

RECENSIONES

SUPERAMENTO DI SÉ – Grytzko Mascioni, *Puck*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 1996.*

Perché *Puck*? Il titolo di questo romanzo viene tratto dall'omonimo personaggio shakespeariano, rispettivamente dallo stesso soprannome attribuito all'autore da altri, in circostanze aneddotiche, e da lui stesso riproposto quale *alter ego*. Corrisponde perfettamente – per la sua estrema mobilità allusiva – a chi può considerarsi "di casa" da ambedue le parti della frontiera italo-svizzera (originario dai Grigioni, nato in Valtellina, vissuto per anni a Lugano), ma anche a chi è stato viaggiatore curioso e instancabile nelle geografie vicine e lontane e nella vasta diacronia delle sue letture. Modello già intento ai destini altrui (si pensi a *Il sogno d'una notte di mezza estate*, ripreso pure nella variante *sexy* di W. Allen nel 1982), il Puck di Grytzko Mascioni viene dotato di vita propria, anche sentimentale, e collocato nel contesto più attuale degli ultimi trent'anni: antieroico, antiretorico, "ragazzo" alquanto invecchiato della *post-beat generation*. La sua è una perenne condizione *fra*; tali anche i regali "testamentari", che sigillano i collegamenti: l'anello destinato ad Alma, protagonista in qualche modo centrale del romanzo, e la penna destinata al figlio lontano, epistolarmente noncurante. Si pensi anche al progetto di Puck di scrivere un trattato intitolato *De Amicitia*. Strutturalmente vengono unite, inoltre, due linee ben distinte in Shakespeare: quella lirica del *Sogno* e quella crudele dei drammi e delle tragedie. La corte, pertanto, viene sostituita dalla politica e dalla storia contemporanea. "E già e già non può chiamarsi che Puck uno che da sempre rifiutò pastoie guinzagli e collari, malsopportò padroni, ribelle persino allo spadroneggiare che facevano le sue proprie smanie e voglie..."

Virus in corpo – nel corpo di Puck, cioè – s'impone come l'antitesi al classico *deus ex machina*. Conforme alla sua funzione proteica, il virus (astratto, non specificato) si rivela mutante semantico ai vari livelli di poetica e di retorica, penetrando dovunque nel romanzo da intendere anche come descrizione d'un *modus moriendi*, all'insegna dei neologismi "premorire", "premorite". Faccia a faccia con la prova estrema, il protagonista cerca di salvare intensamente, rivivendolo scrivendo, il suo tempo interiore. La sua memoria non può abbandonarsi ormai al pacifico flusso proustiano, ma deve consentire alla discontinuità lacerante, ai tagli più affini di Joyce. "Prima di morire il tempo si riaccende in un folgorante guizzare agonico che sembra conferirgli (al protagonista, osserv. M.M.), sul ciglio della fine, un simulacro di vita intensificata, di radiante anche se minacciata esistenza."

* Questo testo steso dall'autore in italiano (in seguito alla presentazione dell'opera nel Centro culturale croato di Trieste il 12 dicembre 1996) riprende l'ossatura d'un omonimo saggio molto più lungo, intitolato in croato *Prevladavanje sebe*, in corso di stampa.

"Che Puck fosse alla ricerca di un padre" ce lo dice un sottotitolo nel romanzo stesso. Risultano difettosi i suoi rapporti familiari: la perdita precoce del padre mite, la fuga preventiva dalla "pericolosa" attrazione materna (sia pure squadrata da altri), il malinteso perpetuo con la moglie (fino al divorzio e oltre), la distanza (nel doppio senso della parola) dal figlio, mittente irregolare dei fax transcontinentali. La motivazione psicanalitica si riversa nella biografia del personaggio, assumendo fortunatamente una dimensione culturologica. Ad ogni modo Puck non ha casa (non ne ha una sola, cioè) e si realizza in quanto carattere, nei centrifughi rapporti letterari e artistici (il cui elenco, prezioso a livello autenticamente documentario, sarebbe troppo lungo da stendere in uno spazio così limitato) e in una varietà topografica quasi senza confronto dopo la così detta avanguardia storica. Simile, perciò, all'omonimo modello shakespeariano, Puck appare quale ultimo testimone su una scena vuota. Simmetricamente ai "padri" di Dante (che pure evitò la famiglia, ricorrendo alla protezione di Virgilio, Brunetto Latini e Guido Guinizelli), l'*alter ego* mascioniano ne conta pure tre (va evitato occasionalmente Kerényi, "padre" altrove del Mascioni grecista, non di Puck), più precisamente: Max Horkheimer, filosofo del dubbio permanente, erede indiretto di Socrate; lo scultore Alberto Giacometti (significativa la citazione: "Non avrei mai potuto né saputo essere Alberto, ma Alberto avrebbe potuto essere mio padre..."), il cui *Uomo che cammina* si offre quale emblema di vita sfuggente, di archetipica fame, ma pure quale forza di volontà; e il poeta Eugenio Montale, nascosto in numerosi critticitazioni, ma soprattutto nell'"eterna ricerca di un tu", ovviamente femminile. Anzi, l'interlocutrice-ispiratrice dà il senso allo sfondo, operando un continuo *transfer* tra il suo primo piano e il paesaggio. Si pensi al suo significato ontologico, quale risulta dall'adattamento cartesiano nel precedente *Di libri mai nati*: "...e tanto mi basta, sapere che ci sei ergo sum..." Così alle ombre dei contemporanei illustri (che possono trovare modelli in Omero, Virgilio e Dante) si uniscono le "ombre" delle donne, ossia il passato sentimentale-erotico di Puck. Si stacca dall'elenco relativo, quasi ricompensa freudiana, Alma in qualità di amante e "figlia" (e, inoltre, d'anima simbolica). Attribuendo ad un medico il ruolo di Leporello, pare che Puck tacitamente assegni a se stesso quello di Don Giovanni. Ma nulla ci vieta di pensare piuttosto al girotondo felliniano o, diacronicamente, al "femminismo" paternalistico di Casanova. La *pluralità dei fantasmi* (= ombre, di cui sopra!) si polarizza tra donne-"streghe" (comprese alcune ave della Rezia, delle quali Puck, ossia Mascioni altrove, pare particolarmente fiero) e donne-infermiere (nel senso concreto e traslato). Tra le menzionate per nome e più individualizzate Alma rappresenta il passato e la ragazza-farfalla (incontrata in Croazia) il condizionale, nella sua specifica funzione di "donna angelicata" o l'"angelica farfalla" di dantesca memoria (*Purg.*, X, 125), rispettivamente inserita nella neomanieristica tensione tra amore e morte (non a caso i versi di T. Tasso figurano in un'epigrafe al romanzo).

