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INTERTEXTUALITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Intertextuality is a concept often associated with postmodernism, more particularly with that sphere of postmodernism where literature encounters critical theory.[1] In many respects, and especially in the field of literature and poetics with which I am concerned, post-modernism can be viewed as a development of modernism which manifested itself during the first decades of the 20th century, in the years preceding and following the great fracture of the first World War. Modernism was characterized by the loss of stable values, by the loss of belief in the possibility of an objective truth and in the validity of totalizing ideologies, by the rejection of formal aesthetic theories, the emphasis given to subjectivity, to the discontinuous and the fragmentary, also by the place given to reflexivity and self-consciousness in the production of texts. Postmodernism, I would suggest, merely went further in the same direction, sometimes with an added dose of scepticism and irony, mostly perhaps as a consequence of new developments like consumerism, the new technologies, globalization, but to me there was no new epistemological rupture like the one that took place with the emergence of modernism.

What I will try to show in this lecture is that though the word for it had not yet been coined, the workings of intertextuality were already being explored by such modernists as T. S. Eliot and David Jones. In that respect also, there is an undeniable continuity between modernism and postmodernism, and I cannot imagine that if we have truly entered a new age "beyond postmodernism" we can do without the key concept of intertextuality to account for that all-important dimension of our experience as readers of literary texts, which we could call "the memory of literature".[2]

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In the Preface to *The Anathemata*, first published half a century ago, David Jones wrote, probably with reference to "the signs of the times" (Matt XVI, 3): "The times are late and getting later, not by decades but by years and months," and complained that this "tempo of change," making "schemes and data out-moded and irrelevant overnight," created special difficulties for the artist, which he then tried to explain:

> The artist deals wholly in signs. His signs must be valid, that is valid for him and, normally, for the culture that has made him. But there is a time factor affecting these signs. If a

[1] A first version of this article, "The Intertextual Effect", was published in *Symbolism, An International Annual of Critical Aesthetics* (New York: AMS Press, 2005), 35–60.

[2] See Tiphaine Samoyault, *L'Intertextualité. Mémoire de la littérature* (Paris: Nathan, 2001).

> requisite now-ness is not present, the sign, valid in itself, is apt to suffer a kind of invalidation. This presents most complicated problems to the artist working outside a reasonably static culture-phase.[3]

If I choose to start these reflections on intertextuality with David Jones, it is not only because he belonged to the generation of men whose fate it was to experience two World Wars and become so much involved in the history of the 20th century, and who could have said with Abraham Cowley that "a warlike, various, and tragical age is best to write of, but worst to write in,"[4] but also because, in his way, he was a poet who strongly believed in the supreme importance of tradition, if not explicitly in the intertextual solidarity of texts, for the good reason that the word "intertextuality" had not yet been coined. The opening sentence of his Preface to *The Anathemata* is a quotation from Nennius: "I have made a heap of all I could find," and some ten pages later he writes: "I believe that there is, in the principle that informs the poetic art, something which cannot be disengaged from the mythus, deposits, *matière*, ethos, whole *res* of which the poet is himself a product,"[5] clearly a way of pointing to the importance of culture a good deal broader and more far-reaching than what T. S. Eliot had said a few years earlier about our common heritage, in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*:

> The Western world has its unity in this heritage, in Christianity and in the ancient civilisations of Greece, Rome and Israel, from which, owing to two thousand years of Christianity, we trace our descent.[6]

By then Eliot was not only "classical in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion," as he had described himself: he had also become the figurehead of cultural conservatism. Yet there is no great difference in effect between David Jones's desire for a "reasonably static culture-phase" and Eliot's insistence upon the necessity to preserve the unity of our cultural heritage, both classical and Christian.

