

A Biblical Intertext in Three Modernist Writers (Joyce, Lawrence, Krleža)

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Assimilation and transformation are of the essence of all intertextual processes. Within the typology of possible intertextual operations worked out by the French theoretician Laurent Jenny a remarkable place is given to the operation he calls »embedding«. This operation refers to cases when »the transplanted texts are only fragments, often lacking an autonomous meaning in isolation ... The intertextual fragment tends to behave... like a word of a poem in its relationship with its context, with everything that this implies concerning stylistic instability, unverifiability, incongruity.«

The text »cited«, considered in this paper, is a fragment from *The Song of Songs* (»Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies«, *Song of Solomon*, VII, 2), which is to be found in three Modernist writers: Joyce, Lawrence and Krleža. The fragment »cited« has been worked into the texture of the »Proteus« chapter in *Ulysses*, the description of Anna Brangwen's dance in the chapter »Anna Victrix« in *The Rainbow* and , in a grotesque inversion, in Krleža's description of Philip Latinovicz's picture of a whore's belly in *The Return of Philip Latinovicz*. In all the three writers the intertextual fragment occurs at a narrative point which is important for the total conception of the work in question and it is linked to the innovative techniques used by these writers. In each of these cases the »cited« fragment participates in an intertextual relationship in a different way and acquires a different ideology as is characteristic for a culture in crisis.

Assimilation and transformation are of the essence of all intertextual processes. Dubravka Oraić-Tolić shows in her study of the theory of intertextuality, *Teorija citatnosti*, that within the Modernist culture in the first decades of the twentieth century semantic determination in the greatest number of central Modernist texts in poetry and prose does not go from the prototext through the citational fragment to the Modernist author's text but in the opposite way, that is to say from the

Modernist author's text to the citation and ultimately to the prototext. Modernist texts do not function according to the principle of mimesis, that is to say by imitating old cultural meanings but according to the principle of semantic deformation and estrangement /defamiliarization/ of well-known cultural meanings, not according to the principle of adequacy with the canonical meanings but according to the principle of the creation of new meanings, not according to analogy but according to contrast or homology, not according to the metaphoric principle but according to the metonymic principle, not according to similarity with the previous text and the previous culture but according to the sequential principle whereby two equal participants in the intertextual meeting engage in a dialogue in which the Modernist writer changes, modifies, negates, in any case radically challenges the old cultural meaning of the prototext.

This happens within the general context of the Modernist culture whose unique historical function – and here the Modernist culture was without precedent in European history – was either the negation or the dramatic and radical reevaluation of the whole of European art and culture.¹

Within this general context of enquiry I shall concentrate on the intertextual operation of »embedding« as the French theoretician Laurent Jenny calls it. In working out a possible typology of intertextual operations he gives a remarkable place to the operation he calls »embedding«, referring to cases when »the transplanted texts are only fragments, often lacking an autonomous meaning in isolation...the transplanted fragment tends to behave ...like a word of a poem in its relationship with its context, with everything what this implies concerning stylistic instability, unverifiability, incongruity.«²

The text »cited«, considered in this paper, is a fragment from *The Song of Songs* (»Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies«, *Song of Solomon*, VII, 2), which is to be found in three Modernist writers: Joyce, Lawrence and Krleža. The »cited« fragment has been worked into the texture of the »Proteus« chapter in *Ulysses*, the description of Anna Brangwen's dance in the »Anna Victrix« chapter in *The Rainbow* and, in a grotesque inversion, in Krleža's description of Philip Latinovicz's picture of a whore's belly, in his central novel *The Return of Philip Latinovicz*. In all the three writers the intertextual fragment occurs at a narrative point which is important for the total conception of the work in question and it is linked to the innovative techniques used by these writers. Although in each of these cases the transplanted fragment participates in the intertextual relationship in a different way, the common denominator of all these texts is that they all boldly and even blasphemously defamiliarize the source text while their own texts acquire a radically different ideology from the source text as is natural for a culture in crisis.

¹ Dubravka Oraić-Tolić, *Teorija citatnosti*, Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1990, p. 39.

² Laurent Jenny, »The Strategy of Form«, *French Literary Theory Today, A Reader*, ed. by Tzvetan Todorov, trans. by R. Carter, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 53.

JAMES JOYCE, ULYSSES (1922), THE PROTEUS CHAPTER

In the »Proteus« chapter Stephen Dedalus, walking by the shore, catches sight of Mrs. McCabe, the midwife, and this segment of his stream of consciousness runs as follows:

»One of her sisterhood lugged me squealing into life. Creation from nothing.