L'opera è compenetrata frattanto da una continua presenza connotativa di miti. Va detto che accanto a quelli classici (Orfeo, Ulisse ecc.) se ne offrono altri novecenteschi, testuali (tipo Hemingway) o subtestuali (quale Conrad), tutti legati alla navigazione o al movimento. La frequenza parallela degli animali non deve sorprendere. Cesare Pavese in *Dialoghi con Leucò* (nati in dialogo con Kerényi!) aveva già collocato l'umanità in una posizione intermedia: tra gli dei eterni e gli animali inconsapevoli, per motivi opposti "fuori" del tempo che ci opprime. Nel romanzo di Mascioni gli animali rappresentano una specie di "test" (né va dimenticata la silloge poetica dall'autore esplicitamente intitolata *Zoo d'amore*, 1993): così gli anatrocchi uccisi dal figlio equivalgono all'uccisione simbolica del padre e del suo mondo, mentre la cavalletta salvata da Puck esprime la libertà, la tolleranza e la pietà. Mascioni tende all'addomesticamento, non alla caccia, o - per dirla con Jung - preferisce l'*anima* all'*animus* (perciò il suo "femminismo" quasi classico rifiuta la militante imitazione dei difetti maschili).

Il romanzo è altrettanto pieno di cataloghi (il catalogo stesso può essere interpretato come figura dell'infinito, come fuga da un mondo ormai senza centro o come segno di metafisica perduta). Accanto agli scrittori, agli artisti, alle donne, eccoci allora ai luoghi, tra cui particolarmente spiccano gli alberghi, i ristoranti, gli aeroporti... L'albergo stesso è casa provvisoria o seriale, che implica il moto successivo. Non mancano, pertanto, esempi storici - al di là dell'accusa di "decadenza", vera o presunta - a chi, guardando dell'albergo, vede *altro*. R. Roussel e V. Larbaud intraprendono ad es., nei primi anni del Novecento, un cammino controcorrente, ossia a favore d'un'etica sociologicamente motivata e anticolonialista. Si ricordi Barnabooth, quale l'*alter ego* di Larbaud: "Per me, / L'Europa è come una sola grande città, / Piena di provviste e di tutti i piaceri urbani, / E il resto del mondo / È per me la campagna aperta dove, senza cappello, / Corro controvento emettendo gridi selvaggi!" Non manca in Mascioni una punta d'ironia laddove *Hotel Abgrund* (= abisso) assume un nome simbolico, né d'allusione laddove in piena guerra in Croazia un bar di Dubrovnik chiamato Casablanca riprende il titolo evasivo del film omonimo del '43. L'albergo protetto dai sacchi di sabbia e dalle tavole di legno non è più vetrina abbagliante né, tanto meno, luogo intoccabile.

