WILLIAM GOLDING’S *THE DOUBLE TONGUE* AS HYPERTEXT OF EURIPIDES’S *ION*

François Pauw
University of Stellenbosch

ABSTRACT

The title of William Golding’s last novel, *The Double Tongue* (1995), alludes to the notorious ambiguity of the Delphic oracle; the novel explicitly draws on Euripides’s tragicomedy *Ion* as hypotext. Not only is the eponymous character of Euripides’s play clearly adapted by Golding, but Golding’s narrator and main character, Arieka, can be regarded as a conflation of two Euripidean characters, Kreousa and the Priestess. In both works, Apollo plays a dominant role *extra scenam* as divine manipulator of human action. In the *Ion*, he literally rapes Kreousa; in *The Double Tongue*, he metaphorically rapes Arieka by forcibly impregnating her with the seed of oracular truth. In this article, Genette’s theory of *hypertextualité* is employed to help us understand the relationship between Euripides and Golding. After exploring Golding’s strategies for contextualising an historical novel, I examine his adaptation of the Euripidean hypotext in terms of setting, plot, characterisation and theme.

1. Introduction

On his sudden death in June 1993, British author William Golding left behind a shortish historical novel, or novella, in near-final draft form. From among several other titles in Golding’s handwriting at the head of the drafts, *The Double Tongue* has been chosen by the editors.²

Golding attained literary immortality with his first and most celebrated novel, *Lord of the Flies*, in 1954. In the next forty years, a staggering ten million copies of this work would be sold in the U.K. alone, and it would be translated into thirty languages.³ Golding’s reputation would be consolidated with works such as *The Inheritors*, 1955 (about a group of Neanderthal Men being nearly wiped out by their *homo sapiens* successors), *The Spire*, 1964

---

¹ Except where they are introduced (Section 2), Genette’s French terms have been anglicised.
² Publisher’s Note to *The Double Tongue*. All references to *The Double Tongue* are based on the Faber & Faber edition (1995).
(about the aspirations of a mediaeval cathedral builder), and The Paper Men, 1982 (about the relationship between an academic and his biographer); to cap it all, he was a Nobel Laureate in 1983. Since Golding is convinced of man’s fall from grace, of his Hobbesian proclivity for greed and egoism, his works invariably manage to illuminate  *la condition humaine* with what David Lodge describes as ‘a fable of spiritual crisis’.

In Golding’s posthumous novel, the metaphor of a double tongue is used twice. Early on, it alludes to the forked tongue inherited by Apollo when he killed the mythological Python (a serpent holding sway before him) at the Delphian shrine. Later, it describes the notorious ambiguity of Pythian hexameters and thus of the oracle as institution.

In keeping with the title, the text of *The Double Tongue* is presented as the memoirs of a priestess of Delphi in the first century BC. Like Golding, when he wrote this novel, the narrator, Arieka, is an octogenarian (p. 17). Having spent her adult life as an oracle staring into the future, she now looks back at a life devoted to Apollo as his Pythia (priestess).

Arieka’s tale is told in simple, unadorned prose, a mixture of straight first-person narrative and reported dialogue. The events that constitute her life are arranged in diachronic sequence, as befits a genre such as memoirs. Postmodernist narratological games are avoided, with the notable exception of the novel’s unusual ending.

2. Hypo- and hypertexts

As it will shortly transpire from a textual analysis, Golding based his novel in large measure on the *Ion* of Euripides. The rest of this article will thus be devoted to a comparison of Euripides and Golding. As tool in studying the relationship between texts, the critical vocabulary of hypertextuality is employed.

---

5 Golding is quoted as having said in an interview: ‘[...] for God’s sake, history is really no more than a chronicle of original sin’ (Baker 1982:134).
7 ‘The god speaks with a double tongue which he inherited from a huge snake he killed at Delphi’ (p. 8). Later (p. 66), Arieka refers to the Cave ‘where Apollo fought the Python’, and yet later (p. 81) to ‘the lair of Pytho’.
8 ‘Those ancient hexameters. [...] As prophecy they were double-tongued’ (p. 101).
9 Cf. the presentation of the story in *Rites of Passage* by means of a journal kept by Edmund Talbot.
10 See Section 5.
In the introductory chapter to his magisterial work on hypertextuality, Gérard Genette distinguishes five types of hypertextualité:¹¹ (i) intertextualité (Julia Kristeva's term), where text A is present in text B in the form of quotations or allusions;¹² (ii) paratextualité, according to which literary conventions such as title and subtitles, notes, prefaces, marginal notes, illustrations and mottos are regarded as paratexts;¹³ (iii) métatextualité, where text B is a commentary on text A;¹⁴ (iv) architextualité, in terms of which generic types are identified and grouped together;¹⁵ and (v) hypertextualité,¹⁶ where text B (the hypotext) is derived from text A (the hypertext) without B being a commentary on A.¹⁷ Of these five types of textualité, the first (intertextualité) and the last (hypertextualité) are clearly of most interest to a comparatist.

