Some Considerations on Ideology and Interpretation, in Allan Baillie's "The Gold Buddha"

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Abstract:

This article tries to present a brief view of how literary works can be interpreted by readers, showing that multivocality always outweighs all attempts to control the meanings and connotations of texts due to various reasons. It focuses on the complexities of the relationship between literary works, their authors, and readers. It is true that every fictional work is imbued by its author's ideas, visions, or ideological perceptions, but that alone does not construct the message of the text. The reader has a fundamental role in the process of uncovering that message. Influenced by his socio-historical and cultural background, he or she is also a participant contributing to the work. This applies to young as well as adult readers. Based on these theoretical assumptions, the purpose of this study is to examine a children's story by the Australian writer Allan Baillie, displaying two opposite and, at the same time, possible readings of the text, each possibly appealing to different readers.

key words: children's literature – Eastern character – ideology – post-colonialism - text interpretation – text reception– Western character.

بعض الاعتبارات المتعلقة بالفكر والتفسير في قصة "بوذا الذهبي" ألان بايلي

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جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

تاريخ تقديم البحث: ٢٧/ ١/ ١٤٤٣ هـ تاريخ قبول البحث: ٢٦/ ٥/ ١٤٤٣ هـ

ملخص الدراسة:

يحاول هذا المقال تقديمَ صورة مختصرة لكيفية قيام القراء بتفسير الأعمال الأدبية، وتوضيح أن تعدد التفسيرات يغلب دائماً كل المحاولات للسيطرة على تحديد معاني وإيحاءات النصوص لعوامل عدة. ويركز المقال على تعقيدات العلاقة بين الأعمال الأدبية ومؤلفيها والقراء. صحيحٌ أن كل عملٍ أدبيٍ يصطبغ بأفكار ورؤى مؤلفه وتصوراته الأيدلوجية، ولكن ذلك لا يشكل وحده رسالة النص. فللقارئ دورٌ أساسيٌ في عملية الكشف عن تلك الرسالة. متأثراً بخلفيته الثقافية والتاريخية والاجتماعية، ويكون القارئ أيضاً مشاركاً بالمساهمة في العمل الأدبي. وهذا الأمر ينطبق على صغار وكبار القراء. بناءً على هذه الافتراضات النظرية، فإن الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو تحليل قصة قصيرة من قصص الأطفال لمؤلفها الأسترالي ألان بايلي موضحاً قراءتين متضادتين وبنفس الوقت محتملتان للنص وكلّ منهما تروق لقراء مختلفين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدب الأطفال، الشخصية الشرقية، الفكر، ما بعد الاستعمارية، تفسير النص، تلقي النص، الشخصية الغربية.

Introduction

In children's literature, some writers actively seek to motivate young readers to change their behaviour while the latter remain largely unaware of such a process. Such an approach purportedly carried out for pedagogical reasons, can be seen at work in many children's stories. As a matter of fact, every literary work in general is constituted on the basis of ideology and politics which usually go hand in hand with what adult writers want to instil into the mentalities of children. There is no utterance which is devoid of any ideological concern. But this does not mean that a work will always deliver what the author wishes it to say. If we look at works of literature closely, we can see that they do not belong to anyone. That is because ideology and politics have their own historical, cultural, and social contexts which help shape and form the character of the author, the independent character of the reader, and consequently that of the text.

Such a view has been discussed in depth by Hans Robert Jauss who also argues that the aesthetic consideration of a literary text is influenced by the history of a work's reception. As he put it, "In the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees" (Jauss and Bahti 19).