Il Puck adulto ricorda i profughi slavi del sud, che da ragazzo aveva visto in Valtellina tra il 1944 e il '45, provenienti da un'immagine fantastica dei Balcani, rimati (!) con la visione esotica dei vulcani e, per giunta, dei "sombrosos messicani". Ben altra sarà la realtà concreta, non corrispondente ad un'altra geografia. Anzi, i toponimi croati e bosniaci si collocheranno a metà strada tra l'antica Grecia e l'odierna Europa occidentale: "...dove le Termopili si chiamavano Vukovar, e Maratona, Dubrovnik. E magari Tebe data alle fiamme da Alessandro il Grande, era Sarajevo, dove il virus della distruzione lascia dietro di sé la morte della libertà della *polis*, squartata dai diàdoci di terz'ordine che governano lo sfacelo malato del mondo. E la chiamano pace". Mascioni contrappone alla presunta indecifrabilità dei Balcani un'immagine culturalmente stratiforme della Croazia con il barocco dalmata-raguseo e il liberty della già "absburgica" Zagabria; chiavi di comprensione alquanto diverse da quella populista e panillirica di Tommaseo, ripresa da Bettiza nel prologo del suo recente *Esilio*. Ad ogni modo l'autore di *Puck* riscatta il lungo silenzio delle addormentate *élites* intellettuali già impegnate, affiancandosi per conseguenza a Fertilio e Bettiza (in parte) in Italia, a Finkielkraut e Bruckner in Francia. Spiritosamente (e amaramente) si accenna ad es. ai vivi testimoni più anziani d'uno stato: quello "ex-Yu", tanto rimpianto all'estero, certo non nelle nuove patrie (al plurale) secolarmente giustificate. Nella biografia diffusa di Puck ci saranno, comunque, due cari punti di riferimento: la nativa Rezia (l'epilogo "Resta laggiù il paese" assumerà un esteso significato escatologico) e la Croazia acquisita ("Zagabria è il luogo" figura tra i capitoli conclusivi del romanzo). Né si dovrebbero dimenticare le pagine dedicate a Dubrovnik, a cui l'autore ritorna in pensiero, quasi si trattasse d'un "San Michele" personale (nella scia di quello famoso di Axel Munthe, del '29). Per Mascioni l'Europa si prospetta (all'insegna dei "se") come "pluralità coesistente", contraria sia all'"orda asiatica" (serbo-montenegrina nel romanzo), sia ad un "clan chiuso in una feudalità secolare" (= l'immagine dell'Occidente), perché la verità tribale e quella imperiale si equivalgono nella loro univocità, negando la democrazia, identificata ad limite con il diritto di sbagliare.

L'etica, la metafisica e la poetica potrebbero imporsi come campi distinti d'indagine. Il virus s'identifica simbolicamente con la bugia, coinvolgendo il problema della tecnica di disinformazione, esplicitamente documentata da Dario Fertilio ne *Le notizie del diavolo* (1994). Cade in *Puck* non solo l'"u-topia", ma anche quell'"a-topia" in cui (ipotizzando la vita "altrove") si credeva da Rimbaud a Breton. L'etica proposta da Mascioni è socratica, per la sua costante attitudine interrogativa (né va dimenticata tra i suoi titoli appunto *La pelle di Socrate*, 1991), ma accanto

all'ideale *polis* greca (non quella della cicuta!) si abbraccia la *humilitas* cristiana. È del poeta solo la "vanità di scrivere" (altro titolo precedente), la "vita di cicala" contrapposta all'oro (variante quasi d'un motto montaliano), ossia sostanzialmente l'essere di fronte all'avere.

Il superamento del catalogo si ottiene, invece, tramite la neostilnovistica "scintilla divina", tramite i riferimenti alla *Bibbia* (i cedri di Salomone, la lotta con l'angelo), tramite la dimensione escatologica (è possessore del macro-*copyright* l'Autore-Demiurgo). Il commento ad una poesia di T.S. Eliot ("Nella mia fine è il mio cominciamento") collega la trascendenza e la poetica.

È labirintica la psiche di Puck: a differenza dell'universale modello mitico di Joyce propone movimenti pluridirezionali, componendo infine un *puzzle*. Il tempo nel romanzo non appare né lineare né circolare, bensì speculare. Le prospettive oblique sono tipicamente neomanieristiche, i capovolgimenti neobarocchi. Molte sono le antitesi evidenti e nascoste. L'impossibilità di dire "tutto" si manifesta nella storia d'un *dossier* rubato; il procedimento della *mise-en-abîme* nel racconto sulla guerra in Vietnam, fatto da Vinny, *alter ego* di Puck, ossia "maschera" della "maschera". È un romanzo che si nega programmaticamente e si ristruttura ricorrendo alle parti delle opere anteriori secondo un procedimento già gaddiano. L'apertura lessicale di Mascioni (splendido ad es. il neologismo *dietrologia*, riferibile all'entropia generale!) costituirebbe un capitolo a parte. Né sembra facile la collocazione dell'autore tra le poche poetiche contemporanee rimaste in gara: la verità soggettiva appartiene, in linea di massima, al postmodernismo, però lo scrittore non accetta il corrispondente solipsismo del micro-soggetto; l'orizzonte caotico sarebbe proprio, invece, del modernismo, ma (attenti!) d'un modernismo che frana e a cui ricorre la nostalgia del soggetto.

Perfino Rimbaud, in un momento di dubbio, aveva osato dire: "Il mondo cammina! Perché non tornerebbe?", alternando cioè la nostalgia alla speranza del veggente. La testimonianza di Puck, "l'esemplare d'una razza in via di estinzione", si fa testamento. Rifiutando la demagogia a favore dei giovani, della novità ecc., egli contrappone il "più" personale al "meno" universale, difende implicitamente ciò che il modo, nella sua corsa, ha perduto. Ha perduto ad es. 1. l'ideale dell'intellettuale impegnato, aperto, non pragmatico, e chi non miri, tramite l'arte, alla carriera politica; 2. la testimonianza culturale, perfino i luoghi (si pensi alle amicizie letterarie *d'antan!*), i salotti, i caffè, ormai sostituiti dalle funzioni; 3. la biografia sentimentale come struttura comunicativa, messa in disparte dai video- o computo-dipendenti e dai surrogati sessuali, che sospingono l'uomo verso la solitudine; 4. la partecipazione alla disgrazia altrui, intesa come questione etica (a favore delle vittime) più che politica.

