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## FREE-PLAY WITH TRADITIONS: LITERARY HISTORY AND INTERTEXTUALITY

### 1. LITERARY HISTORY AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Both the issues of literary history and intertextuality have been widely discussed, but it seems that the relations between intertextuality and literary history have not received adequate critical attention. My impression is that most theoretical approaches treat intertextuality and literary history as mutually exclusive although their connections are obvious in every empirical analysis.

The historical aspect is usually associated with influence but this is not the same as intertextuality: influence is connected with a purely historical viewpoint and the relationship between the two texts is one-directional. In the case of intertextuality, on the contrary, the relations between the alluding text and the referent text are reciprocal and dialogical and at the same time intertextuality comprises both literary history or the historical moment and the present time. Consequently, although we talk about differences between a postmodernist sense and little narratives at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems, paradoxically, that we also need the traditional literary histories as substances for our free-plays. I agree with David Perkins who suggests that 'the function of literary history lies partly in its impact on reading. We write literary history because we want to explain, understand, and enjoy literary works'<sup>1</sup> and 'it reveals the background that makes the work meaningful and the aesthetics that makes it beautiful. Literary histories explain allusions in text, establish the expectations associated with a genre in a given time and place, show how a work broke through a general crisis in aesthetic construction, demonstrate that it served or subverted a dominant ideology, and so forth'<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182–183.

Perkins draws on Nietzsche's essay *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (*On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 1874) and he differentiates between *critical*, *monumental*, and *antiquarian* literary histories. All of them 'fulfil their functions by misreading the past'<sup>3</sup>. For example, *critical* history '...serves the needs of writers in the present'<sup>4</sup> as Eliot's essays about the poets of the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup> (to be more exact, here Perkins refers to the essay '*Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*', written in 1921. That essay is a rediscovery of John Donne's poems for English modernist poetry.); '... *monumental* history corresponds to the type of literary history that concentrates on the greatest of past writers and seeks inspiration from them'<sup>6</sup>. And at the same time '... *monumental* history must ignore aspects of the past that would render a writer or work less inspirational'<sup>7</sup>. And finally, the *antiquarian* literary history which looks back 'with loyalty and love' to the portion of the past from which he / the historian – A.M. / derives. But in doing so he distorts the past, for he is interested only in what lies within his own tradition and greets even its mediocre achievements with enthusiasm'<sup>8</sup>. Although Nietzsche's own essay is a critique of the modern historical knowledge of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is important that Nietzsche's philosophy makes it possible to see the differences also in the grand narratives which were canonized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and also in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (in the modernist period), i.e., the different little narratives existed beside the grand narratives, in other words, modernism included the rebellion against modernism.

So Nietzsche's philosophy also predicts changes in literary paradigm. And in this case it appears that all changes and rebellions are commenced in literature not in literary history, which means that literary texts and writers live their own life and literary histories live theirs. For example, according to Renate Lachmann, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature and the academic literary histories adopted a classical model that 'emphasizes linear development, tradition, canonization, ge-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181–182.

neric and stylistic purity, and formal closure'<sup>9</sup>, but Lachmann suggests that 'such a model can be brought into competition with the model of carnival developed, as a twentieth-century answer to it, by Bakhtin; this competition is especially acute where cultural memory in general, and literary memory in particular, are at stake. The memory of cultural forms, as represented by carnivalesque practice and literary genres, can be deployed against institutionalised memory. [- - -] ... the conception of memory is the prerequisite for registering the cultural meaning of intertextuality'<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, according to Renate Lachmann, modernism brought the change into the interpretation of the process of literature and also into the interpretation of the literary histories. I think that similar tendencies took place in other national literatures as well. For example, the first histories of Estonian literature were written in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And institutional literary histories, our grand narratives dominated until the end of the Soviet period and have continued to exist after the restoration of Estonia's independence. But at the same time various interesting (Estonian) voices existed beside the grand narratives and waited for their time, for example, Ilmar Laaban in exile and Jonny B. in homeland. And according to Tiit Hennoste<sup>11</sup>, the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century Estonian literature is characterised by 'little jumps towards modernism'. I might add that there were also the 'little jumps towards postmodernism, for example Kalju Lepik's poetry in exile. All the narratives and different writers had their own function in the literary process. So as David Perkins suggests: 'a function of many literary histories has been to support feelings of community and identity. [- - -] a history of literature, whether it be the literature of a nation, class, region, race, or gender, would help instruct us who we are individually and as a community. It displays the tradition in which we stand whether we will or not, for this tradition has formed us.'<sup>12</sup>. And in the post-modernist age: 'In fact, however, literary histories deal in rather different way with tradition. [- - -] ... histories of the literatures of regions,