For this reason, readers play a significant role in prolonging the aesthetic status of a literary work. For Jauss, a great literary work is not great only because of the various accumulated judgments and opinions by readers in different generations but also due to the text's "successive unfolding of the potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualized in the stages of its historical reception…" by successive readers according to their horizons of expectations (Jauss and Bahti 30). Thus, a great literary work is not just the end product of its author and its socio-cultural circumstances. It is a complex process that is able to constantly yield different interpretations in different conditions and contexts. Therefore, the work may express the author's intended goal, and, at the same time, it may express the opposite, be he /she aware or unaware of the process. A great part of the process of interpreting

the work thus depends on the reader. This will have a great impact on the way the work is read and interpreted. Literary works that are about the interaction and relationship between the West, the East or the Other, are prone to such a variety of interpretations. They are, using Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, polyphonic and heteroglotic (Bakhtin et al.). Examining the story titled "The Gold Buddha" from Allan Baillie's[1] short stories collection, *A Taste of Cockroach*, two different and possible ways of reading the story, due to both internal and external factors related to the literary work, will be presented. The internal factors are formed and understood on the basis of the external factors. It is worth mentioning here that the story's plot is simple and straightforward. The action of the story takes place in Luang Prabang – a city in Laos – towards the end of the nineteenth century. The golden statue of Pha Bang is the target of various groups and individuals including the Haw bandits, the French Monsieur Pavie's expedition, and Henri. That statue is revered by the city's Buddhist inhabitants who masterfully outwit everyone and tactfully manage to save their holy idol at the end and keep it in a safe place away from all sorts of threats. Caught in this conflict are the characters of the French Yvette and the Lao Kam, whose friendly and sympathetic relationship reflects a humanist image despite their differences contrary to that of other characters around them.

[1] Allan Baillie was born in 1943 in Scotland and moved to Australia when he was seven years old. He started his writing career as a journalist. Influenced and inspired by journalism, he began writing children's fiction. Currently, he is one of Australia's prominent award-winning novelists, and his most successful novels are *Little Brother* (1986), *The China Coin* (1992), *Saving Abbie* (2000) and *Treasure Hunters* (2002). *A Taste of Cockroach* (2005) is his most recent collection of short stories.

Two Possible Readings of the Same Story
A Humanistic Understanding of "The Gold Buddha"

First, the story can be read under the assumption that it supports purely humanistic aims. Ideas like faithfulness in friendship, accepting, tolerating, and helping the Other, mutual understanding, coexistence, and others promoting multiculturalist values are noticeable to one group of readers. This can be exemplified in "The Gold Buddha" through drawing the readers' attention to the steadfast friendship of Yvette and Kam which starts in the beginning of the story and continues to the end. We may look at this from two different aspects: the relationship of Yvette and Kam, and contrasting it with the relationship of Henri and the Eastern characters. The first meeting between two characters in this story is the meeting of Yvette and Kam. This meeting is symbolically significant in establishing an idea in the reader's mind. When Kam finds Yvette, he asks her " 'Are you all right?' " (Baillie 37). The first thing Kam wants to know is whether or not Yvette is fine. Incidentally, one might surmise at this stage that the Eastern character emotionally (not materialistically), cares about the Western one. This is further stressed by the dialogue between Kam and Yvette. She replies to Kam saying:" 'I am all right, Kam.' The youth slowed, cocked his head. 'You remember my name! You are getting better?' Yvette looked at the slight scar on Kam's left cheek and his shimmering brown eyes. She had seen him many times before…etc," (37). The main idea here is that they have known each other long before and their relation has been positive as testified by Kam's exclamation that Yvette can now remember his name. It is also an indication of her good health, which makes him feel happy. To illustrate this, the narrator interferes to show Yvette's reaction through her action. She looks at the scar, which denotes the healing of a previous wound, and at his eyes, which communicate in a romantic way what he feels towards her better than words. After this incident, we are told that their relationship is a fairly old one. Two things are to be noted in this dialogue. First, it draws the reader's attention to the common denominator shared by Yvette and Kam. Both of them have suffered from physical problems that have been recently cured. No detail is given

