REVIEW

Intertextual transactions in American and Irish fictions. By Andrzej Kopce-
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The posthumous collection of articles by Andrzej Kopcewicz, edited under the
title *Intertextual transactions in American and Irish fictions,* seems to be an
excellent way to commemorate the first *professor ordinarius* of American lit-
erature in Poland, a renowned scholar, acute critic, co-author of the first com-
prehensive history of American literature published in this country, author of
many studies, articles and essays devoted to contemporary literature written in
English.
    The selection of the essays in the present volume reveals both the consis-
tency of Professor Kopcewicz's literary fascinations, and the scope and variety
of his critical interests. It also demonstrates the continuing threads of thought as
well as the formal and thematic interconnectedness of the analyzed works, all of
which belong to the self-reflexive tradition of twentieth century fiction. In seven
articles dealing with American and Irish fictions, the book examines diverse
notions of intertextuality and a wide range of their uses. The opening essay,
"The intertextual paradigm", can serve as a blueprint for the author's interpre-
tive method, as it exhibits and recommends a special kind of attentiveness, that
"creative paranoia of the reader", to borrow from Poirer's (1973: 59) reflection
on Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's rainbow*, one of Professor Kopcewicz's favor-
ite novels. The opening essay establishes at once the methodological spring-
board and the critical focus for the articles that follow. Writing, as Kopcewicz
explains with the aid of intertextual theories of Julia Kristeva, Michael Rif-
faterre, Mikhail Bakhtin and Gerard Genette, is "an ongoing process of textual
self-consciousness, a self-reflexive impulse of a text in dialogue with other
texts" (p. 12). The observation is an echo of a discovery about literary tradition
made by Adso, one of the protagonists of Umberto Eco's *The name of the rose*
(1984: 342):

> Now I realized that not infrequently books speak of books: it is as if they spoke among themselves. In the light of this reflection, the library seemed all the more disturbing to me. It was then the place of long, centuries-old murmuring, an imperceptible dialogue between one parchment and another, a living thing, a receptacle of powers not to be ruled by a human mind, a treasure of secrets emanated by many minds, surviving the death of those who had produced them or had been their conveyors.

This "long, centuries-old murmuring, imperceptible dialogue" between texts is the main subject of Kopcewicz's careful critical investigations, whose goal is to examine not so much the very existence of intertexts within the texts under scrutiny but rather their impact and the transformational and creative power of all "intertextual transactions"(p. 12). "Intertextuality," argues Kopcewicz, is "a two-way, reciprocal process, inasmuch as the intertext is modified by its transformation in the text under scrutiny" (p. 12). It encourages a "loop-like reading" (p. 24), as both the text and its intepretant (an intertext) are altered through this reciprocal relation. Kopcewicz systematizes his procedure in the essay "*Finnegans wake* and Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father*": "1) to see how a text is born out of another text, i.e., to study the intertextual process itself; 2) to see how that intertextual process (reading) bears specifically upon the meaning of *The Dead Father*" (p. 75).

The intertextual exchange, as shown in the present selection of articles, can be realized on many levels: as a thematic thread, narrative matrix, structural analogy, parodic transformation, quotation, metaphor, symbol or syllepsis (p. 24). An inimitable master of close reading, Kopcewicz deliberately chooses densely palimpsestuous and intricately self-reflexive works – such as Joyce's *Finnegans wake,* Thomas Pynchon's *V.* and *Gravity's rainbow,* Paul Auster's *City of glass,* Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father* or Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan stew* – to expose their radiating energies and the complex networks of significance deriving from the intertextual paradigms and "subtexts" in which they are grounded.