Now, is there any stability left in the world we live in, in that "botched civilization" which Ezra Pound (with all the dead of WWI in mind) described long ago as "an old bitch gone in the teeth" – "two gross of broken statues" and "a few thousand battered books"?[7] Is there a way to reconcile the views of such men as David Jones and T. S. Eliot on tradition and culture with the radically subversive discourse held by the poststructuralists and neo-postmodernists when the issue of intertextuality became all the rage, first in Paris among the intellectual circles of the Left Bank, in the late 1960s, and soon afterwards among the avant-garde of American literary theorists and language philosophers? Is intertextuality, now that we tend to think that we are *beyond postmodernism*, still a relevant issue? Is it of any real critical use? Is it still being discussed, or is it simply viewed as a well-established irrefutable concept by some, and flatly rejected by others as an outdated craze, a vogue concept, today to be ignored? These are some of the questions that I wish to address in this lecture. I will first look back upon the origin of the concept, try to clarify the main issues at stake, and observe its successive theoretical avatars. I will also point out the fact that the epistemological modernist rupture of the 1920s was the occasion for the production of works and reflections, especially by T. S. Eliot, that are

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[3] David Jones, *The Anathemata* (1952, London: Faber, 1972) 15.

[4] Quoted by James Reeves in *The Modern Poets' World* (London: Heinemann 1968), xviii.

[5] Jones, *Anathemata* 1972, 20.

[6] T.S.Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber, 1948), 123.

[7] Ezra Pound, "E.P. Ode pour l'élection de son sépulcre," *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1948), 176.

the forerunners of those produced by the intertextualists of our postmodernity. I will then take a number of examples in order to illustrate the way in which the notion of intertextuality can be tested *in situ*. Those examples will also help me to introduce some of the conclusions I have come to, and point to the directions in which further theoretical explorations should perhaps be made. Let it be clear that as an intertextualist myself, though no hardliner, I lay no claim to any originality, especially in my attempts to circumscribe the problem, clarify definitions, defend and illustrate the concept of intertextuality.[8]

There is no doubt that this concept was not created *ex nihilo* out of the fertile brain of Julia Kristeva. But she was the first to use it in print in an article on Bakhtin, whom she had read in Russian while still a student in Bulgaria, before she settled in France.[9] The late 1960s were in Paris the years when the human sciences made a quantum leap forward in all directions, with a number of hyper-active, avant-gardist, mostly leftist intellectuals trying to apply the theories and methodologies of those sciences to the study of literature. Foremost were the fast-developing sciences of post-Saussurean linguistics (Roman Jakobson, Émile Benveniste), post-Freudian psychoanalysis (Jacques Lacan), semiology (Roland Barthes) and anthropology (Claude Levi-Strauss). It was the heyday of theorists, the years of transition from structuralism to post-structuralism (not clearly distinguished from what later came to be known as postmodernism) with also Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault all at work, the years when all forms of authority were challenged (and sometimes equated) – the Government, de Gaulle, God, tradition, capitalism, reason, the reigning *doxa*, the Establishment, the Author, the Sorbonne mandarins, the police, etc. They were the years that led to the great libertarian subversive explosion of May 1968 in France, echoed and sometimes amplified in the campuses of many other countries, notably in Prague, in Belfast, and in North America.

Any assessment of Julia Kristeva's launching of the notion of intertextuality must surely begin by recalling the social and political context of the 1960s, but also the specific context of the development of the problematics of the linguistic sign, of the concept of enunciation, and of all the theoretical work done on the notion of *subject*, which Kristeva was soon to define as "*le sujet-en-procès*" (the subject conceived at the same time "in the making" and "on trial"). The order of the sign being radically different from that of the referent, the sign itself being split into signifier and signified, the very notion of meaning as something fixed and stable, even though it sometimes had to be deciphered, was lost and replaced by that of the sliding, shifting, floating signified. Meaning could no longer be viewed as a finished product, it was now caught in a process of production. The subject of the enunciation was to be distinguished from the subject of the utterance (*sujet de l'énoncé*), and all the imaginary representations of a solid, identifiable self, or ego, in control of language and capable of expressing himself, were denounced and replaced by the notion of a subject intermittently produced by his *parole* – literally spoken by language.

Dealing with intertextuality, it is quite normal to start with Kristeva, but one of the difficulties

[8] Mention must be made, among the books that I have found helpful, of Michael Worton and Judith Still, eds., *Intertextuality, Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990), Heinrich F. Plett, ed., *Intertextuality* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991); Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Vincent B. Leitch, ed., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001).