Genette compares the process by which text A is transformed into text B to the creation of a palimpsest.¹⁸ According to Little et al., a palimpsest can be defined as '1. Paper, parchment, etc., prepared for writing on and wiping out again, like a slate (1706). 2. A parchment, etc., which has been written upon twice, the original writing having been rubbed out (1825)'.¹⁹ A real-life palimpsest is thus the result of one or more texts written over the original on a vellum or papyrus manuscript. When applied to comparative literature, the metaphor of a palimpsest is used in similar fashion to describe the result of Text B being 'superscripted' or 'superimposed' on Text A. The original or hypotext is still discernible, however, and is sometimes even acknowledged by the author as a source of inspiration.²⁰ An obvious example of such a hypotext cited by Genette is Homer's Odyssey, with Vergil's Aeneid and James Joyce's Ulysses as two of its many hypertextes.²¹

Since the Greek hypotext examined in this article is a tragedy, it should be stressed that Greek tragedy has had an impressively productive Nachleben. On the whole, its influence has been genre-specific: classical tragedy has served

¹¹ Here, hypertextualité is used as 'umbrella term' for an all-encompassing textualité and consisting of five subcategories.
¹⁵ Genette 1982:11.
¹⁶ Here, the term hypertextualité is more specific: it is one of the five subcategories.
¹⁹ Little et al. 1970:1418.
²⁰ Michael Alexander (quoted by Hutcheon 2006:6) punningly speaks of the 'palimpsestuous' relation between works: 'If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence overshadowing the one we are experiencing directly,'
as a model for modern tragedies, as the honorand of this volume has been demonstrating in a lifetime of research. Euripides’s *Iphigeneia amongst the Taurians*, for example, has been converted into a product of the Romantic era by Goethe in his *Iphigenie; Sartre’s Les Mouches* is an existentialist reinterpretation of Aeschylus’s *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*. Some recent novels, however, provide material for hypertextual study across generic parameters. I have argued that this applies to Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History*, where, in addition to numerous other classical allusions, a Greek tragedy (Euripides’s *Bacchae*) is used as an acknowledged hypotext. There thus appear to be two ways of adapting a classical hypotext: (i) using a Greek or Roman original as a source for a modern adaptation (hypertext) within the same genre; and (ii) adapting a classical original to a hypertext in a different genre. To these, two more could be added: (iii) using an historical or biographical novel to portray a particular period or historical personage by infusing ‘objective’ history with ‘subjective’ fictionalisation; and (iv) writing a novel or poem which contains oblique allusions to things classical without owing allegiance to any single hypotext.

For the sake of brevity, (i) will be called *intrageneric*, (ii) *transgeneric*,23 (iii) *faction* (a term used to describe the conflation of fact and fiction) and (iv) *mosaical*, since such allusions appear as random snippets comparable to a fragmented mosaic.24 These four theoretical options frequently overlap. Thus, a comparison of Euripides and Golding could be made in terms of any of the last three, and even in terms of the first.25

Against this background, Golding’s adaptation of his Euripidean hypotext in terms of setting, plot, characterisation and theme will now be examined, as well as the theme of agnosticism. In view of constraints of length, this examination will perforce be introductory and tentative. One important question, for instance, that will provisionally be sidelined is the mechanism for ‘mantic inspiration’.

---

22 Pauw 1994:147.
23 Genette 1982:15.
24 The last method of adaptation could also be called ‘kaleidoscopic’. Golding himself was fond of applying the metaphor of ‘mulching down’ to ‘the imaginative process by which diverse literary fragments rot to compost in the fertile soil of the imagination’ (Tiger 1982:22).
25 See my Conclusion.
3. A resumé of Golding’s plot

*The Double Tongue* commences with the aged Arieka reminiscing how she was brought up in a rich Aetolian-Phocian family farming on the Corinthian Gulf, half a day’s journey on foot south-west of Delphi (pp. 6-7). Arieka describes herself as plain and ungainly, admitting that ‘neither Artemis nor Demeter nor Aphrodite would have had much use for me’ (p. 6). Her father therefore grudgingly undertakes to pay an extra-large dowry (p. 13) when she has to submit to an arranged marriage. Her would-be groom, shamed by her attempted escape, cancels the marriage (p. 24), but Arieka manages to save face when the high priest of Delphi, in exchange for her dowry, adopts her as ward of the college of priests at Delphi (pp. 26-27). Already in her childhood she was aware of possessing paranormal powers (pp. 5-6, 14-15, 39). Now, the high priest wants to groom a girl with such psychic talents as trainee Pythia.

The rest of the novel is devoted to recounting her professional association with Ionides Peisistratides, the gay (pp. 36 *passim*) high priest of Apollo, some fifteen years her senior (p. 18) and commensurately more smooth and suave, worldly-wise, cynical and opportunist; her access to the Delphian Library and its keeper, the polyglot Perseus (pp. 45-48); her elevation to the post of ‘First Lady’ on the death of both of her predecessors (pp. 70, 75); and the development of a measure of scepticism as she comes to realize to what extent Ionides is using the oracle merely for political purposes (pp. 84-85, 120-21 *passim*).

Through Arieka’s eyes, we catch glimpses of Greece under Roman domination, Athens having been relegated to the status of a quaint, provincial university town (pp. 40, 56). In his bid to free Greece from the Roman yoke, Ionides orchestrates a messenger pigeon service (pp. 61, 78) to gather political intelligence from all over the eastern Mediterranean, and uses his position as interpreter for Arieka to fix questions and rig answers of a political nature (pp. 84, 121). When repairs to Apollo’s shrine at Delphi are urgently needed, Ionides takes Arieka to Athens (pp. 129-40) and Corinth (pp. 143-48) to raise money. Meanwhile, it transpires that Ionides’s naive plans have been squashed by Lucius Galba, the *Propraetor* of southern Greece (pp. 143-47; 159-62). Shortly afterwards Ionides dies, thus heralding the end of an era.