regarding the kind of material medication leading the reader to focus on the emotional or non-physical medication. The point here is that all humans suffer from miseries and agonies which can be overcome by human unity, cooperation, and solidarity. We can see evidence of this if we closely read what the two characters do following the previous dialogue. Kam tells Yvette that Pavie is worried about her, and he offers his hand which she takes to pull herself up. Obviously, the writer is saying that if humans recognize their feelings for each other, help each other, and interact positively, they will enjoy coexistence. The reader becomes aware of it when he sees that their relationship keeps getting stronger and stronger throughout the story. Second, the significance of this dialogue is emphasized by its setting just after the prolonged moment of suspense enacted by Yvette. During that moment, the reader is caught in a maze wherein he cannot find any clue that can enable him to identify with the structure of the story, while he longs for any hint that might clarify the situation. Once Yvette meets Kam, things start to become clear. Thus, by skilfully using the narrative technique of juxtaposition at the very beginning of the story, the writer leaves a great impact on the reader who will keep looking at the significance of the relationship between Yvette and Kam. In addition to this, the relationship between Yvette and Kam becomes more and more significant as it is opposed by the relationship between Henri and the Eastern characters.

Henri's character is depicted in a position opposite to that of Yvette. His relationship with the Eastern characters (who obviously represent the Other) can be looked at in two ways: his symbolic significance in the story, and his interaction with the Eastern characters. Henri might be seen as a symbol of the past Western colonialist exploiter. All that he cares about are material things, and there is almost no hint of any emotional remark on his part. Yvette, on the other hand, symbolizes the current Western humanist partner. The proof of this can be seen in the depiction of Henri as the only European relative of Yvette in the story as if the writer were saying that today's Europe cannot avoid the fact that its historic ancestor had been an abusive conqueror whose influence can be noticed until today. His symbolic significance can be further understood if we look at the first mention and description of Henri.

He is mentioned within the dialogue of Yvette and Kam making the reader wonder who Henri is. Later, the narrator describes Henri in the following passage:

The first time she met Henri *was not good*, for a start. When he saw her on the wharf he said, 'God, you are going to eat me out of *business*!' It got better, but only because he learned [not knew] that she was good at *arithmetic* and could handle *account books*. Henri was a *merchant*, dealing in silk, teak, porcelain or anything else that could be changed into *money*, so she *worked* in a corner of his warehouse. [emphasis added] (38)

This passage instils into the reader's mind the sheer contradiction between Yvette and Henri. It also foreshadows how Henri will act throughout the story. From his first appearance to the end of the story, his relationship with Yvette, as in this passage, or with the other characters, as will be seen later, is portrayed as a purely materialistic character whose sole aim is material interest. The italicized words clearly express Henri's character in the story. All that he can think of is money and gold. When he first meets her, he does not show any emotional expression, rather he shocks the reader with his worldly remark (compare this with Kam's question when he first meets her in the beginning of the story). His colonialist stance is implicitly addressed in reference to his job. "He is a merchant dealing in silk [a fabric that was first developed in China (Britannica, *Silk*)], teak [which is a type of tall East Indian tree], porcelain [a material that was first made in China (Britannica, *Porcelain*)]…etc". Moreover, these materials are to be extracted from the land and sent overseas which is the task of the merchant/colonizer. In addition, this passage can be found after the first meeting between Yvette and Kam in the beginning of the story. This kind of proficient juxtaposition is not carried out haphazardly. It can be assumed that the writer somehow, tries to confront the reader with two opposite views right from the beginning of the story which will run parallel until the end. His craftsmanship is revealed in the way he tackles these views throughout the story without causing any confusion in the reader’s mind. The writer, in effect, presents Henri's character in conformity to this initial picture through, mainly, his relationship with the Eastern characters.

Henri's relationship with the Eastern characters could be better comprehended if we focus our attention on his interaction with Kam. Henri's interaction with Kam is imbued with disrespect, impoliteness, inconsiderateness, contempt, and most importantly, self-interest. This can be witnessed in the many scenes scattered throughout the story. For example, the first meeting between Kam and Henri is, in fact, fraught with such things. It is when Kam brings Yvette back home after their trip to the mountain that he is harshly reprimanded by Henri who inconsiderately calls him "stupid boy" for being late and for not taking care of Yvette properly. In another instance, Kam expresses his religious point of view when he argues that they will be protected by the King and the golden Buddha, at which Henri reacts with a rude and insolent remark "Oh, yes, like your phis- spirits hiding in every rock," (43). Such a statement shows the extent of his unabashed disrespect for other cultures and faiths. His desires are motivated mainly by his self-interest. This can be noticed in several instances but most importantly at the end of the story.