L'interesse di chi scrive (poco incline alla fortuna consolatoria di lodevoli dati stranieri da pescare) non si basa sulla convinzione che *Puck* sia un romanzo sulla Croazia; bensì sulla soddisfazione, semmai, che la Croazia faccia parte d'un romanzo così eccezionale. "Poliromanzo" (per usare un'espressione cara a Calvino) oppure "opera mondo" (cit. Franco Moretti) per la sua ricchezza? Oppure in prospettiva, come pare al sottoscritto, *il* romanzo italiano degli anni '90? Per il suo tema, vero tema da fine millennio: il corto circuito tra la mobilità individuale (un soggetto sincero e spietatamente autocritico) e l'immobilità morale del mondo, paradossalmente sempre più collegato e interdipendente.

Zagabria, 2 gennaio 1997

Mladen Machiedo

Ivo Vidan: *Engleski intertekst hrvatske književnosti* (The English Intertext of Croatian Literature), Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zagreb, 1995.

Ivo Vidan's *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature* consists of eleven studies united by a common central concern. All studies in the book are devoted to the exploration of intertextual relationships between various Croatian literary texts and their English and/or American (henceforth referred to as "anglographic") "models". Spanning the period of 150 years, from Croatian Romanticism (better known as the Illyrian Movement) of the mid-19th century (Kukuljević, Demeter) to the most recent works of contemporary Croatian literature (Brešan, Šoljan, Marinković, Paljetak), the author traces and examines different instances of intertextual presence of anglographic literary texts in the works of Croatian writers in their sundry modalities. Those range from direct quotation and overt thematic or cultural reference to the infinitely more complex, at times elusive, correspondences of thematic concerns, stylistic procedures, or of generic and compositional principles. Semantic transformations that the "borrowed" anglographic elements undergo when relocated into Croatian semiotic and cultural contexts, remain the constant focus of the author's interest throughout the volume. It is this analytical focus that claims our special attention and proves to be one of the book's chief merits.

The studies in Vidan's book are not only linked together by their common central preoccupation but by their common conceptual framework, as the introductory chapter clearly indicates. Departing from the traditional concept of influence, which has predominated in the comparative studies of Croatian literature for a long time, the author introduces a much more rewarding concept of intertextuality/ intertextual relation, in the sense in which the concept has been developed by contemporary semioticians and theorists of intertextuality (Kristeva, Barthes, Genette, Riffaterre).

In the light of intertextualist theory, the demonstrable evocation of an earlier text (hypotext) in a later text (hypertext) is seen not as a mere imitation, a passive import, but rather as an enactive, creative textual strategy aimed at establishing a dialogue between two or more texts as well as between their overall historical and cultural contexts. In short, it is construed as a specific way of producing new meaning/s. The notion is predicated on the theoretical assumption that reference to an earlier text in a later text activates a semiotic transaction between texts brought into intertextual relation, as well as between their semiotic and cultural codes. Elements belonging to one cultural code undergo various changes and consequently take on new functions, when relocated and integrated into a different cultural context, whereby new meanings emerge. Intertextuality understood in its narrower, hermeneutic sense further allows us to view various specific modalities of intertextual relation as being guided by the aesthetic and ideological considerations of the later writer. In this way those specific modalities also become an indication of a particular poetics dominating a certain historical moment in the literature to which the later writer belongs.

As the studies in Ivo Vidan's *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature* demonstrate, the concept of intertextual relation proves both a more flexible as well as a more subtly discriminative hermeneutic tool in comparison to the earlier concept of influence. In the first place, it allows a

more discriminative analysis of various uses to which the elements of a hypotext have been put and of the consequent diverse semiotic functions these elements have been made to perform in a hypertext. Vidan's examinations of Croatian literary texts with demonstrable intertextual features thus make amply visible the historical modalities of intertextual practices deployed by Croatian authors. They are shown to range from the more spontaneous, as it were, and more "naive" cultural and literary references, considerably motivated by ideological demands (e.g., during the period of Illyrian Revival), to the fully intended, often aesthetically highly accomplished re-workings of various thematic and structural features of anterior anglographic literary texts in the production of original, new meanings. In the work of Šoljan, Brešan, Marinković and Paljetak, for example, the sophisticated, intentionally effected intertextual situations unmistakably point to the conscious modernity or postmodernity of these writers.

In addition to this, the comparative analysis rooted in intertextualist theoretical assumptions becomes relatively independent - a fact which will prove of special relevance to the comparative study of Croatian literature - of aprioristic evaluative hierarchies which accrue to the concept of influence. These hierarchies almost regularly make for the properties of authenticity, originality, hence also of aesthetic superiority to be ascribed to the model or "source", whereas the attributes of the derivative, the hybrid, hence of the aesthetically inferior consequently attach to the later text, even if by implication only. The types of literary study posited on some "dependency" theory and generating such polar evaluative oppositions do the greatest injustice to the s.c. small, minor, emergent or the s.c. postcolonial literatures, in a word, to the literatures and cultures with patterns of cultural development different from dominant, metropolitan cultures. Belonging to this large group of non-dominant, "small" cultures, Croatian literature and culture will be construed much more adequately under the aegis of theoretical perspectives which disengage the study of cultures from the notions of "originarity" and "filiation", and are therefore better equipped to discern those cultural practices in a national culture which are intentional, enactive, autonomous and culture-specific. The intertextualist approach as deployed in Vidan's studies is for this precise reason remarkably well suited to the study of Croatian literature. As the author of *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature* himself points out emphatically, "the use of anglographic hypotexts (by Croatian writers) does not signal weakness and inadequacy on the borrowing side. Quite the contrary, it is an expression of confidence and attained maturity, (...) an answer to a challenge" (p. 30), in short, an expression of willingness to engage in a dialogue with another culture.

