

Christiane Bimberg, Igor Volkov (Eds.)

Textual Intricacies

Essays on Structure and Intertextuality
in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Fiction in English

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Postfach 4005, D - 54230 Trier
Tel.: (0651) 41503, Fax: 41504
Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>
E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

Table of Contents

CHRISTIANE BIMBERG (Dortmund) and IGOR VOLKOV (Rostov-on-Don)	
Introduction	7
ELMAR SCHENKEL (Leipzig)	
Imagining Conrad: Appropriations of Joseph Conrad in Contemporary Travel Writing	13
EVA OPPERMANN (Rostock)	
Songs on the River: The Archaeological Intertextuality between "Cnut's Song" and "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn"	25
MARINA OKS (Rostov-on-Don)	
The Rebus of "Nadsat," or, A Key To <i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	37
THOMAS KULLMANN (Osnabrück)	
Affirmative Postmodernism: Intertextuality in A.S. Byatt's <i>Possession</i>	57
OLGA DZHUMAILO (Rostov-on-Don)	
"Never-let-me-go" Wounds: Leitmotifs in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels	73
A.M. LUXEMBURG (Rostov-on-Don)	
The Strange Case of Susan Barton and Mr. Foe: Narrative Structure and Metafictional Techniques in J.M. Coetzee's <i>Foe</i>	103
CHRISTIANE BIMBERG (Dortmund)	
Childhood and Postmodern Identity Construction in Margaret Atwood's <i>Cat's Eye</i> : Body, Art, Biology	125
BURKHARD NIEDERHOFF (Bochum)	
Textual Intricacies: The Leitmotif of the Peonies in Margaret Atwood's <i>Alias Grace</i>	155
IGOR VOLKOV (Rostov-on-Don)	
The Anxiety of Self-Reflection: Autointertextuality in John Barth's Fiction	177
List of Contributors	205

Introduction

Christiane Bimberg (Dortmund) and Igor Volkov (Rostov-on-Don)

The present volume is the result of a long-term German-Russian project between the universities of Dortmund and Rostov-on-Don that has occupied scholars from both countries for the last three years. It was first proposed by Prof. Dr. Alexander Michailovitch Luxemburg during a visit of mine to our partner university in September 2005. Thereafter the selection of essays written by colleagues from our two universities was gradually expanded to include contributions from yet more universities in Germany.

The volume in its present form assembles essays by five German and four Russian researchers from six universities. Established scholars from British Literary Studies and from American Studies in Germany and Russia joined forces with post-doctorates on the project. The essays thus present results and new insights from important strands of research in English and American Studies currently being conducted in Germany and Russia. The authors contributed to the general topic from their diverse areas of experience and interest, which actually go far beyond modern and contemporary British and American fiction. Our team of contributors brought their expertise in medieval, Renaissance, Restoration and children's literature; poetry; drama and theatre; New English/postcolonial literatures; world literature and comparative studies to bear on the present study of textual intricacies.

These essays investigate important works (for both adults and children) of British, New English/postcolonial and American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which are subject to a critical re-reading and re-assessment. The first section of this volume comprises essays devoted to the study of British fiction: works by Joseph Conrad, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, and Kazuo Ishiguro's novels. The second section offers essays on South African and Canadian fiction: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and *Alias Grace*. The third section concludes with an essay on American fiction, the novels of John Barth.

The starting point and major source of inspiration was our fascination in great, complex, and demanding texts in English, particularly modern and contemporary fiction. We were interested in how these texts are constructed, how they function, as well as how author, text and reader interact and communicate with each other. Our special concern was textual intricacies – the ambiguities and ambivalences of those texts, the special character of narrative representation. The art of narration and its effect on readers therefore became the central point of interest and target of investigation. We set out to explore the peculiar textual intricacies from various perspectives, taking thematic and formal aspects into consideration, studying the intersection of theme, mode of

presentation and ideology of genre. The major area of literary studies the essays contribute to is therefore narratology.

Special emphasis has been placed on the categories of structure and intertextuality. This thematic focus allows for a broad variety of individual methods in the study of narrative mode, narrative strategies and techniques, the texts' texture and style. More specifically, there are studies of (leit)motifs, images, poetics, and stylistics; intertextuality, autointertextuality, autoparody, and autoillusion; authorship, metanarration, metafiction, and postmodernism. Due to the special academic training and background of our Russian contributors in ludic poetics, a very welcome focus on the study of ludic texts and the interface of ludic theory and practice can be found in this volume.

Among the diverse critical approaches employed are close reading, deconstruction, contextualization, comparative studies, and reception history. At times the boundaries of Literary Studies are transgressed in a methodological cross-over to Linguistics and Cultural Studies. The essays make use of inductive and deductive methods: some start with a theoretical underpinning of their topic and move on to a creative application of these premises to a particular primary text; others arrive at a modification and qualification of theory after a thorough textual analysis and interpretation.