[9] Julia Kristeva, "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman," *Critique* (Paris, 1967, 33, 239), 438–465.

encountered, and also a subsequent source of confusion, is that Kristeva coined the word in an article which aimed at introducing the work of Mikhail Bakhtin in France, or rather the part of it that was then available, the rest of his œuvre, though written in the 1920s and 1930s, remaining unpublished until the 1970s and 1980s. For this reason, intertextuality was first used with reference to what Bakhtin calls the dialogic aspect of language, which "foregrounds class, ideological and other conflicts, divisions and hierarchies within society."[10] Bakhtin lays the emphasis on the otherness of language, on its internal stratification, on what he calls polyphony, or *heteroglossia* – the coexistence and interplay of several types of discourse reflecting the social or class dialects and the different generations and age groups of society. For Bakhtin "the life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another."[11] We must remember that he lived through the years of the Russian Revolution, and then under Stalin, and his conception of language is primarily social. His position is therefore distinct from that of the formalists and of the followers of Saussurean linguistics. Characteristically, to him the novel is the only truly dialogic literary genre, poetry being single-voiced and essentially monologic. This alone would lead me to conclude that the version of intertextuality Bakhtin was made to stand for (he probably had never heard of, and certainly never used, the word himself) is not compatible with the mainstream acception of the concept.

But is there one accepted mainstream definition of intertextuality? This is most doubtful. All one can do is observe the way in which theorists have tried to formulate a definition, note the variations and differences, and see which can help us progress in our understanding of the problem. Riffaterre's idea that "the term refers to an operation of the reader's mind,"[12] for example, confirms the general thesis that intertextuality means the displacement of critical interest away from the author, which is what Umberto Eco does even more explicitly:

> It is not true that works are created by their authors. Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intentions of their authors.[13]

So no text exists on its own. It is always connected to other texts. But to which other texts specifically? Riffaterre's definition of the intertext as "the corpus of texts the reader may legitimately connect with the one before his eyes"[14] raises more questions (who is to say what connections are legitimate?) than it provides answers. The intertext has been compared with Gilles Deleuze's notion of the rhizome, a network that spreads and sprawls, has no origin, no end, no hierarchical organization. Analogies have also been made between intertextuality and the development of hypertexts and of the World Wide Web, free from the dominant linear, hierarchical models. Postmodern systems of communication have thus created the conditions for what Ihab Hassan calls "the intertextuality of all life." For him, "a patina of thought, of signifiers, of 'connections', now lies on everything the mind touches."[15]

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[10] Allen, *Intertextuality* 2000, 21.

[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 201.

[12] Michael Riffaterre, "Intertextual Representations: On Mimesis as Interpretative Discourse," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984), 142.

[13] Quoted in Plett, ed., *Intertextuality* 1991, 193.

[14] Michel Riffaterre, "Syllepsis," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 626.

[15] Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Ohio State UP, 1987), 172.

Roland Barthes is maybe best remembered, especially among the anti-intertextualists, for the polemical title of one of his essays, "The Death of the Author," first published as "La Mort de l'Auteur" in 1968 – a memorable date, if ever there was one. The title is deliberately provocative, though what Barthes does in it is develop further one of the best-known tenets of the formalist New Critics which W. K. Wimsatt had brilliantly presented in an epoch-making essay called "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946).[16] The main ideas which Barthes later developed in his "Théorie du texte" (a substantial entry of the *Encyclopædia Universalis*[17]) are already introduced here, and they include a theory of intertextuality:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological meaning" (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. […] [The writer's] only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner "thing" he thinks to "translate" is itself a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.[18]

For Barthes, the death of the Author is a logical necessity, but it should be noted that the writer, or *scriptor*, remains. Indeed, as the typographical rule in French is to capitalize only the first notional word after the initial article of a title, "La Mort de l'Auteur" was to be read as distinct from "La Mort de l'auteur," a distinction that was lost in "The Death of the Author." So when Barthes concludes that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author,"[19] it is clear that he speaks metaphorically and that by "the Author" he means what he also calls the "Author-God," not the *scriptor*, whose writing is the "trac[ing] of a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself."[20] The death of the Author means that nobody has *authority* over the meaning of the text, and that there is no hidden, ultimate, stable meaning to be deciphered:

> Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or his hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is "explained" – victory to the critic. […] In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; […] the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning.[21]

In France, in the Departments of French and of Modern Languages, where literature was taught, the death of the Author, the undecidability of meaning, for ever sliding and elusive, the declared synchronicity of the intertext, and the undermining of any stable knowledge of the literary text were viewed as both dangerously subversive and absurdly nonsensical by many, though adopted enthusiastically by some, especially among the younger generation of teachers (to which I then belonged). There were

[16] W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (The University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

[17] *Encyclopædia Universalis* (1973), XV, 1013–1017.