The studies in Vidan's *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature* are primarily organized chronologically, but are further arranged together to form three larger units according to the dominant mode of intertextual relation established in a certain period or group of literary works. The book thus consists of three parts. In part I, comprised of three studies, the author focuses on the presence of anglographic elements in the works of Croatian Romantic dramatists and poets. Kukuljević's *Gusar*, a specific "transmodal transposition" (p. 38) of Byron's *Corsair* comes under close scrutiny in the first of three studies. In the following two studies the author's attention is devoted to various forms of the intertextual presence of William Shakespeare in the plays of Demeter, Bogović and Miletić. Engaged in a re/construction of Croatian national and cultural identity, those 19th century dramatists show a marked preference for historical, political and patriotic motifs in Shakespeare's plays, which they variously adapt to suit their poetic and ideological purposes. Part II of the book focuses exclusively on Krleža's anglographic intertext. The respective intertextual status of Byron, Wilde, Shaw, Shakespeare and Orwell in Krleža's work is explored as well as the respective role of Wilde and Shaw in the formation of Krleža's *fin de siècle* aesthetics. Vidan's attentive and inspired analyses in Part III centre on several instances

of highly elaborate and ingenious re-workings of anglographic literary models in contemporary Croatian literature. Quite deservedly, particular attention is here paid to Ivo Brešan's *Predstava 'Hamleta' u selu Mrduša Donja* (*The Performance of 'Hamlet' in the Village of Lower Mrduša*) and to Antun Šoljan's *Život i rad Šimuna Freudenreicha, hrvatskog Joycea* (*Life and Work of Šimun Freudenreich, a Croatian Joyce*).

In conclusion, let us stress a few key-points. *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature* will interest readers concerned with English and American literature as well as those primarily concerned with Croatian literature. The book will be of particular relevance to readers concerned with Croatian literature in its wider literary and cultural context, to those, in short, preoccupied with important issues of Croatian literary history in its interconnectedness with literary developments in the literatures and cultures of the West. A number of things contribute to this interest. For one, the studies in Vidan's book frequently focus either on those often neglected and largely unexplored segments of the Croatian literary heritage (e.g., 19th historical drama), or else bring to light insufficiently explored aspects of the otherwise well-explored *oeuvres* of Croatian classics such as Krleža, Marinković or Šoljan. In either case the author successfully highlights and fills in some of the regrettable gaps in the study of Croatian literary history so far. In addition, *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature* will undoubtedly recommend itself to readers' interest through the qualities of its critical style. Meticulous care to textual and historiographical detail, close attention to the texts under scrutiny combined with a wide cross-referentiality spanning a variety of literary contexts, both European and American, constitute its main features. These qualities can only be achieved by such an erudite and thoughtful reader of literature as the author of this book proves to be. Above all, the theoretico-methodological approach underlying Vidan's examinations of the anglographic intertext of Croatian literature should recommend itself with utmost salience to students and scholars concerned with issues of Croatian historical poetics in its national and international dimensions. Only by replacing the traditional concept of influence by some more adequate conception of cultural production, such as underlies the studies in Vidan's book, can the comparative study of Croatian literature successfully achieve its main objectives. Any approach that views Croatian literature as anomalous, problematic and largely derivative will be hampered in the attempt to reconstruct its full, authentic historical contours. As *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature* demonstrates, the intertextualist notion of textual production, largely independent of negative implications in reference to the text of any national literature, including "small" and "minor" ones, provides a better and a much more promising hermeneutic instrument for such reconstruction. On the one hand, the perspective allows the "intrinsic", autonomous aspects of the literary-historical dynamics of Croatian literature to emerge in sharper outline. On the other, and for this very reason, the approach is remarkably well suited to substantiate the frequently staked out claim to the organic relatedness of Croatian literature and culture to the literatures and cultures of the West. It is something that can only be done by anchoring the claim firmly in specific detail and by exemplifying it through attentive analyses of its concrete textual instances as are contained in Ivo Vidan's *The English Intertext of Croatian Literature*.

Janja Ciglar-Žanić

Sonja Bašić: *Subverzije modernizma, Joyce i Faulkner* (Modernist Subversions, Joyce and Faulkner), Zavod za znanost o književnosti, Zagreb, 1996; 215 pp.

In her newly published book *Modernist Subversions* (1996) the distinguished Croatian Americanist Sonja Bašić rehearses the extant findings of narratology, delineates a particular moment and development within modernist fiction and draws attention to the as yet unobserved parallelisms between the works of James Joyce and William Faulkner focusing on how the two of them relate to what she sees as the subversive moments in/of modernism.