<sup>9</sup> Renate Lachmann, *Memory and Literature. Intertextuality, in: Russian Modernism. Theory and History of Literature, Vol 87*, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. xxiii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>11</sup> Tiit Hennoste, Hüppeed modernismi poole: eesti 20. sajandi kirjandusest Euroopa modernismi taustal, in: Vikerkaar, 1993-1997.

<sup>12</sup> Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 180-181.

social classes, women, ethnic groups, and so on have the same functions as the national literary histories of the nineteenth century"<sup>13</sup>.

It seems that if we have many different literary histories, or histories about texts, the readers (the members of different nations, classes, regions, races or genders) not only read the texts differently, but also create new histories – the grand narrative does not hold, more exactly, it holds only partly, because the horizon (I use the notion in Hans Georg Gadamer's terms) of the past and the horizon of the present converge in the process of reading. So history loses a little bit its historicity and the present loses some of its present. I think that this is the reason why references to history are not references to reality and also the references to present are not references to present in literature, but the reality and the fictional world are mixed in literary texts and also in meta-texts, the texts of literary histories.

Perkins deduces from Nietzsche's theory that 'if it is true [- - -] that literary history cannot depict the past as it actually was, objective representation cannot possibly be its function. Hence we might swing to the other extreme, and maintain that the function of literary history is to produce useful fictions about the past. More exactly, it projects the present into the past and should do so; it makes the past reflect our concerns and support our intentions'<sup>14</sup>. René Wellek suggests a similar idea as early as 1949: 'So literary history is no proper history because it is the knowledge of the present, the omnipresent, the eternally present. [- - -] There is to be sure a substantial identity of structure which has remained the same throughout the ages. But this structure is dynamic; it changes throughout the process of history while passing through the minds of readers, critics, and fellow artists'<sup>15</sup>.

The last lines of Wellek's words express the above-mentioned paradox of literary text: neither literary history nor the history in literature is reality - it is a memory of reality or memory of history. That paradox appears clearly in intertextuality. As Leon Burnett suggests, intertextuality is like 'a kind of bridge that linked the unattainable past and the inescapable present'<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup> René Wellek, Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1966, p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Burnett, *Cultural Continuities? in: Intertextuality and Modernism in Comparative Literature*, Ed. Emily Salines, Raynalle Udris. Dublin: Philomeil, 2002, p. 42.

## 2. FREE-PLAY WITH TRADITIONS

By intertextuality I mean the relations between texts and not allusions to external reality. So intertextual relations are possible through quotations, parodies of different texts, imitations of texts etc. Every text is surrounded with a mental allusive space<sup>17</sup> where the allusion is created and thereby the intertextual relationships are also created. Allusion is one of the forms of intertextuality that exists in the deep structure of a text, and it is also a component of all other kinds of intertextuality (quotation, parody, pastiche etc.) as an allusive signal. According to Joseph Pucci 'play is, after all, the fundamental quality of allusive space. But it is a play, as we have seen, located in a specific orbit of textualities, intents, and desires. [- - -] ...allusion arises in language and is returned to language, ... [- - -] ...the allusion begins and ends in a work written by an author...'18. And Pucci adds that the reader is an important person in that play (ibid.).