[18] *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1468.

[19] *Ibid*., 1470.

[20] *Ibid*., 1468.

[21] *Ibid*., 1469.

also people who were prepared to compromise and, though they found the new theories excessive in their formulation, they did not find them quite so revolutionary. After all, they said, intertextuality is what we have been practising all the time, and they remembered the wisdom of Solomon saying: "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose, […] and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun,"[22] and so were heartened as they remembered Hemingway (*The Sun Also Rises*), and then John Donne, because Hemingway had also borrowed from "never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*" (for the title of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*). Tracing influences and filiations, finding allusions, references, quotations and borrowings had always been the pursuit of literary scholars, and *imitatio veterum* had been the basis of classical poetics. What had Montaigne done in his *Essays* but rewrite and comment the writings of writers before him – Montaigne who seems even to have coined for the purpose of the intertextualists of the future the lovely nonce-word "s'entre-gloser" which Littré collected in his *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1863–1872)? This is what Montaigne wrote: "Il y a plus affaire à interpreter les interpretations qu'à interpreter les choses, et plus de livres sur les livres que sur un autre subject ; nous ne faisons que nous entre-gloser."[23]

A good example of the moderate – some would call it watered-down – approach to intertextuality is to be found in the definition added in 1997 to the second edition of the *OED*, now available on line: "The need for one text to be read in the light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other texts; the (allusive) relationship between esp. literary texts," a definition characteristically followed, among the chosen examples, by a remark of the nothing-new-under-the-sun type by George Steiner:

> **1989** G. STEINER *Real Presences* II. iv. 85 Are all theories of hermeneutics and "intertextuality" – a characteristic piece of current jargon which signals the obvious truth that, in Western literature, most serious writing incorporates, cites, denies, refers to previous writing – a waste product?

By a commodius vicus of recirculation, Steiner, Western literature and tradition bring me back to Eliot (acronymed as TSE – or "Thomas Stearns and Environs" for the benefit of the Joyceans among you[24]), not the cultural Conservative and ageing senior member of the post WWII literary Establishment, but the modernist poet of *The Waste Land,* a poem in which the key elements of "title, motto and concluding formula represent quotations" (with Malory, Petronius and the Upanishads as pre-texts).[25] Indeed, one could easily argue that the reputation of *The Waste Land* (like that of *Ulysses*, also published in 1922) as a masterpiece of modernism is due to the fact that it is avowedly run through by a strong intertextual undercurrent of quotations and allusions which are only partially explicated in the seven pages of notes added by Eliot himself. The end of the poem is a sort of poetic *collage* of fragments challenging any notion of identity, linguistic cohesiveness, diachronicity, or personal authorship:

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[22] *Eccles*., 1, 5-9.

[23] "There is more to be done interpreting interpretation than interpreting things, and there are more books on books than on any other subject; we are for ever inter-glossing each other." Translation mine. Montaigne, *Les Essais* vol. IV (1802, Paris: Didot, an X), 237.

[24] *Finnegans Wake* opens with the words "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs."

[25] Plett, ed., *Intertextuality* 1991, 11.

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling
down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon – O swallow
swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih[26]

Eliot, not only as a poet but also as a theoretician, can arguably be said to have been the great forerunner of intertextuality with the "quasi-intertextual ideas"[27] presented in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," published at a time (1919) when Europe had not yet recovered from the unprecedented mechanical butchery of the Great War. A major rupture took place then – experienced as a social, political, philosophical and moral crisis – creating the sort of critical self-consciousness that led to the challenge of all the commonly accepted views on language, literature and the arts, and helped produce the aesthetic and literary movement later known as modernism – a movement in which, though the word had not yet been invented nor the concept defined, intertextuality was at work. "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone," wrote Eliot,[28] and the reason for that is that all true poets and artists have the historical sense that makes them aware of the "simultaneous order" of tradition:

> The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not only with his own generation in his bones, but with the feeling that the whole literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a *simultaneous existence* and composes a *simultaneous order*. The historical sense, which is the sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.[29]

The "simultaneous order" of tradition – more amiably formulated than, but not a far cry from, the synchronicity of the intertext – is further developed by Eliot:

> What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.[30]