It is no coincidence that Kopcewicz should preface his explication of the intertext with a reference to T. S. Eliot's classic essay "Tradition and the individual talent", for in this way he subtly reveals the sources of his own critical practice. Kopcewicz quotes Eliot as stating: "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together" (p. 10). Not impossibly, it was from Eliot and other modernist poets that Kopcewicz learned the singular "image-gathering" sensitivity which characterizes his method and shows in his respect for a concrete image, metaphor or phrase – "a formula" (p. 28), out of which he so effectively builds his rich webs of intertextual connections. The ability to distil the intellectual, conceptual and

metaphoric complexities of contemporary fiction into a clear and cogent argument rooted in a particular image derives from the author's training in modernist poetics and the New Critical School of interpretation. A record of these proclivities is his early study of the poetic image in the Anglo-American poetry of the 1920s and 1930s *Funkcja obrazu w strukturze wiersza na podstawie wczesnej poezji angloamerykańskiej XX w.*, (1969), continued and expanded in his later book *Poezja amerykańskiego Południa* (1972), devoted to the Fugitive Poetry of the American Southern Renaissance. In both studies, Kopcewicz focuses on the relationship between the structure and the rhetoric, examining also the shift of focus from the rhyme and meter to the image as the structural principle of the poem. Quoting H. D.'s poem "Oread", Kopcewicz defines the imagist principle governing the new poetic consciousness as that which probes the sharply delineated and concentrated images for means to transcend reality so as to reach something beyond it, be it a feeling, a concept, or thought (Kopcewicz 1969: 40-41). Earlier, he cites T. E. Hulme, who sees the poet's task as that of capturing the exact "curve" of what he sees, be it an object or thought (Kopcewicz 1969: 39). In the conclusion of his analyses, Kopcewicz states:

> Współczesny wiersz, dążąc do koncentracji obrazów, wydaje się być "jednym wielkim obrazem", w którym wszystko dzieje się jednocześnie, a jego znaczenie jest wieloznaczne. Jest to rezultatem powstania organicznych związków między obrazami. (Kopcewicz 1969: 116).

> [The modern poem, aiming at the concentration of images, appears to be "one great image" in which everything happens simultaneously, its significance being multiple. This is a result of organic relations formed between images.]

The image-thought compound, coupled with a perception of organic links between images that make up the structure of the modern poem, can be very helpful in grasping the operating principles at the heart of Kopcewicz's own critical work. As McGuinness (2006: 185) argues in his essay "Imagism", the main goal of the compression of images in modernist poetry is "simultaneous perception of things overlaid, fused, interpenetrating". Given the chance to examine all these intertextual investigations together, we cannot fail to notice that a similar sensibility, capable of perceiving, clarifying and ordering the intricate, organically fused and multilayered compounds of images and thoughts, informs most of the observations in the volume under review. The approach, while respectful of the heteroglossia, multiperspectivism and decentralization of postmodernist self-conscious literature, uncovers a hidden unity beneath the seeming incoherence of modern literary tradition.

In the article "Auster, Emerson, Borges, Burton, and Melville's Scrivener", the distilled "formula" which fuses other images is the idea of center and cir-

cumference. It functions as a subtext and is an extended metaphor describing the relationship between man and divinity. This approach binds texts as various as Emerson's essays "Circles" and "The Over-soul", Burton's *The anatomy of melancholy,* Melville's *The confidence-man* and "Bartleby, the scrivener", Poe's "William Wilson", Jorge Luis Borges's short stories "God's Script", and "The fearful sphere of Pascal", and Paul Auster's *New York trilogy.* Going back to religious and philosophical sources, Kopcewicz shows how this idea is renewed, subverted and transformed through its creative recycling in the postmodern fictions of Auster – who uses it both to expose the transcendentalist matrix underlying the American literary tradition and to demonstrate the loss of unifying and logocentric certitudes in the culture's postmodern condition. As demonstrated by Kopcewicz in a series of interconnected examples, the idea of circumference informs Auster's text as a structural principle, pulling the narrative towards the expectation of an Emersonian disclosure and at the same time disrupting this expectation through its intertextual dispersion (p. 32). Furthermore, this conceptualization functions as a metaphor, describing the increasingly strained relationship between the word and the world. Finally, it is the syllepsis that gathers the aporetic interpretants into a postmodernist dialogic construct in which rival meanings complement one another even when their sources – the original text and its intertext – suggest contradictory interpretations. When read through the layers of palimpsestic glosses and scripts insightfully brought into play in this article, Auster's novel appears less de-centered than the proliferation of entropic and obscure metaphors permeating the text may suggest. The initial image of the dark room in which the individual parts and plots of Auster's trilogy converge, becomes – in the course of Kopcewicz's analysis – more of a 'well-lighted place', with Auster's insurgencies against conventional representation tamed and dialogically open to further intertextual transactions.