Wolfgang Iser expresses a similar idea about the concept of play although he does not speak about intertextuality and allusion: 'Authors play games with readers, and the text is the playground. The text itself is the outcome of an intentional act whereby an author refers to and intervenes in an existing world, but though the act is intentional, it aims at something that is not as yet accessible to consciousness. Thus the text is made up of a world that is yet to be identified and is adumbrated in such a way as to invite picturing and eventual interpretation by the reader'<sup>19</sup>. Iser refers to the relationship between the real world and the fictional world: by fictionality he means that we must take the latter world as a play<sup>20</sup>. The play is founded on the oscillation, to-and-fro movement: 'It also turns the text into a generative matrix for the production of something new. It invites and enables the reader to play the game of the text...'21. Iser suggests: '...what the text achieves is not featuring a pre-given, but transformation of the pre-given material that it encapsulates<sup>22</sup>. So as far as intertextuality is concerned, the move-

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Pucci, *The Full-Knowing Reader*, in: *Allusion and the Power of the Reader in the Western Literary Tradition*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting. From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 250.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

ment between the allusive text and the referent text (or the pre-given material) is dynamical and mutual and finally still depends on the reader's cultural memory.

At the same time intertextuality contains the aspect of temporality. As Heinrich F. Plett puts it, 'temporality is a factor of prime importance in intertextuality. It is interpreted from two radically opposite perspectives, a synchronic and a diachronic one. The synchronic perspective claims that all texts possess a simultaneous existence. This entails the levelling of all temporal differences; history is suspended in favour of the co-presence of the past'<sup>23</sup>. So, if the allusion as an allusive signal is the origin of intertextuality it is also the point where the aspects of temporality, the past and the present intersect.

Joseph Pucci believes that Christianity creates an active and meaning-making reader who interprets allusions and texts: the monks who commented on the scripture often used their own readings and interpretations for guiding the other monks<sup>24</sup>. As Joseph Pucci has argued<sup>25</sup>, the first text that legitimizes the powerful reader was Augustine's (354-430) *De doctrina christiana*. And it is common knowledge that the Bible is one of the most allusive texts and it is also a frequent referent text. On the one hand, the Bible is a holy, sacramental and traditional text, but on the other, reading of the Bible enables an individual relation to religion and also to a religious text. Maybe that is the reason why so many different interpretations of the Bible exist. It creates the impression as if the Bible has always been in the present although it is an old text.

The Bible is a very important text in literary histories too; we can see that throughout history the interpretation of and free play with Biblical motifs became more and more free. For example John Donne's poem '*Hymn to God, my God, in my sickness*' from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1631), written eight days before his death:

Since I am coming to that holy room  
Where, with Thy choir of saints for evermore  
I shall be made Thy music, as I come  
I tune the instrument here at the door,  
And what I must do then, think here before.  
[- - -]

<sup>23</sup> Heinrich F. Plett, „Intertextualities“, *Intertextuality*. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Pucci, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are  
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?  
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltàr,  
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,  
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Charm, or Shem.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,  
Christ's cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place;  
Look Lord, and find both Adams met in me;  
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,  
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.<sup>26</sup>

Donne was a poet who has greatly influenced English modernist poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I think that Donne's poetry is also like 'a little jump towards modernism' in the 17<sup>th</sup> century English poetry. Although the mentioned poem 'Hymn to God' perhaps may not be considered to be the best example of Donne's works, it shows an interesting intertextual relationship between the Bible and Donne's text. The poem expresses an emotional and individual relationship to God and to religion especially in the last stanza – the play with tradition and intertextual relation to the Bible is associated with the poet's own individual feelings and thoughts. Individuality as well as originality that are reflected in the poem were very highly valued by modernist art. That is why it is understandable why Donne was rediscovered namely in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And in this case we can say that Donne influenced the canonized literary history, created a new literary tradition, and at the same time he played with literary traditions and also created new meanings for the referent texts. Donne was an opponent of the poetic norms of the late sixteenth century<sup>27</sup> and modernist poets liked that play – a characteristic feature of modernism is its experimental quality.

A good example to illustrate the movement between the old and the new is Charles Baudelaire's poems. Baudelaire stood between the old and the new, between the classical and the modern and, for example, also between Victor Hugo and cubists or constructivists. In the poem "Le Cygne" ("The Swan") dedicated to Victor Hugo, from the cycle *Tableaux Parisiens* (1857) he writes that old Paris is no longer there, he alludes to the ancient literature, but the heroes in Baudelaire's poem

<sup>26</sup> Frank J. Warnke, Alexander M. Witherspoon, (eds.). *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry. Second Edition*, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1963, p. 759.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 712.

are in a different environment, they have lost their glory and are related to the suburb of Paris:

Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve,  
Pauvre et triste miroir oË jadis resplendit  
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,  
Ce Simoës menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,

A fécondé soudain ma mémoire fertile,  
Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.  
La vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville  
Change plus vite, hélas ! que le cÔur d'un mortel);

Je ne vois qu'en esprit tout ce camp de baraques,  
Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fêts,  
Les herbes, les gros blocs verdis par l'eau des flaques,  
Et, brillant aux carreaux, le bric-à-brac confus.