Once again, Henri's materialist inclination obviously outweighs his humanity. After temporarily saving the Pha Bang, Henri asks Kam what if the chasing Haw bandits come to this place to which they have brought the statue. Definitely, they will confiscate it. Therefore, it is better, Henri suggests, that he takes the statue somewhere else where it will be safe. We, readers, as well as Yvette and Kam know that Henri is only interested in "how much gold it will weigh" not in how he will keep it in a secured place until it is returned to the people to whom it belongs. His dangerous, opportunistic nature is only equal to that of the bandits in the story since both are only interested in stealing the statue. In this final scene of the story, the author displays great skill in dramatizing the event so that it reaches a climactic point, then the reader is relieved only in the last few lines. In that same scene, Yvette insists that Kam should not put the Pha Bang in Henri's trust pointing out that he has saved it once and he should keep it no matter what it costs. To some extent, the scene shows the victory of the loving and altruistic characters over the materialistically self-interested and opportunistic ones. This way, the reader can see the two different versions of dealing with the Other. If we compare the beginning of

the story with the end, we can see clearly how well the writer artfully contrives to draw the characters in a particular way from beginning to end.

Consequently, the form (or narrative strategies), the content of a literary work, and the ideology of the author and the reader combine to formulate a positive interpretation of the work. This is cogently expressed by Jonathan Culler in his book *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Throughout his book, Culler discusses whether or not literature can make us better people (Culler 37, 113). It does make us better by displaying the good so that we identify with it and try to emulate it and the evil so that we can resist and reject it. In our story, this can be exemplified by the two different kinds of relationships that may link the West with the East. In addition to that, the appropriate use of universal ideas like faithfulness, friendship, mutual respect, self-interest, materialism, helping the weak and many others, reinforces the effect of the story on the reader. Such features help shape the ideology behind the story while enabling the reader to produce a certain interpretation subconsciously. The influence of ideology is best described by Perry Nodelman when he says, "Ideology is always a matter of politics; that is, it relates to the ways in which people get and maintain power over each other". So, the adult, as Nodelman suggests, tries to maintain power over children by directing them towards a particular kind of behaviour in such children's stories (Nodelman 68). Therefore, the implied reader here for the writer, as Robyn McCallum and John Stephens point out, is someone who shares the same values of the environment in which they are produced and received (McCallum and Stephens 360). But, all of that can be seen within one interpretation of the story based on a certain ideology. What I mean to say is that other interpretations are nonetheless possible even if contrary to each other. This can be illustrated by considering yet another interpretation of our story.

A Post-Colonial Reading of “The Gold Buddha”

In the same article, however, R. McCallum and J. Stephens argue that changing the readers' attitudes consciously will depend on a number "of contingent presuppositions about the nature of the self, of society, and of ways of being and knowing" (McCallum and Stephens 360). In an interesting study, Wendy Griswold is able to demonstrate the extent of such contingency. Her study empirically investigates how readers from the West Indies, Britain, and the United States are able to come up with different meanings for a single literary work. Each group from a certain country has constructed a particular understanding based on their shared presuppositions. She concludes, "this capacity to engender multiple meanings while retaining coherence shows that cultural meanings emerge from the interaction between cultural works of varying power and human recipients of varying expectations and concerns" (Griswold 1077), striking a resounding echo with Hans Robert Jauss' idea mentioned above that the importance of a work's literary status is highly influenced by the history of a work’s reception by readers. The idea that socio-historical collective culture of certain people and their shared values and assumptions plays an essential role in their reading of a text also echoes, to a great extent, Stanley Fish's theoretical concept of "interpretive communities". This theoretical concept claims that individuals are parts of communities sharing interpretive strategies which enable them to give texts certain explanations. It also insists that authorial intent is part of the cultural context of the text, but is not limited to it. Moreover, readers attempt to specify these intentions and to provide reasons for the relationships between various textual elements (Fish 14, 15, 71, 72, 146). Such are examples of the internal and external factors related to the literary work, making different interpretations possible. This is why it is possible to argue that maintaining control over the ideology imparted to young readers through literary works could possibly lead to a dead end. It is almost impossible to escape this indeterminacy. In light of this idea, we can argue that “The Gold Buddha” can also be read from a post-colonial perspective. It can be possibly interpreted as instilling a colonialist ideology into the readers' minds in the sense that they learn how to deal with the