What has she got in her bag? A misbirth with a trailing navel-cord hushed in ruddy wool. The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh.

This is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos.

Hallo, Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one.

Spouse and helpmate of Adam Kadmon: Heva, naked Eve. She had no navel. Belly without blemish, bulging big, a buckler of taut vellum, no, whiteheaped corn, orient and immortal, standing from everlasting to everlasting. Womb of sin.« (43)³

In Stephen's stream of consciousness the sight of two women, one of whom is a midwife, links the fact of his own birth with the origin of the human race. »Creation from nothing.« *Creatio ex nihilo*. By means of an irreverent witticism arising out of his associative linking of the telephone cable with the navel-cords, presumably linking innumerable generations, Stephen calls the telephone number of the Creator in Edenville. (»Hello. Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one.«) Kinch is his nickname, which takes the irreverence one step further. Mixed in with Stephen's query about the origin of macrocosm (cosmos) as well as microcosm (man) the two collated Biblical intertexts naturally appear. An allusion to the Book of Genesis (»Heva, naked Eve.«) blends with an incomplete and deformed citation of a fragment from *Song of Solomon*, rehearsing it freely. (»Belly without blemish, bulging big... whiteheaped corn.«) The Biblical citation fuses with yet another citational fragment from the English seventeenth-century religious mystic Thomas Traherne, in which Traherne describes his ecstatic vision of the Eternal City of God, using the phrase »orient and immortal wheat... standing from everlasting to everlasting.« The phrase with which this segment of Stephen's stream of consciousness is rounded off is »Womb of sin.« The Traherne citation has been, characteristically enough, transposed from the level of mystic ecstasy onto another, exclusively mundane level, in full harmony with the total context of Stephen's line of thought in the »Proteus« chapter, organized round the elementary biological facts of life, birth, growth and death within his vision of the endless chain of human generations, the eternal human lot. This view of the human condition is shadowed by the description of Eve, with which the fragment from *Song of Solomon* has been fused. Eve traditionally signifies the fall into the world of generation and death. The potent image from *The Song of Songs*, celebrat-

³ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Penguin Modern Classics, 1969, p. 43.

ing the beauty of the body of the Beloved in the symbolical context of eternal and perfect Love, here, in this defamiliarizing context reinforces the message of Eve, the fall into the imperfect and finite world of sexuality and death. The statement »Womb of sin« is repeated some hundred pages later »The white, wheat-bellied sin«, testifying to the substratum of Catholic consciousness in Joyce, the apostate, the renegade.

To sum up: the segment from the »Proteus« chapter is polymorphic, polyphonic in the Bahtinian sense. Joyce simultaneously leads a plural dialogue with these sources while the citations, incomplete and estranged, irradiate their own meanings in various directions and are yet brought firmly back into the net of multiple meanings by the cohesive strength of the Joycean thought and the Joycean style.

D. H. LAWRENCE, THE RAINBOW (1915), THE ANNA VICTRIX CHAPTER

In *The Rainbow* Lawrence re-structured the novel, articulating the unconscious, the dark substratum of being. In order to achieve this, he invented a technique which focused on the enlarged, enhanced, hyperbolized emotional states, energized by unconscious drives and impulses.

In the scene from the second cycle of his family-chronicle novel which was declared obscene, whereupon the book was seized by the police and all its copies were destroyed, the female protagonist Anna Brangwen, pregnant and naked, dances first by herself and later watched by her husband in the bedroom of their house. As the text explicitly says, she triumphantly dances »before her Lord«, to the exclusion, even »annihilation« of her husband.

»And she had to dance in exultation beyond him. Because he was in the house, she had to dance before her Creator in exemption from the man. On a Saturday afternoon, when she had a fire in the bedroom, again she took off her things and danced, lifting her knees and her hands in a slow, rhythmic exulting. He was in the house, so her pride was fiercer. She would dance his nullification. She was exulted over him, before the Lord.

She heard him coming up the stairs, and she flinched. She stood with the firelight on her ankles and feet, naked in the shadowy, late afternoon, fastening up her hair. He was startled. He stood in the doorway, his brow black and lowering.

– What are you doing? he said, gratingly. You'll catch a cold.

And she lifted her hands and danced again to annul him. The light glanced on her knees as she made her slow, fine movements down the far side of the room, across the firelight. He stood away near the door in blackness of shadow, watching, transfixed. *And with slow, heavy movements she swayed backwards and forwards, like a full ear of corn, pale in the dusky afternoon, threading before the firelight, dancing his non-existence, dancing herself to the Lord, to exultation.*

He watched, and his soul burned in him. He turned aside, he could not look, it hurt his eyes. Her fine limbs lifted and lifted, her hair was sticking out all fierce, and *her belly, big, strange, terrifying, uplifted to the Lord. Her face was rapt and beautiful, she danced exulting before her Lord, and knew no man.*« (225)⁴ (italicised by V.S.)

