kill?" (Golding 162), which dovetails with "the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart" (182), represents the quintessence of this novel and of this material- ecocritical approach for four main purposeful reasons. Firstly, the dichotomic hierarchies of civilization and savagery, human and nonhuman, good and evil are deconstructed, without imperatively finding a third term of synthesis. Secondly, there is a communication of displaced and replaced subjectivities between the text, conceptualized as cultural-human ecology, and context, conceptualized as environmental ecology, by which heterogeneous, at the same time, rhizomatic threads of reality penetrate the same plane of immanence in which these ecologies interact. Thirdly, a new-materialist and post-postmodern paradigm, with profound onto-epistemological implications, is conceptualized, which develops the previous social-ecological and ecosophical perspectives. The textual psyche/culture is embedded in the larger contextual nature, between them being a continuity of substance and identity. Fourthly, the text of culture and the context of nature are incorporated in the same discursive materiality, in which both are conceived as texts through the intra-act of agentive communication. Thus, the human

ecology and the natural ecology are conceptualized as material texts, with the same epistemological-ontological and axiological-ethical rights. From a post-human-natural point of view, the human being and Nature are co-actants in the same immanent world, where they share the same ontic territory and where there is no difference, at least essential, between text, context, and communication.

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