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The English Intertext of Croatian Literature: Forms and Function

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In this paper intertextuality is understood as the practice of citing, adapting, and transforming existing texts within newly produced ones. They thus establish an intended, marked, and ascertainable relationship. This co-presence can work as a meeting point between cultures. The borrowings have different determinable functions within the contexts into which they have been absorbed. The paper will trace ways in which English texts have been made use of in Croatian literature during the last 150 years. Until the beginning of the 20th century Shakespeare and Byron, in changed forms, supported the ideology of national independence. More recently, Shaw, Yeats, Hemingway, Joyce and – in many new avatars – Shakespeare, as well as poets ranging from Campion to Eliot and Pound, have been employed both for social criticism and for a sophisticated postmodern play with linguistic possibilities and cultural traditions. The paper will examine the different intertextual procedures and the various purposes to which they have served at various historical moments.

For some time now I have been studying Croatian plays, poems, and fiction which incorporate English texts, either through quotation, or allusion, or by the inclusion of longer segments of these writings. Sometimes the borrowings are changed, or adapted in the course of adoption. They may follow the developing story line of the original or severely curtail it. Occasionally we find travesties of well-known models or attempts to produce something new sometimes by stressing, at other times by suppressing the origin of the idea, structure, or important details of characterization, plot, or even imagery.

It is not the actual amount of borrowing or the technicalities of versification or stage effects that matter most, but the function which these borrowings acquire

in their new context. Our concern is not only with what they contribute to the Croatian text but also how these appropriations from foreign sources make part of the world view and the spiritual, political, or artistic intention of the Croatian author and how they express his milieu. Why for instance should an epic poem by Byron, *The Corsair*, be adapted for the stage in the Croatia of 1844? What modifications does it undergo in this transposition of verse tale into drama? And perhaps more to the point: why should it interest us today?

To go back for a moment to the word »source«. It will remind us of another well-known term in literary studies, »influence«, which generally means the power to affect others. It contains a neutralized form of the concept »influx« – which can be seen as another aquatorial image denoting the concept of flowing in, inpouring, the point where a river joins another body of water. Michael Baxandall (58–59) believes that seeing source A as an active element in relation to the object of influence B is a grammatical prejudice. Instead he finds this object to be an active entity that absorbs, transmutes, renews, alludes to, quotes, elaborates, subverts, responds to, etc. etc.

Therefore another image, the palimpsest, may be more appropriate for representing such transtextual operations. A palimpsest is a parchment, tablet, etc. that has been written upon or inscribed 2 or 3 times, the previous text or texts having been imperfectly erased and remaining still partly visible. It is therefore understandable that Gérard Genette should have used the word »palimpsest« for the title of his book on hypertextuality. It deals with the variety of ways in which new, (hyper-) texts have been made on the basis of old, (hypo-)texts through imitation, parody, continuation, addition, shortening, transposition from one genre or medium into another using stylistic modifications or simply translation, as well as innumerable other devices.

This, then, is an important aspect of intertextuality, which according to Gerald Prince (46) is a concept embracing »the relation(s) obtaining between a given text and other texts which it cites, rewrites, absorbs, prolongs, or generally transforms and in terms of which it is intelligible«. Before showing how this works in studying the presence of English texts in Croatian writing a distinction must be made clear. There are two ways of understanding intertextuality, both of them relevant to what we are interested in. The wider sense is very clearly described in the following passage by Roland Barthes:

»Every text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at variable levels, in more or less recognizable forms: the texts of the previous culture and those of the surrounding culture; every text is a new fabric woven out of bygone quotations. Scraps of code formulas, rhythmic patterns, fragments of social idioms, etc. are absorbed into the text and redistributed in it, for there is always language prior to the text and language around it. A prerequisite for any text, intertextuality cannot be reduced to a problem of sources and influences; it is a general field of anonymous formulas whose origin is seldom identifiable, of unconscious or automatic quotations given without quotation marks«.

The other sense is narrower but more precisely determined. It refers to the way in which there is a conscious, intended, and marked relationship between a later text and earlier ones (Pfister, 25) or rather – bearing Prince in mind – those that it absorbs, binds together, rewrites, cites, or transforms.

Let us now look at some of the different forms of intertextuality that can be established between Croatian and English texts. We may start with the example briefly mentioned in the beginning. By changing Byron's verse tale *The Corsair* into a play, *Gusar*, Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski performed – if we follow Genette's terminology – an intermodal transposition (Genette, 323). In addition, the text is a translation often departing from the original and subjected to transmetrization (change of meter) (Genette, 254), transvocalization (some passages are spoken by different or new characters) (Genette, 335) and transfocalization (from the diegetic third-person to the first-person mimetic perspective) (Genette, 285) together with a reduction of its length (thus undergoing concision) (Genette, 271). The narrative substance, the story, remains fairly complete and is not even condensed; indeed some of the narrative sequences even undergo stylistic expansion. Certain details are elaborated and new ones are added, substituting narrative description by a concretization of the live circumstances of several characters. This summary of the operations through which Byron's text was adapted sounds like a caricature of theoretical jargon. Nevertheless, an account of the various transtextual possibilities used in the case that we are dealing with may offer a useful guide and a shortcut towards an analysis of the substantial difference between the two works. What matters most, namely, is the function of the changes.