At the very beginning of her book, Bašić recalls a Yeatsian allusion in Joyce identifying it as a "subversive code" - unannounced, unexplained, of indeterminate status - exemplifying Joyce's textuality. She proposes to base her comparison of Joyce and Faulkner on the "fluctuation and opposition" of two narrative/stylistic complexes operating within their novels. On the one hand, she refers to the figural strategies that brought about the psychological turn in the modern novel and, on the other, the distancing narrative procedures which undermine the transparency of the text and destabilise its authority and power of representation. The aim of the book is to show that a similar tension-filled juxtaposition between the two modes can be found both in Joyce and Faulkner and to rectify the critical oversight of this connection. Since both Joyce and Faulkner have assigned niches in the stream of consciousness tradition this facet of their work has been well documented and critically explored. In her analysis Bašić concentrates on the "distancing narrative/stylistic complex" which she believes has been unjustifiably neglected: "the subversion of literary conventions... and the strategies which problematise the relation of literature (language) and reality (the world), the question of the referentiality and of literature's capacity to (re)present" (14).

In the first chapter "Problems of narration: point of view, focalisation and speech/thought transposition" the author rehearses the extant findings of narratology and critically valorises their various ways of formulating the literary transposition and depiction of human experience. She concludes that modernism was a time of the greatest forays into psychic experience yet the writers engaged on this project, recognising its basic futility, wrote into their text a sense of distancing irony which manifested itself in different textual strategies.

These strategies are the subject of her second chapter entitled "Questions of style: realism and modernism, subversion and 'excess'". She reiterates the above mentioned opposition and duplicates it on the diachronic plane by tracing the often elusive transformations of realist mimesis and diegesis into new modernist variants. Joyce and Faulkner, Bašić contends, were both "master inventors and elaborators of deliberately anti-realistic strategies" such as "parody/hypertextuality; the discontinuity in the choice of themes and their disparity of style; connotation which always outweighs denotation; fragmentation; the complex juxtaposition of both poetically evocative and parodic patterns and motifs" (56). For example, Joyce in *Ulysses*, alongside the use he makes of hypertextuality and of metatextual commentary, seems to "hide" the narrator behind its "subversive strategies", the ludic principles which generate the book's textuality, its multiplicity of signs, ultimately, the very act of writing (80).

In the third chapter "Anticipations of modernism: Joyce's *Dubliners*", working from the thesis that "the language veils (of Joyce's strategies), although masked behind a superficial simplicity of style, are very dense in *Dubliners*" (84), Bašić explores the subversive impact of Joyce's collection of short stories which has generally been approached as a realistic-naturalistic masterpiece. In a close reading of the text she sets out to disclose how the short stories in *Dubliners* subvert the different presuppositions of referentiality and sense "such as the authority of the narrator, the motivation of character and the conception of the integral personality, the development of the theme, the possibility of completing metaphoric (allegoric) identification and closure" (85). The thrust of the subversive attributes in Joyce's early collection is to generate a sort of nontransparency which Bašić tentatively labels "impoverished ambiguity" (87) and which comprises, among other things, the inability of knowing final intentions and conclusions, minute dislocations within established conventions and suppressed or undisclosed information. Needless to say, such a reading compels the reader to reconsider his/her habitual engagement with Joyce's early texts.

In the chapter "Free indirect Joyce - authorial, figural, parodic" Bašić contends that Joyce's work problematizes the entire repertoire of techniques used to transpose speech/thought into narrative. Not only did he employ focalization and free indirect style but, more to the point of Bašić's argument, he elaborated these techniques in numberless variants and nuances. Joyce's texts signalise to the reader that an "unbridgeable indeterminacy" lies at the very center of free indirect style. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* not only is the reader constantly shuffling between characters and between characters and the narrator but s/he is forced "to absorb a multiplicity of figural and authorial styles which are, within the mimetic context of focalisation-free indirect style, mutually incompatible and therefore destructive of the illusion" (122). In a more radical fashion, in *Ulysses* free indirect style virtually disappears and Joyce indulges in playing with the entire roster of narrative modes drawing the reader's attention to the act of narration itself and the fictional status of the text.

In the fifth chapter "The great language game: scenes from Joyce's *Ulysses*" Bašić shows how the mimetic/expressive, figural levels of the text dissolve into a specific mode of writing which perhaps, as she wrote in the previous chapter, has still to be named. According to our author, in *Ulysses* Joyce charts a movement from focalized narration towards an ever-growing diegetic-parodic or hypertextual/metatextual distancing whereby he abandons his figural creations, the space of the world, and enters *paperspace* - his own concoction -, the domain of textual production. The sum total of these strategies enhance the non-transparency of the Joycean text and refuse the reader a purchase on its meaning.

In the sixth chapter Bašić elaborates the subtitle of her book contending that of all English and American novelist it is Faulkner who with his "frequently paradoxical coupling of narrative *mimesis* and *diegesis*, as well as his mixture of stylistic expressiveness and hypertextual literariness which spreadeagles the reader between extreme emotional and aesthetic empathy and equally extreme distancing" (165) is the one closest to Joyce. Although critics have remarked the similarity between the stream of consciousness in Joyce's and Faulkner's novels, Bašić holds that they have overlooked the similarity in their later works in which both authors deconstruct the strategies of unification, totality, empathy and opt for artistic practices which are ironic, discrepant, iconoclastic, oftentimes of a seemingly whimsical and provisional nature (193).