people who are to be colonized. Due to some factors within a particular ideological context, the implied reader here might see what the writer says as, using Edward Said's words, a "fact of nature" (Said 162), thus agreeing, to a great extent, with the author's view, albeit subconsciously. Such an interpretation can be explained in various ways, but, for the sake of brevity, I will focus on two distinct ways: the story's representation of religion in the East, and the interactions between the Western and the Eastern characters.

Religion in this story is depicted to a great extent in the same way it is depicted in many colonialist writings. It is displayed as something negatively metaphysical relating it to some sort of other life. It is shown as an illogical way of thinking which is unable to solve worldly problems, and although it is at odds with the human rationality, people still cling to it as if it were the most precious thing they have. This can be seen in the beginning and the end of the story, as the author creates a number of situations which help implant a colonialist view of religion in the East. In the beginning of the story, Yvette is depicted in a place which she cannot recognize. Everything around is infused with vagueness and obscurity which attract the reader's attention and triggers his sense of suspense. Later, the first description of religion is laid in the following, "The *haze* became a *silent* group of Buddhist monks carrying a *litter* on their shoulders, as if they were bearing a *king*" (34). The first mention of religion is juxtaposed to the moment of vagueness (haze), and those religious men are "silent" which adds to the vagueness. Moreover, they are carrying a statue in a litter which indicates that they believe in supernaturalism and work hard to serve their belief. The last phrase points to the hierarchical system and dictatorship common in the structure of Eastern countries and religions. This picture is developed further throughout the story. Immediately after this scene, Yvette is described as being lost "*God*, where am I?" (35), and a faint unrealistic voice tells her: "you will never find the lane or even recognize the door you came through. *You are totally lost*" [emphasis added] (35). It is as if the author is saying that her being lost is a result of the effect of religious presence. This has affected Yvette whose stay is just brief, let alone the way it could affect the

local inhabitants who live there permanently. The author convincingly completes his depiction of Yvette's confusion when she follows the supernatural voice comparing it with the rational voice, "'All right, *that is enough*,' she said, *stopping to hear the faint tremble in her voice*. *No*, she *thought*… You have not been thrown into *a corner of hell*… You only need to *see* the place to bring everything back. *Just get out of this mist*" [emphasis added] (35). She tells herself enough of this unrealism, so the voice stops. She then starts thinking rationally convincing herself that she is no longer entrapped into the pangs of supernaturalism, and that she only needs to see things through her mind's eye in order to get out of that maze. Once she achieves that she becomes able to realize where she is and things become clearer in her mind. So, the Western character finds salvation through the powers of rationality. But the Eastern characters are not able to do that because they have already confined their thinking within the strictures of religion which is the main source of supernaturalism.