Là s'étalait jadis une ménagerie;  
Là je vis, un matin, à l'heure oË sous les cieux  
Froids et clairs le Travail s'éveille, oË la voirie  
Pousse un sombre ouragan dans l'air silencieux,

Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage,  
Et, de ses pieds palmés frottant le pavé sec,  
Sur le sol raboteux traînait son blanc plumage.  
Près d'un ruisseau sans eau la bête ouvrant le bec

Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre,  
Et disait, le cÔur plein de son beau lac natal:  
"Eau, quand donc pleuvras-tu? quand tonneras-tu, foudre?"  
Je vois ce malheureux, mythe étrange et fatal,

Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovide,  
Vers le ciel ironique et cruellement bleu,  
Sur son cou convulsif tendant sa tête avide,  
Comme s'il adressait des reproches à Dieu!<sup>\*28</sup>

\* Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Kurja õied Tõnu Õnnepalu tõlkes, Tallin: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Andromache, I think of you! The stream,/ The poor, sad mirror where in bygone days/ Shone all the majesty of your widowed grief,/ The lying Simoës flooded by your tears,/ Made all my fertile memory blossom forth/ As I passed by the new-built Carrousel./ Old Paris is no more (a town, alas,/ Changes more quickly than man's heart may change);/ Yet in my mind I still can see the booths;/ The heaps of brick and rough-hewn capitals;/ The grass; the stones all over-green with moss;/ The débris, and the square-set heaps of tiles. // There a menagerie was once outspread;/ And there I saw, one morning at the hour/ When Toil awakes beneath the cold, clear sky,/ And the road roars upon the silent air, // A swan who had esca-



Joseph Pucci interprets the poem in the following way: ‘The vision imagined in this poem is configured as it to invite the dynamics of allusive play by invoking them through description. The poem’s speaker, after all, gives shape to his own mental play by offering that he ‘thinks’ (*je pense*) of Andromache, which leads, in turn, to the admission that the body of water he spies, be it a puddle, a stream, or the Seine, forms a mirror (*miroir*) framing the grief of Andromache’s widowhood that this scene has made him remember. The present, therefore, links directly in the speaker’s mind to a prior textual moment. This present is made to function in the context of a past story framed by Virgil<sup>29</sup>. Thus we can see how Baudelaire plays with traditions and rereads them. It is not an influence, because Baudelaire doesn’t imitate Virgil, but he interprets and plays with Virgil’s texts and ancient myths, the new meaning is important for him. And it is interesting that at the same time Baudelaire’s text contains also thoughts about future, which is the real source of the poet’s sorrow in the second and third stanza.

But in my opinion, it is important that modernist poets express their individual relationships with traditions: the play with traditions is not simply a play for them, on the contrary, the modernist play with traditions is a serious play and it is also an egocentric play were the author’s feelings have a very important place as well as author’s intentions do as can be seen from the Estonian poetess’s Marie Under’s poem “*The Virgin’s Foundling*”, written in 1928:

To the sea at dawn the Virgin stepped, unwary –  
Stepped to wash but stumbled, the holy Virgin Mary.

Stumbled, stooped and found a waif, the cruel waves had thrown,  
One whose mother still must live, despairing all alone.

ped his cage, and walked/ On the dry pavement with his webby feet,/ And trailed his spotless plumage on the ground./ And near a waterless stream the piteous swan/ Opened his beak, and bathing in the dust/ His nervous wings, he cried (his heart the while/ Filled with a vision of his own fair lake):/ “O water, when then wilt thou come in rain?/ Lightning, when wilt thou glitter?” // Sometimes yet/ I see the hapless bird – strange, fatal myth - / Like him that Ovid writes of, lifting up/ Unto the cruelly blue, ironic heavens,/ With stretched, convulsive neck a thirsty face,/ As though he sent reproaches up to God! Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*. Ed. Marthiel and Jackson Matheus, Norfolk, Connecticut: A New Directions Book, 1955, p. 109–110, trans. by F.P. Sturm.