Thus the order of tradition is constantly altered, "the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted," and as a result, Eliot says, whoever has followed him so far "will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."[31]

As for the other very sensitive issue of authorship, Eliot was no man to proclaim the death of the Author, but the "process of depersonalization" which he advocates, though it is not coupled as in Barthes' article with "the birth of the reader," clearly goes in the same direction. Eliot speaks of "a continual surrender" of the self. For him "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."[32] In his

[26] T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1963), 79.
[27] U. Hebel, in Plett, ed., *Intertextuality* 1991, 140.
[28] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1951), 15.
[29] Eliot, *Tradition* 1951, 14. Emphasis mine.
[30] Eliot, *Tradition* 1951, 15.
[31] Eliot, *Tradition* 1951, 15.
[32] Eliot, *Tradition* 1951, 17.

effort to explain the impersonality of the creative process, he first uses the analogy of the catalyst and the metaphor of the poet's mind as "the shred of platinum," and then, more simply, he writes:

> 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.[33]

This last formulation proposed by Eliot, though it is not couched in the language of modern linguistics and semiotics, is I believe admittedly compatible with the idea of the text being a redistribution of the intertext. It confirms my opinion that the theory of intertextuality is to be found in its embryonic form, or read between the lines, in Eliot's essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent." To take a final mainstream attempt at defining the concept, what is there in it that is incompatible or contradictory with Eliot's discourse?

> [Intertextuality is] a text's dependence on prior words, concepts, connotations, codes, conventions, unconscious practices, and texts. Every text is an intertext that borrows, knowingly or not, from the immense archive of previous culture.[34]

My conclusion, at this point, is that the raging polemics of three decades ago have now calmed down, though I know by experience that they can easily be resumed whenever the opportunity arises, especially over the issue of what Derrida calls "the suspension of meaning and reference"[35], and also over the issue of the author's intentions. My conclusion is also that the "plethora of definitions and redefinitions"[36] of the concept of intertextuality is to be interpreted as a symptom of the vital importance of the issues at stake and of the impossibility of any final knowledge about them, as they concern, to put it in three simple words, man, language and the real. I also believe that the cultural crisis and epistemological rupture of the 1920s created the conditions for the first prudent tentative approaches to the concept of intertextuality which a later generation, in the 1960s and 1970s, were to develop with a typical passion for theories and abstractions. Lastly, as I started with reflections by David Jones and the ageing Eliot, acknowledging the artist's and the poet's dependence upon the otherness of language and the intertext, whether you call it tradition or "the immense archive of previous culture," is not contradictory with a nostalgia for a fairly "static culture-phase" or an avowed preference for the unity of the Western Christian tradition. Rather than follow those who try to elaborate theories that are so strict and abstract that they tend to defeat their own purpose, I favour the idea that there are many mansions where intertextuality can help us approach the truth of man's relation to language and the real, and the cause of our love for literature and poetry. As Graham Allen writes, "our task is to engage with [intertextuality] as a split, multiple concept, which poses questions and requires one to engage with them rather than forcing one to produce definite answers."[37]

It will appear quite clearly that in the examples I am now going to give and comment upon I have to speak in my own name, relying upon my personal past experience as reader of poems and teacher of poetry courses. How else could I engage with intertextuality the way I now intend to, namely as a dimension of

[33] Eliot, *Tradition* 1951, 19.

[34] "Introduction to Theory and Criticism," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 21.

[35] Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida", *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 48.

[36] Allen, *Intertextuality* 2000, 59.

[37] Allen, *Intertextuality* 2000, 59–60.

textuality capable of producing a certain effect upon the reader – not any reader, not the average common reader, but a given reader envisaged in his singularity as *subject,* that is to say as *subject to*, not *master of*, language?