A similar critical formula is employed in the next essay, "The machine in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas Pynchon". Here, the image-metaphor connecting the writers chosen for discussion is the eponymous machine, or, to be precise, the rocket, which – as Kopcewicz convincingly argues – just like Melville's white whale, becomes a capacious receptacle of symbolic and allegorical meanings, absorbing all other metaphors, tropes and symbols, regardless of their seemingly contradictory nature. What interests Kopcewicz in Adams's, Stockton's and Pynchon's works is the allegorization of sexual, social and technological forces, This discourse foregrounds and resolves the tensions between binary and aporetic categories and concepts such as the female and male, technological and natural, human and inanimate, religious and secular, creative and destructive. Examining the layers of allegorization, substitution and displacement in the parallel plots of these texts, Kopcewicz discovers that the

machine, anthropomorphicized and set against the power of the feminine, wonderfully opens out and binds the disparate narrative and conceptual planes. The author also points to the development and transformation of the meaning of the machine. In Adams, cautiously admiring the dynamo's mysterious and dark forces, it is a generative power that nevertheless releases entropic and dissipating energies. In Stockton, whose characters literally embrace the machine, it is at once "the vehicle of discovery" and "a physical projection of love and its fulfillment" (p. 44) – fusing courtship and adventure plots, and orchestrating the manifest and latent content of the novel, demonstrating both "the immersion of the human in the machine" and "the technologization of the human in the procreative act" (p. 47). In Pynchon's *V.*, in turn, the rocket blends with the increasingly textualized female character, the eponymous V., who is dispersed in the endless mutations of her shifting identities, deferring the significance of this union. In the epic *Gravity's rainbow*, all the previous blueprints converge and resurface, as the rocket becomes "a symbol of human consciousness shaped by the increasing technologization of life" (p. 52). The rocket contains the fears of Adams and the sexual anxieties of Stockton, but also transcends them through the paranoid interconnectedness and ambivalences of the novel's symbols and images.[1]

A veritable intertextual feast awaits the reader in the sequence of the four papers whose main interpretant and connecting thread is Joyce's *Finnegans wake* – itself one of the most challenging and rich intertextual fields, with a plenum of diverse literary, historical and cultural references. Reading the essays collected here, one cannot resist the impression that Joyce's text holds no mysteries for Kopcewicz, whose passion for the fictions of the Irish writer was life-long and genuine. He moves freely and confidently in the heteroglot world of the novel, sorting out its multiple, broken narrative planes, tracing the complex transformations of its characters, decoding and translating verbal compounds and manifold traps in which the text abounds. Also here, faithful to his close-reading method, Kopcewicz chooses a concrete image, turning it into a metaphor or symbol which serves as a key to the intertextual treasure chests of Bar-

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[1] The intertextual tissue of Pynchon's *Gravity's rainbow* became the subject of Kopcewicz's considerations in his two earlier articles, collected elsewhere: "The rocket and the whale: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's rainbow* and *Moby-Dick,*" (Kopcewicz 1979), and "Elements of Puritanism in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's rainbow* (Kopcewicz 1981). In both articles the author discusses the significance of the symbolic apparatus of Pynchon's masterpiece through a careful selection and examination of a few focal images and controlling symbols, which he traces back to the Puritan allegoric and symbolic imagination infusing the whole American literary tradition. The argument reveals that *Gravity's rainbow* "seems to be informed then by several epistemological modes, passing, as it were, from the puritanical to the transcendental, from seeking meaning of the image imprinted on the visible nature to the desire of merging with it" (Kopcewicz 1981: 145).

thelme's *The Dead Father* and *Snow White,* Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds,* or Sorrentino's *Mulligan stew.* In *The Dead Father* it is Joyce's spatial-temporal construct of "a wheeling square", a metaphor for the circularity of the narrative in *Finnegans wake*, which "absorbs the whole novel and its person-ages … shapes its teleology, symbols and characters, as well as its structural and historical dimension" (p. 79). In Barthelme's work, the temporal dimension of Joyce's novel is deliberately reduced, which renders the text "the product of a distinctly spatial imagination" (p. 84). In a comprehensive argument, where Barthelme's text is meticulously and expertly mapped onto the narrative matrix of Joyce's novel, Kopcewicz explains the American writer's use of the collage as part of "the dismantling of Joycean temporal machinery" (p. 89), testifying to a significant change within the postmodern textual territory, which becomes increasingly spatial, synchronic, rhizomatic and self-reflexive (p. 93).