The latter are seen as always serving religion, and they believe that it is the cause of their survival despite the fact that the reader cannot see any evidence which might be linked to it. A connoted mockery of their religion on the part of the author will be passed on to the reader as a result. We sense that when, for example, Kam assures Yvette that everything will be alright: "'The King is very clever and he will talk to the leader of the bandits and *stop them*. And our Buddha has been *saving* the city for *hundreds of years*'" [emphasis added] (44). The course of the story ironically shows the opposite. The bandits will be the "clever ones" and occupy the city, the King will escape, the religious people will take their Buddha to a safe place, and the bandits will set the city on fire. Another instance which displays the passivity of the Eastern people is when Henri, Yvette, and Kam see the Pha Bang. The narrator describes the statue, which is gold, saying it is "as tall as a small *boy* [who must be attended all the time]" [emphasis added] (45). Then, Henri wonders how much gold it weighs, and Kam's reply expresses the extent of supernaturalism he advocates saying "'Gold is *nothing*. *The Pha Bang is everything*'" [emphasis added]. Yvette immediately says: "'It looks *old* [so unable to help]" [emphasis added] (46). This obviously sets the two views, the Western

rationality and Eastern belief in the unseen, side by side, so that the reader can contrast them at the end of the story.

The story's satirical stance is set in the last scene. It shows how Kam, Henri, Yvette, and some locals are able to carry the statue away from the bandits. Henri proposes to take it somewhere safer. Yvette replies to that saying: "'Kam you have *saved the Pha Bang. Do not lose it now*!'" [emphasis added] (64), and this does not prove what Kam says about it - that it saves them - which appears as a myth to the reader; it rather confirms the validity of the Western point of view. The evidence of this is that Kam does not answer this by attributing any kind of power to his god. The last few lines of the story conceal his cynicism with an amusing touch. Being loathe to distract his readers with a happy ending at odds with the connoted message, the author as it were, mixes poison with honey, as the Arab proverb goes. This will lead us to examine yet another aspect of the story.

This aspect can be proved if we look at the interaction of the Western characters with the Eastern ones. The most important Western characters in this story are Henri and Yvette, and the most prominent Eastern character is Kam. Through their interactions, readers (especially those who are influenced by colonialists' agendas) are likely to read the story as a way of exemplifying how best to colonize indigenous people. Such an idea can be seen in two very expressive scenes. The first shows the wrong way to occupy people. It is by stating bluntly your goals, to the reader as well as to the characters, devoid of any kind of sympathy or cooperation with the colonized. Henri's first interaction is intelligently made with a group of characters and is set in the beginning of the story. It takes place when he goes to King Rama V's minister to get permission to cut down a forest. Following the King's refusal Henri gets angry to the extent that he clouts the favourite son of the King who considers for a while to behead Henri. As the story moves on, both the King's savageness (because he has envisaged the beheading), and cowardice (because he flees the city due to his fear of the bandits), is highlighted and points to the Eastern man's barbarity (incidentally enacted by the bandits when they destroy the city). This status might be one of the reasons that justifies colonization. So, Henri's first interaction with a symbolically representative

group of Eastern characters demonstrates that his relationship with them is imbued with aggression and offensiveness required and legitimized by his 'so called' superiority. What makes this scene more effective is its setting after the scene of the first meeting between Yvette and Kam which is full of mutual understanding and respect. In this way the reader is able to witness two scenes; one is emotional and uniting, while the other is crudely materialistic and severing. To explain this further, we should look at the other scene.

This scene draws a brilliant picture with Yvette and Kam in the middle. It attracts the reader to the way colonizers think and act. Kam and Yvette are seen walking around the wats and stopping in front of a wat door which shows "Europeans from ancient times dancing," (49). Those Europeans are treated and admired as if they have become in the status of something religious, and the reason for that is given by Kam who says: '"Those are Portuguese *merchants* [like Henri who is a merchant]. They came here in the seventeenth century and so *impressed the people they were put on a wat door* [like Yvette who impresses us by her kindness with Kam]. Maybe your uncle will be on a door in the future'" [emphasis added]. It is obvious that she is the one who deserves to be appreciated and put on a door due to her good manners, and this is illustrated in what follows. Yvette remembered Henri's plot for the Pha Bang and winced. She says, '"I do not think the people of Luang Prabang would like him,'" (49). Incidentally, Kam echoes the Old Widow in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* who expresses her fondness of the old colonizing policemen over the new ones due to their rich experience with the land and customs (Kipling 124), in reference to the positive way they supposedly treated the colonized natives. The explanation is provided later on when Kam tells Yvette how he has lost his properties due to the Haw bandits, which prompts Yvette to take his hand in a compassionate and moving gesture (50). To add to his wittiness, the author smartly invites the reader to feel sympathy for Yvette who is most unlikely to be linked to the idea of colonization because of her young age. She is the bait by which the writer ensnares the reader's consciousness and prevents it from discovering the colonialist assumptions behind such a story. However, upon second thought the reader is likely to ask why the Western characters are there in