Besides substituting Croatian folk names for several romantic literary names Kukuljević places his play between the Adriatic island of Korčula and the city of Skadar (Scutari). He mentions Dubrovnik and its farther neighbourhood – Hungary, Venice – as well as another historical burden: the pressure and exploitation in this geographically precisely situated area. The plot taken over from Byron remains the same and involves only the Turks. But in the text the other, Western enemy, Venice, is also unambiguously described and condemned.

Byron's verse tale is an epitome of romanticism, a story of passion, freedom fighting, sensuous love. Kukuljević's adaptation makes use of some of the conventions but plays down others. His audience, provincial and mostly unsophisticated in comparison with, say, a Viennese one, is not yet ready to follow Western fashions all the way. The patriotic dimension is paramount and the erotic potentialities of the love theme are to a large extent suppressed. Modest in linguistic prowess and dramatic quality this derivative play is a piece worth recording because of the very fact that it appeared in a marginal area of Europe, thirty years after the original was written. It is surprising that in this remote border region of Europe a text by the

celebrated and scandalous English lord, problematic and morally ambivalent by reputation, a) should have been made use of at all; b) in a national adaptation, linguistic and ideological; and c) in a different genre that might have – had the new author been more adroit – provided a collective feast for his audience's national sentiments. An essential intertextual feature – d) – of this event is subjective: namely that Croatian culture at that early moment of its modern dawn could feel self-confident enough to have reached a level when it could creatively and originally absorb such a peak of contemporary literary sensibility as that embodied in a verse tale by Byron. Kukuljević was probably tempted to take on Byron because of the romantic aura characteristic of his text as read by the public in Western Europe. At the same time the moral and social norms of his own country made him reduce the use of the same conventions that had attracted him. Instead he pragmatically stresses the story's potential of self-denying patriotic heroism that Byron's original public must have found exotic.

The real hero of 19th and early 20th century Croatian literature is, unsurprisingly, Shakespeare. On twenty-odd occasions he is used in order to provide the dramatic conventions for modern nationally oriented plays intended to boost and support the national consciousness. Many writers structured their plays through a series of parallel scenes, often taking place in the open air, and used an innumerable cast, occasionally mixing tragic and comic, verse and prose. The topics most frequently concern the national Croatian rulers before the defeat of 1102 when full sovereignty was lost for almost 900 years. Occasionally, well-read authors like Mirko Bogović or Stjepan Miletić – a wizard theatre director who produced sixteen Shakespeare plays within four years – deliberately followed particular shakespearean plots in order to see how Croatian history may function within such patterns, laid out in advance as it were, to be put to such use. Several of Shakespeare's plays – *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, etc. – find their echo in Croatian historical tragedies and on two occasions, in the 1850s and about half a century later, the action of *Macbeth* is followed quite closely. Verbal resonances enhance the thematic kinship – the consequences of regicide – between tworemote corners of Europe. One of these plays, Miletić's *Pribina*, uses, early after 1900, a rich, decadent, ornamental prose reminiscent of Oscar Wilde! Very effectively from a dramatic point of view it inserts the arrival of the players from *Hamlet* in order to increase the tension before the murder.

From a different perspective however Miletić's main work is *Tomislav*, a chronicle play about the first Croatian king, crowned in 925, full of variety in character and episode, patriotic solemnity and comical punning. It creates analogues both of Henry V, before and after his ascent to the throne, and of a recognizable Falstaff in a very minor key, in addition to a faithful imitation of the Prologue as well as a host of scenes involving nobility and churchmen.

The point, again, is not dramatic excellence. It is irrelevant to speak of imitation, plagiarism – nor, on the other hand, does the text deserve to be called Shakespearean pastiche. It is a transposition into a Croatian code of the summit of Shakespearean histories, with the purpose of promoting national pride at a time when Croatian political parties were shaping up for more decisive action which was to lead as close to independence as Hungarian and Austrian counterpressure could be forced to yield. In his afterword the author discusses the intention behind his plays in terms of the Shakespearean cycle of histories and his utopian hope that open air performances might be staged on a regular basis embellished with explicit national ceremonies around the act of coronation. His series never got beyond two plays before he died.