Before Ionides’s death, Perseus entrusted Arieka with an heraldic key giving access to the forbidden double doors at the back of the oracular *adyton* (p. 160). Upon unlocking them, she now finds nothing but ‘the solid, impenetrable rock of the mountain’ behind them (p. 165).
It would appear, then, as if the author concludes on a note of religious pessimism: the ultimate mystery of Delphi is a void (cf. pp. 23, 126); the numinous is a human fiction. Such a deduction, however, is invalidated by the very last paragraph of the novel. In earlier works, Golding showed himself a master of end-games. His last work, likewise, concludes with an unexpected twist. Arieka receives a letter from the archon of Athens: in view of her long service as Pythia, the city wishes to erect a stone image of her. She, however, requests that they rather erect an altar with the inscription TO THE UNKNOWN GOD (p. 165) — a clear allusion to ‘Αγνώστῳ θεῷ in The Acts of the Apostles 17:23.

Thus, the reader is challenged by a biblical hypertext to re-evaluate the polarity between belief and scepticism that forms the religious intertext of the novel. Golding has shown a predilection for such a strategy, for in The Paper Men, the cynical Wilfred Barclay is unable to resist the force of a religious illumination when he confronts a statue of Christ in a Sicilian cathedral.

4. Strategies for contextualising an historical novel

An historical novel is a work of fiction. It is not to be judged by the same criteria as historiography for, in Aristotelian terms, it is ‘poetry’ rather than ‘history’. Nevertheless, critical readers, even those of a work which probably would not have had its author’s unqualified blessing, will expect such a work to provide a true and internally consistent reflection of the era it purports to depict, of its politics, its customs and its beliefs, its culture and its arts, in as far as these are known.

26 Kermode 1995:14; Lodge 1984:179. The term ‘end-game’ probably derives from the title of Samuel Beckett’s eponymous play, where the mood of impending doom experienced by Hamm and Clov is, unexpectedly, somewhat alleviated when Clov sees a small boy regarded as ‘a potential procreator’ (Beckett 1958:49-50); it thus implies an unexpected and positive volte face. In an interview, Golding has agreed that The Spire was the only work (up to 1965) ‘not to have a gimmick [i.e. a reversal] at the end’ (Dick 1965:481). Virginia Tiget (1982:222) gives the following description of Golding’s use of this ploy: ‘As a rule, in Golding’s novels, the sheer magic of the storytelling lulls us into unguarded enjoyment. Our innocent delight is then darkly undercut by an abrupt shift in narrative viewpoint; new revelations force us to modify our earlier sympathies and reconsider what [...] had previously seemed innocuous.’ Maybe this should be understood against the background of Golding’s confession that ‘my tongue is in my cheek an awful lot of the time’ (Baker 1982:158).

27 Lodge 1984:178. For Golding’s religious views, see Section 6.3

28 Arist. Poet. 1451a-b.
Why would Golding have opted for a Greek setting? According to Kermode, Golding was well versed in the Classics, preferring Greek to Latin; he liked the tragedians, especially Euripides, even more than Homer.\(^{29}\) Indeed, for a time after the war he read almost exclusively in Greek tragedy and history.\(^{30}\) Moreover, Golding is known to have adapted Greek hypertexts: he has acknowledged *The Bacchae* as a hypotext for *Lord of the Flies*,\(^{31}\) and critics have even found correspondences between Colley (in *Rites of Passage*) and Pentheus.\(^{32}\)

Golding wasn't the first novelist to depict mantic inspiration in antiquity: Steven Saylor's *Arms of Nemesis* (1992) springs to mind, in which Gordianus the Finder encounters the Sibyl at Cumae,\(^{33}\) and the title of Hillary Bailey's *Cassandra* betrays its prophetic theme. And, of course, long before them Delphi had been the focal point, if not the actual location, of works by authors such as Aeschylus,\(^{34}\) Euripides,\(^{35}\) Plato,\(^{36}\) Pausanias and Plutarch.\(^{37}\)

In depicting mantic inspiration in Graeco-Roman antiquity, Golding has opted for the Hellenistic-Roman era rather than, for instance, the Classical.\(^{38}\) The question that should be asked, then, is: how is Arieka, as a woman in the first century BC, rendered authentic? What strategies does the author employ to lend credibility to her reminiscences?

*The Double Tongue* abounds with allusions to social conventions, customs and artefacts, literature, politics and geographical settings from antiquity; Golding was clearly not averse to doing his homework.\(^{39}\) Although Hensher...
goes too far when he judges Golding’s historical details to be ‘both leaden and incredible’, they do frequently suffer from a frustrating vagueness. They generally manage to validate the ‘ancient’ nature of the setting, but too often they fail to shed light on the first century BC because they refer to the distant past. Thus, numerous implicit or explicit allusions to the ancient world do not demonstrate that Golding created a plausible picture of life specifically between, say, 120 and 50 BC in Delphi or Athens, but merely that he had a nodding acquaintance with classical antiquity in general. The same argument holds true for allusions in Arieka’s account to literature of the Archaic and Classical era.

But to what extent is Arieka’s own era reflected? Allusions to Hellenistic poets and philosophers provide but a meagre harvest: apart from a veiled reference to New Comedy (p. 96), they are limited to Menander (p. 34), Diogenes (p. 108) and Theocritus (p. 121). However, no Greek or Latin poetry of the first century BC is mentioned. In view of Arieka’s naïve and protected provincialism, the omission of Latin literature is hardly surprising. Moreover, one could expect Greek literature to dominate in the Hellenistic age, especially in Roman provinces of Greek origin. Such a bias, at any rate, is confirmed by the content of the Bookroom (especially pp. 46-47): it is a repository of the past rather than a reflection of the present. On occasion, the polymath Ionides cynically describes Latin to Arieka as ‘a language with too much grammar and no literature’ (p. 96). Judged by extant Latin literature, we can say with hindsight that the second part of Ionides’s claim is not too far off the mark: a list of canonised Latin authors, in Arieka’s last years, would probably have been limited to Plautus, Terence, Lucretius, Julius Caesar and the early Cicero.