The volume opens with an essay by Elmar Schenkel on "Imagining Conrad: Appropriations of Joseph Conrad in Contemporary Travel Writing." His study is one of intertextual strategies. The author explores the nature of the fascination that Conrad and his works hold not only for many readers, but also for quite a number of writers. He does so by studying responses to Conrad by English, German and Scandinavian writers, particularly Conrad's appropriation in contemporary travel writing. Precisely those aspects that Elmar Schenkel points out as having particularly inspired other authors' creative appropriations of Conrad refer back to essential qualities of Conrad's own texts: a sensibility towards Oriental and Non-European cultures, certain political temptations and simplifications, and the intersection of reality and fiction. As is the case with all great authors and texts, Conrad's presence in contemporary travel writing testifies to the fact that he is a touchstone for current questions.

Eva Oppermann's contribution "Songs on the River: The Archaeological Intertextuality between "Cnut's Song" and "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn"" offers an investigation of a different kind of intertextuality in a famous canonical text from English children's literature. She focuses on a small, but very significant episode, "Cnut's Song" from the *Liber Eliensis*, a history of Ely Cathedral and Abbey from the twelfth century, to demonstrate its relationship to "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. In doing so, she employs the concept of archaeological intertextuality. As a result, she is able to show that Grahame uses several motifs from the "historical" text in order to create the religious atmosphere of his chapter. The study of another German example of the same religious-mythical atmosphere in Otfried Preußler's children's classic *Der kleine Wassermann* serves the

purpose of showing that this kind of atmosphere is neither misplaced nor unusual in children's books.

Marina Oks's essay on "The Rebus of "Nadsat," or, A Key To *A Clockwork Orange*" employs a linguistic approach in addressing the special phenomenon of the extensive use of invented languages in twentieth-century fiction. Among its purposes are, as she points out, reflections of an author's philosophy or of his/her political attitudes towards existing social laws. What she is especially interested in, however, in the context of this present volume is that an invented language can become a poetical constituent of a literary text and determine its style and structure. This is the focus of her investigation of *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess and its invented slang "Nadsat." Her essay is a study in postmodernism. She uses recent approaches within the theory of ludic poetics and stylistics, examining ludic elements in the poetics and style of *A Clockwork Orange*. "Nadsat" is ultimately understood by her as closely tied to the essential ludic techniques of the novel, in fact the most decisive ludic component which gives the novel its status as an encoded message, a rebus, a puzzle.

Thomas Kullmann's essay on "Affirmative Postmodernism: Intertextuality in A.S. Byatt's *Possession*" turns to Byatt's novel for its wealth of intertextual references. Taken in their sum they have an ironic slant, making the work appear to be a typical example of postmodern fiction. In his study of intertextuality, Kullmann is interested mainly in two aspects: First, those elements of the plot which do *not* fit the usual definitions of postmodernism – he argues that the 'parodies' of Victorian poetry obviously invite the modern reader to enter into, and sympathize with, Victorian consciousness, rather than to mock it. Second, Thomas Kullmann examines the extent to which *Possession* (and comparable works of fiction) can be considered "postmodern." Subsequently he identifies various forms of intertextuality in *Possession* and examines their functions in their respective contexts. His conclusion is that Byatt makes use of postmodern techniques in order to affirm traditional values of life and scholarship, making them palatable by means of a multiple layering of ironies. Furthermore, Thomas Kullmann manages to clarify the nature of the "postmodern" features of Byatt's text and define a specific "brand" of postmodernism, of which *Possession* serves as an example.

Olga Dzhumailo's essay on "Never-Let-Me-Go" Wounds: Leitmotifs in Kazuo Ishiguro's Novels" adds to the sustained close readings and analyses of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels already published by B. Shaffer (1998), M. Petry (1999), B. Lewis (2000), and C. Wong (2000). The essay introduces a new approach to the analysis of the textual intricacies and thematic intrigues of Kazuo Ishiguro's oeuvre. Dzhumailo uses the study of leitmotifs as a promising way of revealing the specific laws of the writer's creative method. All of Ishiguro's novels, including his latest, *Never Let me Go* (2005), are studied. The key leitmotifs which recur in his oeuvre persist as sometimes hidden directions within unreliable narratives. Among the different theoretical perspectives employed in this essay are phenomenological and thematic approaches, as well as

more structure-oriented views of leitmotifs. Additionally, some selected works on the postmodernist frame of mind in its relation to the wounded self and experience are made use of. As a result of the investigation, Dzhumailo is able to demonstrate that by making sense of the discrepancies between a seemingly dispassionate narrative mode and a hidden plot of leitmotifs, Ishiguro's texts bring to light the poignant vulnerability of fragile human experience.