The scene expresses emotional tension in erotic and marital relationship in a new novelistic idiom Lawrence was developing at the time of *The Rainbow*, for which the best term is »visionary expressionism«, suggested by Jack Stewart⁵. The dance in which the character is brought into a self-hypnotized, rapt state, completely surrendered to his bodily movements, was judged by Lawrence to be a perfect medium for the articulation of the unconscious. Lawrence's text dramatizes an inner emotional landscape, burning in intense colours. The reactions of the young married couple to their approaching parenthood are different and the difference is articulated within the context of the struggle for dominance, which is a constitutive element of all Lawrentian portrayals of the relationships between the sexes. Anna feels triumphant in her pregnancy, Will fears exclusion and inferiority in the contest of power. In the startlingly defamiliarizing context Lawrence develops a parallelism to King David's exultant dance before the Lord in the Old Testament⁶. In the verbal texture of the scene lies embedded, almost indistinguishably, the truncated citational fragment from *Song of Solomon* (»Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies«).

»And with slow, heavy movements she swayed backwards and forwards, *like a full ear of corn* (italicized by V.S.) ... dancing his non-existence, dancing herself to the Lord, to exultation.«

While the visual impact of the text focuses on Anna's belly, »big, strange, terrifying, uplifted to the Lord«, the truncated and deformed citational fragment is re-located and refers to Anna's body, her deep sensual self.

The text, possibly, also alludes to the dance performed by the Shulamite in front of Solomon in *The Song of Songs*, expressing an adoration of the Beloved in the context of perfect Love. The Lawrentian text embodies a radically different meaning. It suggests a conflict as well as sexual anxiety, sexual neurosis in the context of tension-laden modern times.

The citation from The Song of Songs appears in an incomplete, fragmentary form and is almost unverifiable. It is placed in a defamiliarizing context and radically estranged. It is almost unrecognizable and yet, entering into an intertextual relationship with other verbal elements it contributes towards the complex and stylistically unstable meaning of this narrative segment of *The Rainbow* in the best Modernist fashion.

⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, Penguin Books, 1989, p. 225.

⁵ Jack Stewart, »Expressionism in *The Rainbow*«, *Novel*, Vol. 13, No. 3, Spring, 1980.

⁶ »uncovered himself exultingly«: 2 Samuel VI, 14–23.

Miroslav Krleža, *The Return of Philip Latinovicz* (1932)

The Return of Philip Latinovicz, Krleža's subjectivist, lyrical novel presents the inner theatre of consciousness of the protagonist Philip Latinovicz, the gifted artist, who undergoes a spiritual crisis of utmost intensity, questioning the nature and the meaning of art as well as the ultimate realities.

The major structural joints in this introverted novel are the moments of the conception of a new picture by Philip, the Modernist painter. These pictures, realized or only imagined, express fully and totally his innermost mind and his crisis. The first of them is the famous picture of a whore's belly, which Philip intensely imagines but fails to execute on canvas.

»Tu, obasjana snopom svjetlosti, što je padala kroz maleni kolut na prozornoj ploči, ležala je žena, a trbuh joj je bio raskriven, ogroman i sasvim bijel kao svježi hljeb, kada leži na pekarskoj lopati. Samo to, da je taj trbuh ogroman, naduven, mekan i nagnjio kao kvasac pod prstom, da ima pupak, kao prijesan hljeb na pekarskoj lopati, to je bila jedina slika, što mu je ostala u pameti sasvim živo i neizbrisivo...

Crno-bijelo?