the first place. Part of the answer to this question can be reached by looking at what Pavie and Henri are doing. The other part lies in Yvette's inability to stop her uncle from stealing anything. Therefore, she is there to lessen the bitterness of her uncle's harm by pacifying the colonized. She is like the morphine which suppresses the pain but does not cure the disease. This is even more dangerous because the patient might think that he is cured while the sickness gnaws at him from inside. We will argue that it is due to Yvette's likes that colonization is made tamer.

Consequently, form, in terms of narrative techniques, and content, work together at the hermeneutic level to (re) produce the story's effect within a certain ideological and political context. This interpretation has its own historical and cultural context which is known to some readers, especially those who are affected by colonialist and post-colonial discourses. The story is also intertextual as it enmeshes with other colonialist writings as our reference to Kipling's *Kim* implies. All this reflects the importance of ideology which truly determines the position of the author, the reader, and the text. To a large degree, both of the author and the reader, based on their ideology(ies), determine the interpretation of the literary work. This view is asserted by some critics who argue that reading and interpretation of texts is a participatory task (Modir et al. 1). At the same time, the story will always, endlessly play an important role in formulating the subjectivity of another implied reader. According to a post-colonial reading of the story, we have argued that it does not make the reader better; but is rather likely to make him/her crueller.

Conclusion

In short, this article attempts to prove that Allan Baillie's short story "The Gold Buddha" is polyphonic and heteroglotic. It can tell many things to several people variously based on many formalistic strategies and different ideological backgrounds. An example of this is the story's beginning and end which might be thought of in various ways. That will definitely lead to diverse interpretations depending on social, historical, and cultural factors. The beauty of the work can be seen in how every interpretation can convincingly be proven. The more evidence any interpretation can display to show that it is the "correct" one, the more the work will be attractive and admired. It is also true that the problem posed by the story cannot be specified due to the diverse views readers might have. John W. Creswell notes that we bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research (Creswell 15). Likewise, readers bring certain beliefs and assumptions, understanding of human life, and vision of the world to the text they read, which usually leads them to build up their own interpretive frameworks. Whether it makes the reader better or not depends on a number of criteria which far outreaches the work itself. Nodelman stresses that such a thing is an effect of ideology which makes us "unaware of the contradictions in how we see and understand ourselves and others," (Nodelman 74). It is therefore plausible, as Jonathan Culler contends, that literature is the vehicle of ideology and the instrument of its undoing (Culler 38). Literature is always multi-faceted. If someone thinks that it renders ideology in a specific way, he/she has to be sure that it might also do it in another way, or it may even deconstruct that ideology altogether. In other words, no one can have power over a literary text because it will always prevail. All the various readings of the story can be summarized as, mainly bearing the concealed effects of ideology and politics. Their combined effect controls how people think in certain ways and how their critical skills are formed in particular shapes. It is not difficult to imagine in what forms and shapes they can mould readers critical awareness, regardless of their differences.

Short Biographical Note:

Nasser Albaqawi is currently an assistant professor of English Literature in the Department of English Language and Literature – Faculty of Languages and Translation at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University – Riyadh SA. His BA in English Language and Literature was from the same department. He pursued his higher studies (both PhD and MA in English Literature) at Macquarie University – Sydney. He finished his MA in 2008 and his PhD in 2013.

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