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Intertextuality, Its Content and Discontents

POROZHDENIE INTERTEKSTA (ELEMENTY INTERTEKSTUAL'NOGO ANALIZA S PRIMERAMI IZ TVORCHESTVA B. L. PASTERNAKA). By *I. P. Smirnov.* Sonderband 17. Vienna: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, 1985. 204 pp. Paper.

In contemporary criticism the question is not whether there are intertexts but rather how many there are for each text and of what type. To improvise an example, in study- ing Nikolai Zabolotskii's "Ia ne ishchu garmonii v prirode," a follower of Harold Bloom would focus on the strategy (antithesis and completion) by which the poet deals with the anxiety of Fedor Tiutchev's influence (namely, with his "Pevuchest' est' v morskikh volnakh").' A Riffaterrean would concentrate on the expansion and conver- sion of romantic hypograms (lines, motifs, topoi) organized around a central formula or matrix. [2] An Omry Ronen would adduce a plethora of poetic and prosaic subtexts, among them Mikhail Lermontov's line I snilas' ei dolina Dagestana ("Son") (for the Zabolotskii line I snitsia ei blestiashchii val turbiny) and the Grand Inquisitor's critique of the nevynosimaia svoboda . . . v poznanii dobra i zla (for the lines I ne mila ei dikaia svoboda, / Gde ot dobra neotdelimo zlo), and assign the dominant role to one of them. [3] A commonsensical eclectic would try to correlate all of the above with informa- tion about Zabolotskii's gulag term to produce a plausible narrative. [4] What would I. P. Smirnov do?

He would be as rigorous as any of the thereoticians and yet would look for more textual data than all of them together. He would most probably take note of the Tiutchev quatrain (from "Eti bednye selen'ia") included in the "Legend of the Grand Inquisi- tor" and thus document a dialog between the two authors who were later to be linked in Zabolotskii 's posttext. That Ivan Karamazov quotes a different poem (rather than "Pevu- chest' ") would prompt Smirnov to undertake a systematic study of Fedor Dostoevskii 's use of Tiutchev, as well as of Zabolotskii 's patterns (both idiosyncratic ones and those characteristic of his Oberiu background) in manipulating such dialogs among earlier works, or pre-texts. He would also investigate possible direct links between the Tiutchev and Lermontov pre-texts of the Zabolotskii poem. Assuming, for the sake of the argument, that he would discover none, he would pronounce Zabolotskii the creator of a quasi-dialog between the two precursors and thus a practitioner of constructive inter- textuality (rather than reconstructive, as in the case with Dostevskii and Tiutchev). All this, however, would still not, according to Smirnov, suffice to argue the case for intertextuality. To qualify, Zabolotskii will have to be shown to have later produced a modi-

1. See Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1975), especially 85 ff. See Sarah Pratt, "'Antithesis and Completion': Zabolockij Responds to Tjutcev," *SEEJ,* 27 (1983), 2:211-227.

2. See Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 19-22 and passim.

3. See Omry Ronen, *An Approach to Mandel' shtam* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983); see also Boris Gasparov's review of Ronen's work in *Slavic Review* 44 (Winter 1985); 770- 773, and mine in *SEEJ* 31, no. I (1987) : 115-117.

4. For example, as sketched out in my article "Zamiatin, Orvell i Khvorob'iev," *Grani* 140 (1986); 202-203.

fied replay of the same constellation (Lermontov-Tiutchev-Dostoevskii).

The complexity of Smirnov's critical discourse is determined by his concept of literary art and intertextuality (p. 22):

> Всякое произведение... реактивирует как минимум два источника, обнаруживая между ними отношения параллелизма. Художественный текст трансдиалогичен, он ссылается на диалог или на квазидиалог. Новый текст, если он эстетически отмечен, нацелен на том, чтобы констатировать в используемом литературном материале повторяемость и прервать ее. Текст выступает как делимитативный член рассекреченного им повтора, как поле, где трансформируется параллелизм претекстов.