41 For instance, to Linear B (pp. 76, 116), the Phoenician alphabet (p. 48), the Athenian archon (pp. 77, 135, 165), a kylix (p. 146), a labrys (p. 160), herms (p. 35) or hetaerai (pp. 51, 135).
42 Such allusions range from Homer and hexameters (pp. 45-46, 58-61, 90, 101, 125) to Arctinus (the Little Iliad) and Pindar, Simonides, Bacchylides, Eratna (p. 46), Sappho, Alcaeus (p. 47), Aeschylus (pp. 46, 135), Sophocles (p. 46), Histiaeus (p. 48), Herodotus (pp. 48, 69), Pythagoras (p. 109), Socrates (pp. 39-40, 59), Plato (pp. 116-17) and Aristotle (p. 107).
43 On one occasion only is reference made to Latin literature in general: when the Latin section of the Bookroom (called the liberarium) is destroyed (p. 154).
44 In the absence of Roman literature, Golding does reflect Latin as language by his use of Latin words such as columbarium (p. 61), adytum (pp. 68 passim), imperium romanum (pp. 108-09), stylius (p. 137), abacus (p. 138), Propraetor (pp. 143 passim), palantium (p. 144), atrium (pp. 146, 152) and liberarium (p. 154), or terms acknowledged to be of Latin origin (a Roman legion, p. 57; incubation, p. 86; portico, p. 87; ominous, p.
The level on which Arieka’s world can most accurately be dated, is political. Once again, allusions to the distant past are too vague to be of any help; they merely sketch a plausible background for contextualising and authenticating her Greekness.\(^{45}\) Of significance for the history of Delphi is Arieka’s musing that her Phocian ancestors removed the Delphian treasure (p. 69; cf. pp.7-8, 94).\(^{46}\) Allusions to the deified Alexander abound, as is probably to be expected in any phase of Hellenism.\(^{47}\)

For the purpose of establishing a terminus post quem, the following allusions to political figures in the Hellenistic-Roman age, listed in chronological sequence, provide an increasingly more precise point of departure: the Punic Wars (pp. 41, 111); the Roman destruction of Corinth in 146 BC (pp. 132-33); the granting of the title of ‘free city’ to Athens by the Roman senate (p. 133); Mithridates VI of Pontus (p. 64); ‘Sulla the Roman dictator’ (p. 135), who is known to have unscrupulously used the Delphian treasury before his death in 78 BC;\(^{48}\) a visit by Metellus Cimber and Julius Caesar to the oracle (pp. 65-66, 83, 89).\(^{49}\)

Establishing a terminus ante quem is a simple matter, for near the end of Arieka’s account (p. 159) she remarks that ‘it looks as if the Romans

---

\(^{98}\) the Roman senate, p. 133; efficient, p. 160), or the pun on the names of Metellus Cimber and Julius Caesar (p. 89).

\(^{45}\) The following historical allusions would probably have been common knowledge to any educated Greek after 404 BC: Croesus (pp. 69, 127); Peisistratus (pp. 45-46); Thermopylae, Marathon, Salamis (p. 70); Alcibiades (p. 132).

\(^{46}\) This plundering can be dated to the Third Sacred War between 356 and 346 BC (Lloyd-Jones 1982:177).

\(^{47}\) As a dating aid, Arieka refers to ‘the year in which the God Alexander the Great was born’ (p. 8); in the make-believe games of her childhood, her friend Leptides is described as fighting with Alexander’s army (p. 11); Arieka describes coins ‘with the head of the God Alexander’ (pp. 33-34); Ionides tells Arieka that Alexander begged to visit Delphi (pp. 39-40); Ionides claims: ‘It is only the Alexanders who to some extent control their fate’ (p. 109); the golden dress of a Corinthian girl is described as having belonged to the royal family ‘even before the time of the God Alexander the Great’ (p. 143). For good measure, allusions to Alexander’s mother Olympias (pp. 64, 141), to Ptolemy I (p. 46) and to ‘Alexander’s admiral of the fleet’ (presumably Nearchus, p. 48) are added.

\(^{48}\) According to Spawforth 2003:205, Athens enthusiastically supported Mithridates VI in 88 BC; the city was sacked as a result by Sulla (86 BC), and a timocratic constitution imposed, but it retained ‘free’ status. See further Gill & Gempf 1994: 403.

\(^{49}\) It is strange that nothing is mentioned of the sack of Delphi by barbarians in 84 BC (Gill & Gempf 1994:403). This event would have been of the utmost significance to a middle-aged Arieka.
themselves are going to have a civil war’ — clearly alluding to the Civil War between Caesar and Pompey which would commence in January 49 BC.\textsuperscript{50}

5. The Euripidean hypotext

Arieka’s fictionalised background, as summarised and evaluated in the previous two sections, could be described as ‘historical-biographical faction’. From the perspective of comparative literature, however, there is one intertextual category which is of more significance than faction. Whereas the latter contains oblique allusions which provide a broad intertextual framework, this category has a bearing on a single identifiable work which provides a specific transgeneric hypotext.\textsuperscript{51} I am referring to Euripides’s Ion. This tragicomedy, or romantic comedy, or melodrama springs to mind as a prime candidate whenever a classicist is looking for literary sources in which Delphian Apollo or mantic inspiration is treated. The classicist will not be disappointed: Euripides’s play is implicitly or explicitly acknowledged in six separate passages in the course of Arieka’s account:

1. Arieka, as trainee Pythia, is under the impression that she has to sweep floors (pp. 27, 34); Ionides corrects her by explaining that she merely has to carry the sacred besom in processions (p. 36). The broom-wielding Ion in the prologue of Euripides’s play (103-05, 112-14) has clearly provided the hypotext for this topos.\textsuperscript{52}

2. Ionides, showing Arieka a manuscript of Euripides’s Ion in the Delphic library, explains: ‘[Ion] wasn’t my ancestor but he filled the same position that I do here. Euripides wrote the play … It’s a rather cruel story …’ (p. 46).