Similarly ingenious is the reading of the relationships between *Finnegans wake* and O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds.* Here, the intertextual transaction is realized on the narrative level through the parodic employment of the American Western and on the symbolic one in the staircase episode in O'Brien's plot. The critic focuses here on the image of a woman's clothes separated from her body, which, when interposed with Joyce's interpretant, exposes the gap between art and reality. Kopcewicz resorts to Gerard Gennet's notions of the hypertext and hypotext to clarify the transposition of the epic and mythic plot to a new generic context. He also returns to Riffaterre's concept of syllepsis to explain the con-traries and failures of art severed from reality, and to connect O'Brien's aesthet-ics to the metafictional sensibility of postmodernism.

Although Kopcewicz's method betrays a deconstructive turn, if only in his recognition that the forces which produce meaning in language cannot be en-tirely controlled or predicted, his distance towards the fashionable theories and critical industry of our times keeps his work free of their solipsisms and ex-cesses. If there is one critical allegiance that informs *Intertextual transactions in American and Irish fictions*, it is Michael Riffaterre's thought, in particular his understanding of intertextuality presented in *The fictional truth*. Riffaterre, as Kopcewicz points out in "The intertextual paradigm", is interested in small in-tertextual units/subtexts capable of containing the whole semiotic system and reflecting the structural matrix of the text in which they appear or to which they refer (pp. 12-15). Those segments suggest the expressive capacities of language and "the unified poetics of form and content, of discourse and structure" (p. 18). Riffaterre's notion of syllepsis, the intertextual trope most frequently used by Kopcewicz in his essays, implies the existence of such unity also between the source texts and their interpretants. The sylleptic tropes discussed here work somewhat similarly to the ester bonds forming the bases between the separate spirals of a DNA double helix. Due to the informational exchange and interac-

tions between those sylleptic bonds, the structures, symbolic complexes and narratives of the texts – which may seem to be running in anti-parallel or opposite directions – prove complementary and mutually dependent. Those intertextual 'bridges' emerge as essential to untying the self-reflexive knots and tensions as well as releasing the vast interpretational energies of the scrutinized fictions.

I had the opportunity to watch Professor Kopcewicz's erudite, rhizomatic and digressive mind at work as his student at the School of English in Poznań. The experience of participating in his intertextual discoveries was, as I recall, both illuminating and instructively humbling, but above all profoundly humanizing. The revised essays gathered by Janusz Semrau in this volume beautifully contain and recreate that privileged experience, courting us with their sharp imagistic focus, wit, distinctive turn of phrase and lucidity of argumentation. Kopcewicz relentlessly trains us to think about literature as a Borgesian garden of endlessly forking paths, a multicursal, organic labyrinth, with endless interconnected routes, proliferating entries, twists, cross-roads as well as unexpected openings. Affirming the continuity of literary tradition – somewhat against the common critical lament about the increasing fragmentation, heterogeneity and disconnectedness of our culture and tradition – Kopcewicz's essays help us recognize the transformational potential of each studied intertext. Keeping his cultural and literary universe large and allowing it to expand with each intertextual discovery, the critic uses his insight to gather and bridge the often disparate literary sensibilities, aesthetics and traditions. In the rhetoric of T. S. Eliot, Kopcewicz sees the entire body of literature as testifying to the "presentness of the past", possessing "a simultaneous existence" and constituting "a simultaneous order" (Eliot [1920] 1950: 49). With a rare meticulousness and attentiveness towards the dispersed elements of each intertextual jigsaw puzzle, he skillfully juggles and reshuffles their component particles into a coherent, living textual field, building strong organic links between the texts under scrutiny.

At once instructive and enjoyable, the book will be a real treat to the reader open to the palimpsestic and dialogic discourse of literature. It will also prove useful to those who seek a closer understanding of the concept of intertextuality with its rich possibilities of application.

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