This definition (once you penetrate its Latinate heaviness) exhibits a virtuoso command of existing theoretical tools and concepts: recent theories of intertextuality (Russian formalist, French, and American); the principles of repetition and frustrated expectation; the isomorphism of the rhetoric deployed by the poet in his own text and in his treatment of other texts; axiomatic discourse, based on definitions and corollaries; and many others.

This makes for a consummately sophisticated theory and a demanding, but ultimately rewarding, presentation. The book's title itself is emblematic of the way Smirnov simultaneously (and ambitiously) takes on the three major intellectual challenges inherent in the three areas of learning that can be called Smirnov's own major inter- texts. The first is intertextuality, finally "in" in our field (thanks largely to the influence of Kiril Taranovsky and his school, as well as to recent rereadings of Iuril Tynianov and Mikhail Bakhtin), although most of the theoretical work continues to be done out- side Slavistics.[5] The second stems from Smirnov's adherence to generativist or, in broader terms, structuralist methodology, rooted in the 1960s semiotic Sturm und Drang in Soviet humanities and enriched by Smirnov's current German academic con- text.[6] The third is the problem of Boris Pasternak's poetic oeuvre and its intimate ties with the Russian and western traditions, especially with the symbolist period, on which Smirnov has published extensively.[7]

The title's parenthetical reference to "examples from Pasternak's work" modestly understates the amount and originality of the intertextual analyses that support Smirnov's theoretical theses. One third of the book is devoted to *primechaniia* i*ekskursy,* and, as in Alexsandr Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin,* the digressions, rich in minute philological observations and references, are as important as the main plot. Less theoreti- cally minded readers may, in fact, value the specific intertextual findings more than the theoretical points they illustrate. This is a dubious compliment to pay a theorist, how- ever, and Smirnov hardly deserves it, for he rigorously subordinates his analyses to the needs of his theoretical argument. On the other hand, if some of his examples are less convincing, it is not so much because he stretches his points, but rather because of the

1. Beginning with his "O vzaimootnoshenii ritma i tematiki," in *American Contributions to the Fifth International Congress of Slavists, Sofia 1963* (The Hague, 1963) pp. 288-322, and "Pchely i osy v poezii Mandel'shtama," in *To Honor Roman Jakobson* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1967), pp. 1973-1995.

1. He teaches at the University of Constance (which boasts of such names as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser) in the Slavic department, headed by Renate Lachmann, whose recent interests are in the sphere of intertextuality.

2. See especially I. P. Smirnov, *Khudozhestvennyi smysl* i*evoliutsiia poeticheskikh sistem* (Moscow, 1977) and I. R. Dohring-Smirnova, I. P. Smirnov, *Ocherki po istoricheskoi tipologii kul' tury* (Salzburg, 1982).

archetypal pitfall of theory: In applying a comprehensive conceptual framework one is tempted to interpret in its terms everything, including the text's neutral aspects.

I started with a mock-up of Smirnovian analysis and its sketchy methodological profile to avoid the risk of misrepresenting the book's actual argumentation, which de- fies easy abridgement. Here I can only briefly mention several of its most interesting points and register some reservations.

In the first twenty pages Smirnov gives an overview of current intertextual theory and outlines his own. The intertextualists' claim that every word in a poem is generated intertextually (just as every word in a language comes from its dictionary) can be con- ceded in the trivial sense. But a disproportionate concentration on intertexts virtually eclipses the internal thematic and structural concerns of a text, resulting, at times, in far-fetched connections. This claim is even harder to defend within a framework that targets, as does Smirnov's, specific subtexts and sources (in the spirit of Bloom, Taranovsky, and Ronen), rather than systemic correlations (a la Riffaterre) underlying the trans-dlalog. Against all these odds, Smirnov for the most part succeeds in producing cogently argued intertexts.