3. Ionides, in justifying the procession that Athens is to send to Delphi, explains to Arieka: ‘They are bringing the Ion of Euripides! You will see your first tragedy!’ (p. 76).

4. Arieka, as vehicle for Apollo’s prophetic utterance, experiences possession by the god as quasi-rape, in terms reminiscent of Kreousa’s fate in the Ion (p. 88).

5. Having attended a performance of the Ion, Arieka is better able to understand why she experiences possession by Apollo as ‘rape’ (pp. 115-16).

\textsuperscript{50} Warington 1965:113.
\textsuperscript{51} All references to the Ion are based on the Oxford text of Owen (1939).
\textsuperscript{52} See Section 2.
6. In the most explicit allusion to the *Ion*, Arieka addresses Apollo: ‘Are you there, sir? Once, you turned your back on me [...] Oh, my soul, how shall I keep silent? Ah ha, you recognize that do you not? The raped Creousa raging against the god who had raped her and begotten Ion to be priest of his temple’ (p. 119). This passage contains a verbatim echo of the opening line of Kreousa’s monody in which she berates Apollo: ὦ ψυχά, πῶς σιγάσω; (859).  

Arieka then proceeds to describe her attendance of the performance of the *Ion*, after being informed of the argument (hypothesis) of the play by Ionides beforehand. In view of Ionides’s Athenian identity (and of the Euripidean hypotext, i.e. Kreousa’s rape by Apollo in Athens, as well as Ion’s Athenian paternity), it is significant that this production takes place in Athens. These six allusions are frustratingly brief and seemingly scattered at random through Arieka’s account. Nevertheless, the sixfold repetition has the effect of accentuating the unique status of Euripides’s *Ion* as hypotext for Golding’s novel.

Summarising the plot of a complex drama is an unedifying exercise, as it appears to reduce cleverly timed peripeteiai, anagnoriseis and dramatic irony to a mere concatenation of episodic scenes. For present purposes, however, an outline of Euripides’s plot will have to suffice, dispensing with most of the formal structural terms of tragedy, since Golding employs the hypotext both sparingly and in non-dramatic form.

The scene of Euripides’s *Ion* is set in the forecourt of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Hermes recounts how some twenty years earlier, Kreousa, daughter of King Erechtheus of Athens, was raped by Phoibos Apollo on the Acropolis (10-11). The baby born of this violent union was saved from exposure by Hermes and brought to Delphi (36-40), where he was brought up by the Priestess as Apollo’s servant. Meanwhile Kreousa was given in marriage to Xouthos, a non-Athenian (57-58), and now the royal couple’s ἀτεκνία (childlessness) has brought them to Delphi to consult Apollo’s oracle (64-67). Hermes concludes his prologue speech by prophesying that Apollo, concealing his own paternity, will present Xouthos with Ion, as a

---

53 According to Genette 1982:8-9, this would represent intertext proper.
54 As Owen 1939:xix remarks, the plot is more intricate than that of any other extant play of Euripides.
55 *Ion* is the only surviving Greek tragedy where the entire action takes place at Apollo’s shrine at Delphi. See n. 28.
long-lost son. True to Euripides’s preference for etiological explanations, Ion will give his name to the Ionians (74-75).

The body of the play consists of deception, attempted revenge, recognitions (true, false or ambiguous) and, ultimately, a reconciliation of sorts. When Kreousa explains her Athenian ancestry and maternal yearnings (306) to Ion, he recounts his version of his pedigree: as an orphan since infancy, he belongs to Apollo (311) and thinks of the Pythia as his mother (321), while not discounting the possibility that he is the child of some woman who was sexually abused (325). Ion’s speculation concerning his maternity cruelly reminds Kreousa of her own fate at the hands of Apollo. She describes her horrifying experience, identifying the perpetrator, but substituting an anonymous friend for herself as victim (338). If alive, she speculates with unintended irony, the exposed baby must be about Ion’s age; moreover, some poor mother must be yearning for Ion (360). This double irony renders Kreousa’s visit to the oracle all the more poignant. Defending Apollo’s honour in spite of misgivings, Ion advises Kreousa not to pursue the matter; she, however, is bitter in her reproaches to Apollo (384-91).

Xouthos now arrives from the adjacent sanctuary of Trophonios with the oracle that neither he nor Kreousa will return home childless (408-09). He therefore attempts, in a fanes anagnorisis, to embrace Ion as his son (517-27). Despite initial resistance, Ion is eventually reconciled with his newly-found status as Xouthos’s son. Xouthos admits that he once had an inebriated one-night stand with a Delphic maenad (545-53); moreover, the putative date of conception would not be inconsistent with Ion’s present age.

When Xouthos invites his new-found son to Athens as royal successor (576-77), however, the latter is less than enthusiastic, especially in view of the childless Kreousa’s expected jealousy (607-15). In the ensuing scene, Xouthos, now planning to take Ion along incognito to Athens, threatens the Chorus of Athenian slave women on pain of death not to reveal anything of his new plans to Kreousa. Despite a half-hearted conventional promise of non-intervention by the Chorus (666-67, 690-91), they blabber out to Kreousa that she is never to bear any children (761-62), adding, for good measure, that Ion has found his father, and that the latter is none other than Xouthos (794-95, 802).