Today it seems odd that (except in a weak experiment by Miletić, *Boleslav*) until recently *Hamlet* should not have been more frequently or more fully exploited by a milieu quite willing to get out of Shakespeare anything that might make the domestic heroes' quandaries more complex and meaningfully ambiguous. The reason is that political concerns recruited most of the intellectual energies of modern Croatia. When, in the late 1960s, a brilliant new play appeared – it was again fully political. This time, however, Shakespeare was used most ingeniously and originally in the creation of what must be one of a small handful of the most firmly expressive, best constructed, and meaningful plays ever written in Croatia. The author is Ivo Brešan. Its translator into English, William E. Yuill, shortened and somewhat generalized its original title into *The Performance of Hamlet in Central Dalmatia*.

The action is placed in a small backwood village and develops mainly on two levels: 1. rehearsals for an amateur performance of *Hamlet* in a crude and simplified version of the text corresponding to the possibilities of the uneducated people of that region, and 2. events in the same village which are broadly analogous to those in *Hamlet*. Claudius here is the local Party boss after World War II.

What we get is a tightly woven self-reflexive plot where repetitions and variations act as a complex broken mirror that exaggerates and distorts the features that the characters as individuals and as a group reveal in the course of the play. Ivo Brešan's multiple version of *Hamlet* is a travesty in which the grotesque twists on the original model assume frightening connotations. This corner of Europe, hungry and downtrodden by armies and plundering authorities from both East and West, makes its own version of modern authoritarianism assume permanent features of robbery, extortion, intimidation. When costumes and accompanying paraphernalia (crowns, swords, armour) arrive from the city to be used in the performance, a drunken group of peasant amateurs, headed by the main political activists, stage a regular carnival orgy accompanied by the irrational rhythms of the primitive Balkan reel. No Fortinbras appears on the scene. The play ends without a Shakespearean cathar-

sis. Instead, after a sudden blackout, we hear the voice of the bullied village teacher who directs the play against his will: »Light... Let's have some light... Light!« (Brešan, 81).

To end this account of a selection among memorable adaptations from English literature and their functioning within Croatian culture I want to discuss a short and ingenious *tour de force*, a Croatian *Finnegans Wake*. It is a comical mystification purportedly by one Simon (Šimun) Freudenreich, the Croatian Joyce as the title has it. The surname, of course, is a meaningful translation, the first name itself points towards Shem the Penman, implied author of Joyce's late masterpiece. Antun Šoljan is the name of the actual author. His structure, although his text is much shorter, is closest to that of Nabokov's *Pale Fire*: text-notes-commentary (all fictional). The theme is very close to Joyce's: the resurrection of a folk hero, yet not from the oral tradition but from an epic poems of nation-wide popularity by the 19th century poet Ivan Mažuranić. It deals with the death of the tyrannous Turkish Smail-Aga, who here experiences a resurrection, in the wake of Finnegan, who is explicitly mentioned. The »Gans« – the German word for goose – plays an immense role in the various puns, verbal permutations, turns, confrontations with many other motifs based on literary and political associations. Words change their grammatical functions and, through slight distortions, take part in a huge network of allusions comprising a universe comparable in kind, though certainly not in scale, to that of Joyce's late idiosyncratic master-product. It is a game by a well-read and witty master, but a significant one. Contrary to the ideological and programmatic uses of literary borrowings from important models, like Byron and Shakespeare, for pragmatic national purposes, Šoljan is here contributing to Croatian culture in a different way, which one wishes could become the prime mode in literary experimentation. He is trying out the flexibility and referential capacity of the Croatian language, and testing the wealth of its connotative possibilities. Doing so he makes use both of its own traditions and inheritance and of the most challenging text in the international literary production of our epoch.

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ENGLISKI INTERTEKST HRVATSKE KNJIŽEVNOSTI – OBLICI I FUNKCIJE

U ovom izlaganju intertekstualnošću se naziva praksa citiranja, prilagođavanja i preinačivanja postojećih tekstova unutar drugih, novo proizvedenih. Time oni zajedno uspostavljaju odnos koji je unaprijed namjeravan, jasno označen i provjerljiv. Ovakva zajednička nazočnost može se shvatiti kao točka u kojoj se sastaju različite kulture. Posudbe imaju različite, a određive funkcije unutar kontekstâ u koje su uključene. Na ovom mjestu predočit će se neki od načina na koje su engleski tekstovi upotrijebljeni u hrvatskoj književnosti u tijeku posljednjih 150 godina. Sve do početka dvadesetog stoljeća Shakespeare i Byron su u različitim oblicima služili afirmaciji ideologije nacionalne neovisnosti. U novije vrijeme, Shaw, Yeats, Hemingway, Joyce i u raznim novim uobličanjima – Shakespeare, kao i pjesnici od Campiona do Eliota i Pounda upotrijebili su se kako radi kritike društva tako i za rafinirano postmoderno igranje jezičnim mogućnostima i kulturnim tradicijama. U ovom izlaganju razmatraju se pojedini intertekstualni postupci i različite svrhe kojima su služili u različitim povijesnim trenucima.