He begins by analyzing the repeated treatment (in "Pamiati Demona" and later in "Liubimaia-zhut' !") of a constellation of pre-texts found in Lermontov, Andrei Belyi, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Aleksandr Blok (an example of reconstructive dialog, pp. 22-35). He proceeds to demonstrate the constructive dialogization of the sources that he traces to Rainer Maria Rilke, Lord Byron, and Dostoevskii in the threesome of posttexts formed by the two versions of "Venetsiia" and the corresponding passage in "Okhrannaia gramota." Then he develops the hypothesis that the initial transformation of sources by Pasternak reflected the generic poetics of futurism, whereas the subse- quent retransformation of the same (and cognate) intertextual material was dictated by Pasternak's own poetic idiolect. This latter is known to have been defined (in accor- dance with Bloom) by Pasternak's deliberate dissimilation from Vladimir Maiakovskii, and Smirnov analyzes the corresponding de-Nietzschefication of the poet's self-image in "Liubimaia-zhut' !"). He continues this kind of unrelenting analytical probing throughout the rest of the book.

A typical problem of such an approach is how much in an intertextual construction put on a poem depends on a particular reading of a line. For instance, if one fails, as I do, to see a suicidal drive in the way "Venetsiia venetsiankoi brosalas' s naberezhnykh vplav'," a whole set of intertextual links adduced by Smirnov (for example, with Dos- toevskii) seems to be endangered. Incidentally, it is in connection with "Venetsiia" that Smirnov further develops his source-oriented view of intertextuality and discusses those cases of literary affinity that do not meet his requirements and are, therefore, discarded (for example, Karolina Pavlova's "Venetsiia").

One of the book's most valuable conclusions concerns the ways in which the metonymical principle (a major principle of Pasternak's poetics, according to Roman Jakobson) is operative in the treatment of pre-texts. Another is about the diachronic difference between the early Pasternak's semantic voiding of all the invoked pre-texts, as opposed to his later tendency to cancel only the more recent ones in favor of a neo- traditionalist reinstatement of an older source. Smirnov demonstrates how the mature Pasternak (for example, in "Volny") consistently cancelled the second items of (quasi-) dialogical exchanges (for example, between Pushkin and Viacheslav Ivanov), and the argumentation becomes particularly provocative as Smirnov tackles the formidable theoretical problem of proving the existence of a negative entity (known as the semiotic zero).

Sometimes Smirnov seems to reify his theoretical constructs (p. 119):

Но, по определению, всякий создаваемый текст ведет свою родословную по меньшей мере от двойки антецедентов. Поэтому перед младшим автором встает задача отыскать в творчестве старшего еще одно произведение каким-либо способом сцепленное с тем, которое подверглось устранению из рамок интертекстуальной работы.

A temptation to legislate too strictly the possible creative-interpretive processes is a perennial trap theorists set themselves in their struggle with poetic chaos and their quest for a hidden order; Smirnov's is an extreme case of this law enforcement quandary. One could say that from the repertoire of the basic models of poetic logic ("the binary opposition, the dialectical resolution of a binary opposition, the displacement of an unresolved opposition by a third term, the four-term homology, the series united by a common denominator, and the series with a transcendent or summarizing final term" 8), Smirnov projects the more complex ones into the intertextual sphere: as a minimum, a dialectical triad, and as a rule for a poet's oeuvre, a homology of two series with a transcendent term.

Naturally, such maximalism may lead to forced conclusions, but it certainly proves to be a powerful heuristic procedure, especially in the hands of a scholar of Smirnov's erudition, sophistication and ingenuity. On balance, the book offers an impressive reformulation of the ongoing theoretical debate on intertextuality and a generous contribution to the study of Pasternak's poetics and its genesis. In my view, it should be translated into English and, in the process, into a friendlier, "Anglo-Saxon," discursive mode. Meanwhile, it should be read for what it is-an intellectual adventure that I hope to have made more accessible by my inevitably fragmentary comments.

5. See Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975) p. 174.