---

56 According to Hamilton 1978:277-78, eight Euripidean plays contain a prologue prediction. In six cases, including the Ion, the predictions are given by gods and never revealed to the human characters; in four plays, including the Ion, the prediction is altered, qualified, questioned or contradicted in the course of the play.

57 Rabinowitz 1993:204 notes that such breaking of a promised silence by the Chorus is unprecedented in tragedy.
Kreousa’s response is, first, to denounce Apollo for his betrayal (885-86), and then, at the suggestion of an old family slave, to hatch a murder plot against Ion. When this plot fails, Ion is prevented from taking revenge by the dea ex machina intervention of the Priestess (1308),\(^{58}\) who effects a double anagnorisis in typically Euripidean fashion\(^{59}\) – first of son by mother (1398), and then of mother by son (1437), both brought about by tokens.\(^{60}\) Thus, mother and child are at long last united.

Finally, Kreousa explains to Ion that Apollo is actually his genetic father (1531-32), but that Apollo’s paternity had to be kept secret by the false oracle. Ion, distrustful, wants to consult the oracle for divine verification of his paternity (1547-48), but the timely intervention of Athena, as epiphanic divinity, precludes this. She confirms that Apollo is Ion’s father (1560-61), but orders Kreousa not to disillusion Xouthos about his assumed paternity (1601-02) and explains that Apollo wasn’t responsible for his own plan, as described by Hermes in the prologue, going haywire.\(^{61}\)

Thus all’s well that ends well, in that all human personae seem to accept Fate’s smoothing over of divine violence, manipulation and smugness. Nevertheless, Apollo’s reputation has been dented.

Which themes from the Ion could a twentieth-century novelist employ in writing about ancient Delphi? Which parts of the hypotext did Golding actually borrow or adapt, and what did the broader generic parameters of a novel allow him to graft onto the sparse frame of drama? I restrict myself to three, dealing with structure, characterisation and theme respectively.

6.1 Structural innovations and adaptations

In the case of a transgeneric adaptation of a drama to a novel, the formal structure of the original can hardly be retained. I have pointed out that Donna Tartt, in her novel The Secret History, has made use of structural divisions reminiscent of tragedy, but such a ploy is rather exceptional in a novel.\(^{62}\) Instead, Golding’s novel is subdivided into eight shortish chapters.

---

58 Aristotle, Poetics 1454a had a high regard for this kind of plot, where close relatives threaten to kill, or are at the point of killing, each other.


60 Kreousa recognises the cradle (οὐγγος, 1338) in which Ion was brought to Delphi; Ion recognises a piece of weaving (ὑφαντι, 1417) done by Kreousa.

61 Owen 1939:xix regards this as the only example in Greek Tragedy ‘where something is definitely announced in a prologue as going to happen, which does not.’

Not surprisingly, he fails to introduce structural elements such as prologue or *exodos* into a work that purports to be a novel.\[^{63}\]

Thus, there is no room for typically Euripidean divine epiphanies in Golding: he dispenses with a Hermes *ex machina* to kick-start proceedings, and with Athena to wrap things up by saving face for Apollo. There is no Chorus in Golding, and thus there are no *parodoi* or *stasima*. There is no plot or dramatic tension to speak of: memoirs, on the whole, are perforce episodic when compared to drama. From Arieka’s point of view, however, a limited number of unexpected *peripeteiai* in her long life could be identified: first, the arranged marriage forced on her, followed by her sudden removal for involuntary service to Apollo; later, the demise, in quick succession, of her two predecessors, precipitating her first exposure to the painful duties of the First Lady, the potentially exciting visit to Athens and the failure of Ionides’s revolt; and finally, Ionides’s death and Athens’s invitation to honour Arieka. Moreover, Arieka’s proposal with which the novel quizzically concludes – the erection of an altar ‘to the unknown god’ – may be interpreted as a kind of *anagnorisis* of the numinous by a priestess who has gradually become disillusioned with her own god.

One way in which Golding adapts the Euripidean original is rather quaint. In the *Ion*, the reader or spectator is first introduced to the eponymous character, as temple servant, where he chases birds away from Phoibos’ sanctuary (106-08, 154-60). Later (1181-210), a structurally indispensable role is played by a pigeon: when Kreousa’s old servant wants to poison Ion, a flock of pigeons arrives (1196-97) and a pigeon drinks the contents of the chalice with poisoned wine meant for Ion, dying a painful death. Thus, Ion is alerted to an attempt on his life.

Since a comparable plot is absent in *The Double Tongue*, Golding could have dispensed with pigeons altogether. Instead, he expands the role of pigeons, but on a totally different level: Ionides now establishes a messenger pigeon service to gather political news for manipulation by the oracle (pp. 77-78, 127).

### 6.2 Characters and characterisation

In the creation of personae for his novel, Golding has taken great liberties with the possibilities the Euripidean hypotext would have offered him. The Euripidean Ion becomes Ionides (sometimes abbreviated to Ion). His tell-

\[^{63}\] But surprisingly, Golding admits that ‘I think of the novel […] as having a shape precisely like Greek drama […] You have this rise of tension and then the sudden fall […]’ (Baker 1982:165).
tale name would be a dead give-away to a classicist reader, especially when, early in the novel, he is linked to Delphi (pp. 26-27): neither Plato’s rhapsode Ion, nor Ion of Chios, but the mythical founder of the Ionian race featuring in Euripides’ eponymous play. However, he is more senior in age and status than his naïve Euripidean counterpart (the latter is fossilised as teenager), and much more assertive, manipulative and cynical: a smooth operator if ever there was one. In his later years his religious cynicism is somewhat tempered (p. 116), and Arieka discerns a humility and openness in him that was absent earlier (p. 126). Yet later, an ageing Arieka has to deduce: ‘So Ionides, cynic, atheist, contriver, liar, believed in god!’ (p. 136). Despite their different temperaments, Arieka develops a genuine affection for Ionides, described by Kaveney as ‘a love no less real for being separated entirely from sexuality.’