I will start with "Sad Steps," a remarkable short poem (18 lines) by Philip Larkin. Here is the way it begins – rather crudely, I must admit:

> Groping back to bed after a piss
> I part thick curtains, and am startled by
> The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness.[38]

"Sad Steps" is a powerful poem on the coming of age, the moon being "a reminder of the strength and pain / Of being young," and of the fact that "it can't come again," with exciting problems of many kinds, especially in the interpretation of the abrupt high-flown exclamatory interruption addressed to the moon: "Lozenge of love! Medallion of art! / O wolves of memory! Immensements!" A poem I like, and liked teaching. Now Larkin is known for his very conservative views on poetry, and there is a statement he made in 1955 which is relevant to the question of intertextuality, a notion that Larkin, of course, rejected:

> As a guiding principle I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe, and therefore have no belief in "tradition" or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets, which last I find unpleasantly like the talk of literary under-strappers letting you see they know the right people.[39]

When I found out that the origin of the rather intriguing title, "Sad Steps," was to be found in sonnet 31 of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* ("With how sad steps, O Moone, thou climb'st the skies, / How silently, and with how wanne a face!"), I was both pleased and amused: I was amused to catch Larkin red-handed; I was pleased to know something I did not know before, something about the "origin" or "source" of Larkin's poem, as there is admittedly a special satisfaction in obtaining that sort of scholarly knowledge. I later chanced to find out that Wordsworth had also taken Sidney's sonnet as a starting point for a poem of his own, a sonnet which begins with the quotation, marked by inverted commas, of the first two lines of Sidney's poem. That made me feel even more knowledgeable, but none the wiser about "Sad Steps."[40] To put it another way, I experienced nothing of the specific poetic effect of intertextuality which has little to do, as I want to show, with knowledge.

My second example will be different, being a case of *ekphrasis*, or "medial substitution," with visual signs being replaced by linguistic signs.[41] It is found in "The Hunt by Night," the title poem of a collection by Derek Mahon, whose epigraph, "– UCCELLO, 1465" explicitly refers the reader to Uccello's picture now known as *The Hunt in the Forest*, the most famous work in the collections of Italian paintings of the Ashmolean Museum, at Oxford.[42] The structure of Uccello's painting is determined by the careful implementation of the theories of perspective which artists of the Italian Quattrocento had recently developed after Leon Battista Alberti and his treatise *Della Pittura* (1435). Mahon's poem also presents a remarkable formal regularity, the metrical and rhyming patterns set up at the beginning being maintained throughout the six stanzas of six lines each. The

[38] Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1988), 169.

[39] Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955–1982* (London: Faber, 1983), 79.

[40] William Wordsworth, *The Poems* vol. I, ed. John Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), 570.

[41] Plett, ed., *Intertextuality* 1991, 20.

[42] Derek Mahon, *The Hunt by Night* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 82.

following extract (lines 17–28) gives some idea of the very special visual pattern of the layout, as it includes the whole of stanza 4:

The mild herbaceous air
Is lemon-blue,

The glade aglow
With pleasant mysteries,
Diuretic depots, pungent prey;
And midnight hints at break of day
Where among sombre trees,
The slim dogs go

Wild with suspense
Leaping to left and right,
Their cries receding to a point
Masked by obscurities of paint –

The extract makes a clear reference to Uccello's painting, and quite interestingly to the central vanishing point ("a point / masked by obscurities of paint"), but in a position which does not coincide with the centre of the poem – the blank between stanzas 3 and 4 ("Is lemon-blue / / The glade aglow"), as if to mark the radical incompatibility of the iconic and of the linguistic semiotic codes. But this is no place to reflect like Stephen Dedalus at the beginning of "Proteus" upon the ineluctable modalities of the visible and of the audible, the *nebeneinander* and the *nacheindander*.[43] The question to be posed is whether the concept of intertextuality has any relevance here. I believe it does, not so much in terms of reference, meaning and representation, but because the poem and the painting are now both part of the great intertextual symbolic circulation of signifiers amongst the subjects of language, which Eliot envisaged as a "simultaneous order," and thus both addressed to the Other. A work of art, moreover, whether a poem or a painting, is also always inspired by the Other in any or several of the various forms it takes – language, culture, the Muse, the unconscious. There is no doubt that Mahon's poem was, and still is, *inspired* by Uccello's painting. Likewise, thanks to the presence of the past (the synchronicity of the intertext), it can now be said that Mahon's poem reciprocally *inspires* Uccello's painting. I can bear witness to it: last time I was in the Ashmolean Museum and stood in front of the *Hunt in the Forest*, it was for me literally *haunted* by the lines of Mahon's poem.