<sup>29</sup> Pucci, *op. cit.*, p. 235–236.

Looking at the guiltless one, so helpless on the shore,  
All that she had felt for her Son she felt once more.

Tenderly she lifted it to warm it at her breast,  
Breathless, all aglow, she took up to heaven her guest.

Took its sodden swaddles off, bathed it, kind and mild,  
Cuddled and caressed it like her own dear Jesus-child.

Dressed it in a gleaming robe, all of braided silk,  
Gave it to an angel nurse to nurse it with her milk.

In each hand she put a star: the brightest stars of space.  
O the boundless bounty! the grace beyond all grace!<sup>30</sup>

The motif of Virgin serves implicitly the social aspect in this poem and the reader is not quite free to interpret the text - Under plays with old motifs but she does not give them a new meaning. It might be said that the author's intention coincides with the traditional meaning or the poem exalts the traditional values and in this case tradition is really a substratum for the whole society, not only for the reader.

A different free-play with traditions can be seen in postmodernist literature. Although authors use many quotations and allusions in postmodernist poems, it sometimes seems that the poet is not there and the reader is relatively free to interpret the text. For example, it seems that in the Estonian writer's Doris Kareva's poem "*Concerto strummenti e voce*", written at the end of 1990s, the main idea is really a play with language and historical allusions:

Andromeda, mandragora,  
rhododendron, mandala,  
dandy, candy, Cassiopeia,  
Christiania;  
mania grandiose, rosa mundi,  
gloria!  
laurel, laurel, coriander,  
oregano, oleander, Romeo and Juliet,  
androgynous and salamander,  
Alexandria.

Sirius, strings, viola, tequila,  
Aeolus, Nile, iota, iota,  
Oibibio, Iphigenia  
Louis!

<sup>30</sup> Anne Lange (ed.), *Kuus eesti luuletajat Ants Orase tõlkes. Six Estonian Poets*, in: *Translations of Ants Oras*, Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2002, p. 71; trans. by Ants Oras.

Crete, éclair, criteria, cripple and crap,  
Catechism cut in two, too-too,  
Caracul, curriculum vitae, crooks,  
caramba! –  
Clara gave Carl a clarinet,  
Carl!  
Carl snatched Clara's corals,  
Cucumber cool!

Kama Sutra, cabala, nits and gnats, newts,  
maîtresse, Mae West, Miss Universe,  
misdeed? Striptease, reprise:  
Tantra, mantra, yantra.  
Tantra, mantra, yantra.

Mater, mater dolorosa,  
hosannah, rosamanna,  
Asterix, crucifix,  
aquarelle, parallel-Ariel,  
el-el-el-electro-shock!  
Deadlock.

Urdmurt, Buriat,  
purple, jasper and pitch  
Auschwitz.  
Andalusian bitch.  
Adenoid, asteroid, ecumenic  
hypnoid.  
Dalai-Lloyd, tomb and doom,  
gloom, glum, jubilum,  
drum, dumb,  
dumb,  
dumb.<sup>31</sup>

The title *concerto* suggests the idea of play, and at the same time the mentioned names and words from history, the Bible and myths make possible different associations. The poem creates an impression that history is in the present, and at the same time the play also expresses an emotional and individual relation to the old traditional texts, but it is more reader – than author - oriented.

The postmodernist play makes the old and traditional phenomena familiar to the reader. I think that this is the main idea of postmodernist intertextuality. And in this case the active and powerful reader

<sup>31</sup> Doris Kareva (ed.), *Tuulelaeval valgusest on aerud. Windship with Oars of Light*, Tallinn: Huma, 2001, p. 218–219.

also creates the history of literature or, more exactly, s/he interprets the (literary) history, but not as a modernist great writer, but as a post-modernist reader who creates his own little narratives and s/he may take the great narrative with irony or humour and even paradoxically.

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