When he returns unharmed from his short-lived experiment with fomenting rebellion against Rome, for instance, she realizes with profuse gratitude: ‘He is more than a husband, that quicksilver, quicksand, learned mountebank of the gods! I believe in him, liar, soothsayer, self-deceiver, fool, the eighth wise man’ (p. 162).

Euripides’s Ion could hardly be gay: his aetiological role is that of procreator of Ionians (74-75; 1587-88), and thus he must be heterosexual. In the case of Golding, Ionides’s sexual preferences are described in extreme terms as ‘that shuddering distaste for a woman’s flesh which made any physical intimacy out of the question …’ (p. 76). One could argue that Ionides’s gayness reinforces Arieka’s sexual identity as paitheno. Had he been heterosexual, he could have constituted a threat, or a temptation, to her professional chastity. On the other hand, Golding has created other gay characters such as the drama producer in The Pyramid, Colley in Rites of Passage and Father Watts-Watt in Free Fall, and thus, perhaps not too much should be made of Ionides’s gender status.

Golding has discarded the theme of pseudo-orphanhood and search for paternity, but not that of patrilineal descent, for his Ion claims the Peisistratids as his ancestors and thus considers himself, significantly, as Athenian (pp. 117, 129). One is reminded of the brutal conception, birth and exposure of the other Ion in a cave on the Acropolis (Ion 10-13 et al.). Through the cultural and ideological identity of Ionides, and through the esteem accorded Athens by the Delphians and by Arieka, Golding thus makes explicit the Athenian bias that is implicit in Euripides’s Ion.

---

64 Kaveney 1995:40.
66 When the telling patronymic (‘Peisistratides’) is added in addressing him (pp. 26, 29, 72), his Athenian genealogy is implicitly highlighted: he is a descendant of the fifth-century ‘tyrant’ Peisistratos.
Neither the Euripidean Xouthos nor Kreousa appears as persona in Golding’s novel. Consequently, neither the status of μέτοικος (metics), as exemplified in the Chorus’s prejudice against Ion (as presumed non-Athenian) and against Xouthos (as non-autochthonous), nor the theme of ἀτεκνία which is so cardinal to both Xouthos and Kreousa, is treated by Golding.

Instead, the preoccupations of Kreousa are partly transposed to Arieka. The gender of Golding’s narrator is of paramount importance. As has been mentioned, Arieka identifies with Kreousa in that both are women who are manipulated and abused by a male divinity, Apollo. Arieka, unlike Kreousa, is childless, however; moreover, she has a higher professional status than Kreousa. A more valid comparison would, of course, be with Euripides’s Priestess, whose mantic functions Arieka takes over, although she lacks the semi-divine authority the former exerts in the exodos (1320-68). Arieka could thus be viewed as a conflation of two Euripidean characters.

In her memoirs (pp. 9, 26-27), Arieka claims that her name means ‘Little Barbarian’. If so, it is curiously un-Greek. Why not derive it from a contracted form of ἄφθικος, which LSJ s.v. renders as either ‘much heard of’ or ‘far-hearing’, ‘hearing readily’? Both of these senses would be eminently applicable to her role as Pythia.

Golding’s characterisation of Arieka is, on the whole, sensitive and convincing. In the course of her memoirs she develops from a shy, self-conscious, confused teenager into a wise old woman, even though she can never quite rid herself of an inferiority complex tied to her looks. She objects to the violent way Apollo takes possession of her, but is temperamentally incapable of the virulent denunciation of Apollo we find in Euripides’s Kreousa.

Although Apollo is not present as a character in either Euripides or Golding, he plays a dominant role extra scaenam in that he functions as divine manipulator of human action in both works. In Ion, he literally rapes the mortal girl Kreousa; in The Double Tongue, he metaphorically rapes his prophetess Arieka by forcibly impregnating her with the seed of oracular truth.

Divine paternity might have been a genealogical plus in mythology, but Euripides does not gloss over the fact that Ion’s pedigree was bought at the expense of his mother being raped. Francis Dunn regards this emphasis upon violent rape as ‘unprecedented in Greek tragedy’. 69 Kreousa’s

67 Verses 591-92, 723, 1058-60.
68 This adjective appears to be cognate with ἄφθικος or ἄφθικος (‘disobedient’).
69 Dunn 1990:132.
harrowing plight is recounted neither by Apollo nor by Ion, but (thrice) by herself, as victim and plaintiff. It might be so that, in male chauvinist classical Athens, rape was a crime not against the woman, but against her husband, and that therefore it was less serious than seduction;\textsuperscript{70} from Kreousa’s point of view, however, Apollo is guilty as charged. Apollo’s conduct is so unbecoming, in fact, that even Ion berates him.

When Apollo takes mantic possession of Golding’s Arieka, her metaphorical rape is experienced as actual rape: ‘The god would have me there in the holy seat whether I would or no, oh yes, it was a rape, this was Apollo who fitted me in the seat, twisted me anyway \[sic\] he would, then left me’ (p. 88; cf. pp. 118-19, 136). The cynical Ionides’s description of Apollo as ‘a particularly uxorious, or should I say gynoecious, potentate’ (p. 63) thus comes as no surprise.