At the end of the book the author signals to the latent ambiguity in its title. Namely, the strategies that she reviews in her analysis are both modernist subversive takes upon narrative conventions and procedures but, from the postmodernist position, they can be also said to subvert

modernist paradigms. To quote: "What we have here is the paradoxical coexistence of two omnipresent opposite narrative strategies, always potentially subversive and constitutive for our definition of modernism" (199). In my reading of Bašić I find the implication that between modernism and whatever followed it one cannot speak of a break but rather of a continuum. Although the assumption that postmodernism does not represent a radical break away from modernism is a viable position, one to which many critics have subscribed, I incline to believe that differences, discontinuities and dissimilarities between modernism and postmodernism exist and must be acknowledged. In order to avoid the danger of collapsing the differences between modernism and postmodernism, Bašić's model in my opinion should also be viewed in a wider literary-historical and theoretical framework. However, in the more restricted field that she set out to investigate in her Joyce-Faulkner comparison - the hyper/metatextual aspect which has been critically recognised in Joyce but neglected in Faulkner - this danger has been modified by her theoretical underpinning (e.g. Genette, McHale, Waugh and Hutcheon among others) and wealth of carefully selected excerpts from *Ulysses*, *Absalom*, *Old Man*, and *The Hamlet*.

In *Modernist Subversions: Joyce and Faulkner* the Irish writer holds central stage and prevails over the American by three chapters to one. In these concluding remarks, I want to single out the chapter on *Dubliners* (its English version was published in *Style* in 1991) where Bašić reconsiders Joyce's revolutionary use of free indirect style and engages the extant Joycean contributions to this subject (e.g. Kenner, Riquelme, Gillespie, S. Benstock, Cohn). Bašić's reading of Faulkner through a Joycean lens presented in only one (the last) chapter of her book provokes the reader to approach his novels in a new key. Owing to its groundbreaking, therefore risky nature, it is to be hoped that the author will embark on a more detailed and comprehensive elaboration of the Joyce/Faulkner nexus which her presentation both requires - and deserves.

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- *Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, *Mit, nacija i književnost "kraja stoljeća": Vladimir Nazor i W.B. Yeats* (Myth, Nationhood, and End-of-the-Century Literature: Vladimir Nazor and W.B. Yeats), Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, Zagreb, 1995, 208 pp.**
- *Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, *Kamov i rani Joyce* (Kamov and Early Joyce), Hrvatsko filološko društvo, Zagreb, 1984, 100 pp.**

This comparativist study (first title) situates a Croatian and an Irish poet within their common European artistic climate. It places them in the cultural *milieu* of their respective countries at the end, or rather the turn of the century - about one hundred years ago. The author's purpose is to trace parallel features in the work of both poets, particularly with regard to their understanding of myth as an expression of nationhood.

Contacts between Croatia and Ireland have started to develop only very recently. There was no direct mutual awareness between the two poets. However, Gjurgjan has traced a very interesting link. When Yeats, as senator of the newly created Free Irish State, was trying to procure a suitable design for Irish coins he approached, among others, Ivan Meštrović, a Croatian sculptor well known in Europe in the years before and after World War I. Meštrović's design, characteristic both of his personal style and of Irish visual tradition, is reproduced on the front page of Gjurgjan's book. Unfortunately, because of some postal mistake it reached Yeats too late to be used.

Meštrović, just like his compatriot Vladimir Nazor, and like Yeats himself, belongs to the early modernist, *art nouveau*, or *Jugendstil* period in European art - the Croatian name being *secesija* (after the Austrian term *Sezession*). In a very complex chapter the author tries to determine the distinctions in the usage of these and other terms (symbolism, decadence, etc.) related to the same aesthetic tendency. She defines its main "ideologeme" as "art as the alchemy of reality". The natural world is transformed by the metaphoric presence of mythological images and figures, often with the purpose of developing the theme of survival and growth and relating it to national identity. This poetic procedure is symptomatic of the world view developed in politically dependent nations which are still trying to achieve full sovereignty and their own statehood.

Gjurgjan stresses the difference between, on the one hand, the turn of the century understanding of myth as a sign of an ancient emotional sediment formed through long stretches of time and an expression of the collective unconscious ("a peak of man's intuitive or metaphysical knowledge"), and on the other, the avant-garde revaluation and ironic deconstruction of myth as false consciousness. According to the first version, myth enables us to penetrate below layers of social construction and reach towards archetypal aspects of man's imagination. She accepts Cassirer's ontological concept of myth as well as Vico's antropomorfing practice, also stressing Barthes' characterizing of myth as "de-politicized speech" in which "history is transformed into 'nature'". This she finds true both of universally accepted classical myths and of those that appear in national, more precisely located forms - of Irish and Croatian traditions.

Both Nazor's early poems - such as those in the collection *Slavenske legende*, 1900 - and Yeats' poetry from its beginnings until about 1914 focus on the presence of heroic folk figures, leaders, divinities, fairies based on national inheritance or, frequently, invented by the author in

accordance with established tradition. The rhetorical figures in the texts suggest a very literary, bookish procedure, the descriptions of landscape are ornamental even when purporting to refer melancholically to past glory and the meaning of experienced emotions. From his beginnings however, Nator, even when using decadent stereotypes, expressed an energetic affirmation of a clear vision containing vitalist values: motifs connoting youth and vital energy dominate both his shorter lyrics and his allegorical patriotic epics. Patriotism and aestheticism merge in the development of universal cosmic themes: a stylized pastoral atmosphere pervades his confident expectation of redemption after suffering, sacrifices and struggles; blood and pain lead, ultimately, to freedom. In this work as, indeed, in Yeats', we frequently find oximoronic linking of love and death.