Preslabo. Prejednostrano. Kod ovog davnog događaja bila je glavna rasvjeta onog nečeg gnjilog, prijesnog, naduvenog, ogromnog, onog tajanstveno nečeg ženskog, što bi trebalo da se donese toulouse-lautrecovski, ali opet osvijetljeno jednim naročito nezdravim, nadnaravnim osvjetljenjem gnjile puti. Taj trbuh trebao bi da se prelije preko platna u sasvim gnjilom, žitkom stanju, kao prezreo camembert, i to ne bi smjelo da se donese kao slika običnog, banalnog bordelskog prereza... Oko tog kreveta trebalo bi omotati sve one nevidljive koprene, potajne, goruće pohote, stravu nevinog straha i očekivanje nečeg neobjavljeno nadnaravnog, a kad tamo, to je hladan sumrak, u kome sve vonja kiselkasto po octu! Trbuh ženski bila bi tema, ali tema potpuno otvorena, opasna: tema ženske golotinje, što bi je jedamput trebalo fiksirati bestidno istinito, s najčulnijim zanosima, a naročito neprikrivenim podcrtavanjem tjelesnog. Jedno bijelo golo tijelo trebalo bi naslikati, morbidno, suludo, perverzno, kao torzo zamočen u rasvjetu straha, nemira, groznice, malodobne strave, tmine, smrada, bordelskog vonja kiselih perina, šnelsidera i prljavih šalica, na kojima se razmočila zemlja, a jedna zelena neugodna muha zuji po tmini i bije krilima o ogledalo.« (57–59)⁷ (italicized by V.S.)

Within Krleža's baroquely rich verbalization of Philip's state of consciousness as he conceives this picture a remote echo of the Biblical citation from *Song of Solomon* has been woven, half-hidden, half-concealed and totally estranged, defamiliarized. It has been given a grotesquely inverted meaning, as is common in Modernist texts. The Biblical text from *Song of Solomon* (»Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies«) expresses the potency of desire, celebrates the Beloved's body and crosses images of fertility (»heap of wheat«) with images of purity (»set about with lilies«). In Krleža's description of Philip's imagined picture the female body is, in a grotesquely distorted, deformed version of the Biblical source text, described in such a way that its materiality is heavily stressed, suggesting the way of all flesh. The most significant adjective that is given to the description of the

⁷ Miroslav Krleža, *Povratak Filipa Latinovicza, Sabrana djela Miroslava Krleže*, Zora, Zagreb, 1954.

woman's body is »rotten flesh« (»gnjila put«), which encapsulates Philip's *Weltanschauung* that lies at the root of the crisis. The woman's belly in Philip's picture is associated with »a lump of dough on a baker's peel« but also with the overripe Camembert and with the bloated drowned body, suggesting, on the symbolical level, the processes of growth and maturation, interpenetrated with the processes of decomposition and corruption as the way of all flesh, an existential net in which humanity is captured. Thus the image of the whore's belly has its place as a potent symbol within the total context of the novel, focusing on Philip's crisis which arises from his sense of human life as a circular purposeless movement driven on by a blind Will, a Schopenhauerian dark vision of the human condition. Violent sexuality, which expresses the full range of Philip's responses to the female body (»s najčulnijim zanosima«, »morbidno«, »suludo«, »preveržno« etc.), complements the view expressed through the metaphorical structure underlying this narrative segment.

Conclusion

In these three great Modernist texts the »embedding« of the Biblical intertext occurs at an important point in the development of the thematic complex, thickening the narrative texture, increasing the connotative richness of the semantic field of the narrative segment and, consequently, expanding the total meaning. The meaning to which it contributes is notable for its polysemic richness, ambiguity and radical instability.

BIBLIJSKI INTERTEKST U TRI MODERNISTIČKA PISCA (JOYCE, LAWRENCE, KRLEŽA)

Asimilacija i transformacija leže u osnovi svih intertekstualnih postupaka. Unutar moguće tipologije intertekstualnih operacija što ju je razradio francuski teoretičar Laurent Jenny posebno mjesto zauzima operacija koju je on nazvao »utiskivanje«. Taj se termin odnosi na one slučajeve kada je transplantirani tekst samo fragment, sklon tome da se ponaša kao riječ u pjesmi, sa svom stilskom nestabilnošću, neutvrđljivošću i inkongruentnošću koja se tu podrazumijeva.

»Citirani« tekst u ovom članku fragment je *Pjesme nad pjesmama*, koji se nalazi u tri modernistička pisca: Joycea, Lawrencea i Krleže. Transplantirani fragment je »utisnut« u Dedalusovu struju svijesti u poglavlju »Proteus« u *Uliksu*, u opis plesa Anc Brangwen u poglavlju »Anna Victrix« u *Dúgi*, i u grotesknoj inverziji, u Krležinu opisu slike bludničina trbuha koju zamišlja Filip Latinovicz u *Povratku Filipa Latinovicza*. U sva tri pisca intertekstualni fragment nalazi se na ključnom mjestu u strukturalnoj armaturi romana i vezan je uz inovativne tehnike koje ti pisci upotrebljavaju. U svakom od ovih primjera transplantirani fragment sudjeluje u intertekstualnom dijelogu na osebujan način, sukladno temeljnom kontekstu kulture u krizi.