6.3 Belief vs. agnosticism

It was only in 1870 that Thomas Huxley would coin the term \textit{agnostic},\textsuperscript{71} but some of the plays of Euripides clearly betray degrees of a scepticism or cynicism that is close to agnosticism. Dunn notes that between the prologue and v. 451, Ion ‘has changed from a trusted servant of the god to a skeptic who questions … the veracity of Apollo.’\textsuperscript{72} This atmosphere of uncertainty, of scepticism, of agnosticism, permeates the rest of the play, and as late as line 1537 Ion still asks: ‘Does the god prophesy the truth or in vain?’\textsuperscript{73}

Although Golding’s Arieka feels herself to be genuinely inspired by the god, Ionides is a sceptic, at least initially (cf. p. 57), and even when he starts believing (p. 136), there remains a large measure of doubt as to the veracity of Apollo’s oracles. Thus, a central theme of the \textit{Ion} has apparently been taken over by Golding: the ultimately unresolved polarity between belief and rationalism or agnosticism. Right at the very end, however, Golding \textit{does} resolve the issue when the last sentence of the novel pays homage TO THE UNKNOWN GOD (p. 165).

According to Tiger, Golding invariably depicts ‘a world unpopularly insistent upon the spiritual’;\textsuperscript{74} moreover, Golding himself has claimed: ‘I cannot \textit{not} believe in God.’\textsuperscript{75} Anthony Storr has argued that ‘Golding

\textsuperscript{70} Dunn 1990:133.
\textsuperscript{71} Little \textit{et al.} 1970:36.
\textsuperscript{72} Dunn 1990:136.
\textsuperscript{73} ‘\(\text{ὅ θεός ἄληθής ἡ μάτιν μαντεύεται}\); In reading a question mark, I follow the suggestion of Owen \textit{ad loc.}.
\textsuperscript{74} Tiger 1982:216.
\textsuperscript{75} Tiger 1982:217.
acknowledges his belief in God, but his vision is not that of a Christian. It is closer to that of the ancient Greeks, in whose language and literature he is so profoundly steeped, whereas Lorna Sage claims that Golding, in The Double Tongue, was 'trying to see round the edge of his own skepticism.' Most critics, however, ascribe a more conventional Christianity to Golding. David Lodge for instance, argues that 'Golding's religious vision is powerful and idiosyncratic, deeply Protestant (or Pauline) in his emphasis on “conversion”, and yet suffused with a Catholic mysticism.' The moral dilemmas in Golding's novels, like those in the Catholic Graham Greene, are depicted, and sometimes resolved, against a backdrop of Christianity.

7. Conclusion

In Section 2, I made a distinction between four categories of inter- or hypertextual adaptation: intragenric, transgeneric, faction and mosaical. (i) It might appear as if a comparison between Euripides and Golding does not leave room for the first of these categories, since the two authors specialise in different genres. However, judged by the six passages in The Double Tongue where explicit reference is made to Euripides's Ion as tragedy, Euripides's genre does permeate the palimpsest that The Double Tongue has become, and thus the category intragenric is not invalid. (ii) The category that can most obviously be applied to Golding's adaptation, is transgeneric: a classical Greek tragedy has been morphed into a late twentieth-century novel. (iii) Since The Double Tongue is presented as the memoirs of an individual in the first century BC, it is comparable to a biographical novel, with the important proviso that the individual is fictional rather than historical. But since there is enough plausible historical detail, the subgenre faction is warranted, and thus my third category of adaptation can clearly also be applied to Golding. (iv) The last category (mosaical or kaleidoscopic) can be applied whenever a snippet of information about the classical world appears in passing, for instance, when Sappho is described as 'the tenth Muse' (p. 47), or when a client commends

76 Quoted by Granofsky 1990:62.
78 This can be applied to Golding protagonists such as Pincher Martin, Sammy Mountjoy in Free Fall, Dean Jocelin in The Spire and Wilfred Barclay in The Paper Men (Lodge 1984: 178).
79 See Section 5 above.
80 See Section 4 above.
81 Note that categories 3 and 4 can be applied without dependence on a specific literary source in any genre, and thus they do not presuppose dependence on Euripides.
the wine offered by Arieka: ‘Your wine must come straight from Olympus. That sly child Ganymede must have been taking backhanders. It’s nectar’ (p. 107).

Having read a hypertext, the reader, I think, can (re-)read the hypotext with ‘inside knowledge’. Thus, exposure to the palimpsest of The Double Tongue will redirect the reader and stimulate a fresh approach. Let four short examples suffice. Golding’s Ionides is depicted as gay. Is there any previously undetected hint of gayness in Euripides’s Ion? Ionides is sceptical and cynical. Did Golding create this characteristic de novo, or does Euripides’s Ion warrant such an interpretation? A third point concerns the way the respective authors employ pigeons. Is Golding’s depiction of a messenger pigeon service controlled by Delphi to be traced back to the rather subdued role played by a pigeon or pigeons in Euripides, or is it an innovation independent of Euripides? A last point: when the fictional character Andocides appears in passing as a visiting Athenian architect (p. 127), is his description as ‘irreligious’ meant to conjure up the late fifth-century orator who was implicated in parodying the Mysteries, or is the name fortuitous?

Arieka’s fictional account reflects the historical reality that the oracle of Apollo at Delphi was gradually becoming obsolete by the first century BC. More than a century later Plutarch, himself a Delphic priest, would note the decline of the sanctuary with sadness;82 it would finally be closed in AD 390/391 by the emperor Theodosius in the name of Christianity.83 Now, sixteen centuries later, William Golding has declared it open again. I think we are the richer for it.

Bibliography

Dick, Bernard F. 1965. “‘The novelist is a displaced person’: an interview with William Golding.” College English 26.6:480-482

83 Warrington 1965:186.


frp@sun.ac.za

144
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvs.org.za/acta_classica.htm