Yeats' poetry insists, with his own Irish perspective, on an examination of the tragic beauty of sacrifice - a theme permeating not only the mythological past of a Countess Kathleen, for instance, but equally the contemplation of a topical event of greatest urgency, such as the Easter Rising. In doing so Yeats is not primarily directed by political attitudes but by imagination and by his belief in the power of words to recreate - in the present - the spiritual values of the past. The imagery that frequently recurs in his poems is plurisignificant. The rose, for instance, is not an idiosyncratic, hermetic, or arbitrary symbol, as is often the case in symbolistic poetry but polysemic and full of allusion. In early poems it acquires different connotations - it evokes Ireland, femininity, sensuousness, love, stern self-control, imagination. At the same time, the poet openly explores his own position when facing the challenges of a many-faceted world. "Doubt concerning his own role in the national movement and his re-examination of his personal attitude towards it was to be the main *topos* of his creative concerns, together with the theme of the purpose of human existence in the world and the role of art in the search for this purpose." Gjurgjan extensively discusses such complex poems as "Among School Children" and "The Statues" and traces the way in which Yeats' experience of the wholeness and meaning of life emerges from the far-reaching and manifold connotations of the cultural imagery which characterize the poems.

The concept of *ekphrasis*, the presentation of works of art within poetic texts Gjurgjan sees as a recurrent mode of both Nator's and Yeats' description of nature. It is, she maintains, characteristic of the turn of the century literature in its aesthetical efforts at denaturalizing and stylization. Although the poets feel themselves immersed in nature and wish to belong to it they actually re-present it through intertextual appropriation of conventions, images, commonplaces. It is not the fulfillment of romantic feeling that is achieved but an arrangement of culturally mediated constructs that hint at rather than express experience. "Inspiration does not come from nature itself but from a perception of nature... manifested through cultural artifacts: books, narratives, legends, symbols, myths... Emblems, quotations, and *ekphrasis* are again central to artistic procedure."

It would appear, then, that turn of the century writing, even while insisting on the poet's individual environment and his use of national traditions, creates artefacts designed so as to make intertextual use of existing cultural discourses. The artist's creativity can be seen as acts of magic, performed by individuals invested with the power of sacral transformation. Nator and Yeats, both at least partly mystics, were involved in esoteric lore, Yeats through his connection with Mme Blavatsky and his membership of the theosophical Golden Dawn, and later construing the systematic characterology of the *Vision*. Nator matches him to some extent through his interest in the anthroposophic teaching of Rudolf Steiner which finds expression in the body of his poetry. In their self-questioning, both poets recur to cultural archetypes which were intended to express their return to the basic values through which the past and the present leave their imprint upon each other and virtually contain a project for the future.

The adroitness of her analyses fully justifies Gjurgjan's study, linking two important poets in their rich common context and showing the way in which they express similar historical and spiritual assumptions. This is comparative literature at perhaps its most useful: it does not construe a mechanically deductive relationship between background and text, but delineates a multicultural matrix of circumstances, ideas, and stylistic practices. It functioned in two countries distant from one another, both of them part of larger political entities and without mutual contacts.

The intertextual store of images, patterns, and motifs which the author detects in the writing of both poets exists independently of the languages in which they are expressed. Language, however - Croatian in one case, English in the other - is of enormous creative (shaping and structural) significance in Gjurgjan's comparison of another pair of writers, in her earlier study *Kamov i rani Joyce (Kamov and early Joyce)*. That time the comparison focused on two autobiographical novels by incipient writers, J.P. Kamov's *Dried Ditch* and Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is thanks to its having inherited the English language that the Irishman Joyce could achieve his very personal modernist perspective. Kamov, belonging to another non-sovereign nation, used his own language. At that time, however, Croatian was still a language in which literature had not yet achieved a clear expression of subjectivity. As a consequence, his text, occasionally brilliant and full of penetrating observations and self-analyses is often turgid and blindly groping its way towards socially relevant expressiveness that was to blunt the effect of taboo wording which he used as a means of cultural subversion. Aesthetically, his novel cannot compete with Joyce's, yet considering where he started from and the rather provincial boundaries - within which he was confined in all senses of the word - he is the more experimental and the more avant-garde of the two.

Together the two books on Croatian-Irish literary parallels demonstrate what cultural studies ought to aim at: not to register details and present the background of literary dynamics but to come to grips with the challenge that the two writers with their different languages and environments present to scholarly criticism. Gjurgjan's method is to point to analogies and to different functions within these analogies. Her findings do not simply illuminate textual achievement; they are symptomatic of wider trends within the period in question.

Irrespectively of the international importance of this or that language, it appears that one misses the point if one literature is measured against the achievement of the more widely known one. A division between central and marginal will have to be replaced by a decentralized and de-hierarchized approach, if we are to reach further new insights unhampered by the usual automatic assumptions of traditional priorities.

Ivo Vidan