My next example is "Brother Fire," a poem by Louis MacNeice written in 1942, at the time of the bombings of London, "When our brother Fire was having his dog's day / Jumping the London streets with millions of tin cans / clanking at its tail."[44] I will leave out Saint Francis of Assisi and his "Cantico delle Creature," and simply note the vacillation produced by the reference to Saint Francis' famous text and the integration of the syntagm "Brother Fire" into the syntactic cohesiveness of MacNeice's poem. I will also leave out the echo I hear in those opening lines, more and more insistently as I grow older, from Yeats's "The Tower": "What shall I do with this absurdity – /…/ Decrepit age that has been tied to me / *As to a dog's tail*?"[45] I will concentrate upon the effect produced by the end of the first stanza:

Night after night we watched him slaver
and crunch away
The beams of human life, the tops
of topless towers.[46]

[43] For a detailed analysis of Mahon's poem, see Adolphe Haberer, "Du tableau au poème: 'The Hunt by Night' de Derek Mahon," *La Lyre du larynx* (Paris: Didier Érudition, 1998) 281-294.

[44] For a comprehensive study of the relationship between Yeats and MacNeice, see Adolphe Haberer, "Yeats and MacNeice: From Context to Intertext," *Irish University Review* 27, 2 (1997), 219–235.

[45] Emphasis mine.

[46] MacNeice, *Collected Poems* 1966, 196.

The phrase "the tops of *topless towers*" is a fine example of an inserted quotation, and it calls to the reader's mind some well-known lines concerning Helen in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*:

> Was this the face that launched
> a thousand ships
> And burnt *the topless towers* of Ilium?[47]

Here the literary intertext mediates a story told about the origin of history and the burning and destruction of a city whose better-known name, Troy, is heard in the last words of MacNeice's "Brother Fire" ("Did we not […] / Echo your thought in ours? 'Des*troy*! Des*troy*!'"[48]). For me, it cannot fail to call to mind the lines from Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" – "The broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead."[49] Yeats can moreover still be cited as part of this intertextual circulation if the reader recalls a similar reference to Marlowe in "Long-legged Fly":

> That the topless towers be burnt
> And men recall that face,
> Move most gently if move you must
> In this lonely place.[50]

Who can say what belongs to which poet in this circulation of signifiers relayed by MacNeice, Yeats and Marlowe? The answer that I would like to suggest is that the effect of intertextuality in this case is, with greater or lesser force, to defeat the notion of identifiable authorship. To borrow a line from another poem by Louis MacNeice, "the topless towers" are now "All men's, no man's, thine, mine,"[51] part of what Roland Barthes calls "un souvenir circulaire" (a circular memory).[52] Even if the reader tries to stop the intertextual flux that carries it along, even if he wants to attribute the expression to one particular poet, or lodge it in the context of one particular poem, the "topless towers" will escape, and the signifiers, whether consciously or unconsciously for him, go back to the dancing of their silent intertextual round.

The last example I want to use is found in yet another poem by Louis MacNeice, "The Sunlight on the Garden," probably one of the best-known of the poet's lyrics and a great favourite with compilers of anthologies. The pattern of its four stanzas, their rhythm and complex rhyming scheme have often been analysed. Here is the first stanza:

> The sunlight on the garden
> Hardens and grows cold,
> We cannot cage the minute
> Within its nets of gold,
> When all is told
> We cannot beg for pardon.[53]

The poem progresses and comes to the passage where it quotes, or indicates the origin of, the title of the collection, *The Earth Compels*, in which it was first published: "The earth compels, upon it / Sonnets and birds descend."[54] The passage upon which I am going to concentrate occurs at the end of stanza 3:

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[47] Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*, lines 1328–29. Emphasis mine. I remember coming across an unexpected intertextual use of those well-known lines in the opening chapter of *Poison Ivy*, by Peter Cheyney: "I reckon that some of you educated guys have heard of that Greek dame Helen whose face launched a thousand ships. Well I'm tellin' you that this honey's face would have launched the United States Navy an' a coupla submarines." Peter Cheyney, *Poison Ivy* (1937, Stockholm: Ljus Förlag, 1944), 21.

[48] Emphasis mine.

[49] W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 241.

[50] Yeats, *Collected Poems* 1950, 381. Emphasis mine.

[51] MacNeice, *Collected Poems* 1966, 313.

[52] Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), 59.

[53] MacNeice, *Collected Poems* 1966, 84.

[54] Louis MacNeice, *The Earth Compels* (London: Faber, 1938), 10.