Alexander Michailovitch Luxemburg's essay on "The Strange Case of Susan Barton and Mr. Foe: Narrative Structure and Metafictional Techniques in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*" is dedicated to a masterpiece of South African literature. Luxemburg offers a critical re-reading of J.M. Coetzee's novel by way of close reading. He treats the text as ludic metafiction, dominated by the problem of the text's authorship. The focus of his scholarly attention is the ludic techniques employed by Coetzee. The essay is introduced by theoretical premises on the ludic principle in literature, the tradition of ludic texts in the history of world literature, the principles of ludic texts, and the interrelationship between ludic practice and ludic theory for the establishment of a ludic poetics. In Luxemburg's subsequent detailed analysis of the narrative structure and metafictional techniques in Coetzee's novel, the nature of metafictional games, especially games of parody, is of special importance. Consequently, the metafictional aspects of *Foe* are seen not as resulting from the author's fascination with techniques, but as a natural consequence of the ludic mode of narration chosen by him.

Christiane Bimberg's essay on "Childhood and Postmodern Identity Construction in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye: Body, Art, Biology*" critically re-considers a post-modern Canadian work, a text which has so far not yet received due critical attention. The author addresses important issues of identity construction in the novel, which are irretrievably bound up with Atwood's (re-)construction of childhood. The textual intricacies of the novel consist in the fact that the thematic and the formal level of the narrative (re-)construction of childhood are subtly interlocked in the mode of presentation. The essay therefore studies the interface of content (themes of gender and femininity, power, religion, the British Empire, and Canadianness) and form (narrative mode, i.e. narrative structures and strategies, and rhetorical devices). Of special interest here is the interlinking of various textual levels conceptualizing the body, art, and biology.

Burkhard Niederhoff's essay on "Textual Intricacies: The Leitmotif of the Peonies in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*" invites us to re-consider another work of Canadian fiction. The author singles out the peonies as an important and enigmatic leitmotif in the novel: They recur in the memories, dreams and visions of the protagonist, Grace Marks; in the minds of other characters; and in the more realistic descriptions of actions or settings. Furthermore, they are connected with the central events and with the most important themes of the novel. In his study, Burkhard Niederhoff explores the complex meanings of the motif, points out the reasons for its obsessive recurrence, and discusses its structural functions. The essay combines close reading with narratology.

It also analyzes intertextual connections, including those with *Survival* and *Surfacing*, two earlier works by Atwood. These are closely linked to *Alias Grace* as they deal with similar topics, e.g. the victimization of women, their response to this victimization, and their responsibility for their own survival.

Igor Volkov's essay "The Anxiety of Self-Reflection: Autointertextuality in John Barth's Fiction" tackles autointertextuality, a phenomenon which has not yet been thoroughly studied by literary critics. In his special study of Barth, Igor Volkov uses approaches to autointertextuality as employed by some Nabokovians, who saw it as a characteristic feature of postmodern texts. The analysis of Barth's *LETTERS* (1979) is preceded with a review of autointertextual allusions and themes in Barth's texts. In his discussion, Volkov focuses on some of the most frequently recurring motifs, introduced and then autoparodied by the author. He demonstrates that John Barth not only goes back to certain motifs of his earlier fiction, but arranges autointertextual games to puzzle the reader with the variations of the recurring elements. In that sense *LETTERS* is a milestone in John Barth's creative activity and at the same time its turning point. It is in fact the first novel by John Barth based completely on autointertextuality and autoparody. At the same time, the novel is turned into a huge intertextual field, embracing all of world culture. In this way, John Barth succeeds in making his meta-fiction part of the global literary context.

A careful reading of these essays reveals the numerous connections between them all in the study of textual intricacies. They skilfully integrate textual analysis and interpretation, genre poetics, literary history, criticism and theory. As a result, they enhance our understanding of the intersection of content, form, genre, and ideology, and of the intricate connections between ethics and aesthetics. This practice of a critical re-reading of primary texts is bound up not only with a new critical re-assessment of individual texts and authors, but, significantly, with new theoretical insights as well – a more differentiated view of the characteristics both of intertextuality and postmodernism.

Finally the editors would like to acknowledge their gratitude for the support they received from all of the contributors. Severe changes in the systems of Higher Education in both Germany and Russia impacted work on the project. The Bologna Process was in full swing. New Bachelor and Master Study Programs were to be designed and implemented. Both partner universities underwent tremendous structural and administrative transformations and were subsequently renamed the Technische Universität Dortmund and Southern Federal University of Rostov-on-Don. Life interfered in other respects as well. Births and illnesses occurred. The most severe blow came when the man who had initiated the whole project died quite unexpectedly on April 2, 2007. Alexander Michailovitch Luxemburg's death left a void in many lives and, of course, in our German-Russian academic joint venture. My thanks go to Igor Volkov, his stepson, a scholar in American literature, who proved a wonderful co-editor and friend, and to my colleagues and friends in the East and in the West who contributed to this

volume. They all kept sharing an enormous enthusiasm about the task with us, which we hope to also convey to the future readers of this book. Without that perseverance the enterprise would not have reached this happy ending.