The sky was good for flying
Defying the church bells
And every evil iron
Siren and what it tells:
The earth compels,
We are dying, Egypt, dying

And not expecting pardon,
Hardened in heart anew […]

In the context of MacNeice's poem, "We are dying, Egypt, dying" cannot but strike the reader as an heterogeneous element, even though it is neatly integrated into the fabric of the poem (the rhyming scheme, the continuity of the syntax, even the elegiac theme). The reader may immediately know the line to be a quotation because he is quite familiar with the original text, or he may have only the vague sense of a distant memory being stirred up in his mind, or he may simply be lost in perplexity and bewilderment, his mind a total blank. In all cases something operates in terms of alterity alternating with sameness, rupture with continuity, heterogeneity with homogeneity. For instance, the personal pronoun "we" introduced in the first stanza ("We cannot cage the minute") which we (as readers) could easily assume since we could easily be both addresser and addressee of the utterance, now seems so alien with "Egypt" named as the addressee (and addressed in the same way as "my friend," a few lines earlier) that we find ourselves dislodged from our enunciatory position. The line also produces a major isotopic rupture as it seems impossible to "make sense" of this strange line.

As a matter of fact, "We are dying, Egypt, dying" is borrowed and adapted from Antony's dying speech to Cleopatra:

I am dying, Egypt, dying, only
I here importune death a while, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.[55]

The signifier "Egypt," though evocative by itself of Pharaonic splendour and of sorrowful exile, cannot be separated from the rest of MacNeice's line. It is "We are dying, Egypt, dying" that creates the strange, uncanny, *unheimlich* effect, such an effect that even though I have known this poem and the origin of the quotation for many years, I still experience today some of the same sense of rupture and dislodgement, the same vacillation, the same sudden exemption (or suspension) of meaning I experienced when I first read it. Even the way one is supposed to read the line is problematic: if in order to integrate it we follow the metrical pattern of the poem, the line has to be read as an iambic trimeter, and so, as one critic suggested, "we read 'we are' as approximating to 'we're' as the cadence demands and as MacNeice himself read it," and the first stress falls on "dying;"[56] if however "the ear has incubated a cadence" (as Heaney says[57]) and we feel that something lingers on of the original trochaic rhythm of the line spoken by Antony, "We" will carry the first stress. The result, unless we choose to remain deaf to the conflicting rhythms, is another wavering between the two readings,

[55] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, IV, 13, 18–21. Antony repeats "I am dying, Egypt, dying" on line 41.

[56] Robin Skelton, "Celt and Classicist: The Versecraft of Louis MacNeice," *Time Was Away: The World of Louis MacNeice*, ed. Terence Brown and Alec Reid (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1974), 48.

[57] Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber, 1980), 82.

another sense of estrangement, a pause, and a further exemption of meaning. What I am trying to suggest here is that erudition (knowing the reference made to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*) does not put an end to the intertextual effect, and that it is not enough to fully restore the continuity and homogeneity of the text. And the intertextual effect, when it happens, whether with great force or tenuously, is always unexpected, uncontrollable and short-lived. It brings no light nor any knowledge, but takes us to the edge of something obscure and incomprehensible. The intertextual effect is one of loss – loss of meaning, of control and identity. It is like what Yeats called "that something over and above utility, which wrings the heart,"[58] both desirable and feared. It has to be related to what Jacques Lacan has theorized as *jouissance*.

In the short introduction he added to the fourth edition of *The Faber Book of Modern Verse* Peter Porter writes that "we live in a Permanent Museum, whether we like it or not,"[59] and Plett notes that "an endless *ars combinatoria* takes place in what has been variously termed 'musée imaginaire' (Malraux), 'chambre d'échos' (Barthes), or 'Bibliothèque générale' (Grivel)."[60] Today the times are late and getting later indeed, but even the ever-increasing "tempo of change" which David Jones deplored will not put an end to the operations of tradition, the workings of intertextuality, the pursuit of scholars or the enjoyment, joy, *jouissance*, experienced by the lovers of poetic language. Scholars can also be lovers of language, but in trying to understand the issues of intertextuality I think one should very clearly distinguish the intertextual effect from the type of scholarly research which aims at elucidating all sources, tracing all allusions, finding all references – for example in Joyce, Eliot, Yeats or Auden, to mention some illustrious paradigm-cases. Such research is of course highly respectable: I know the frustrations and rewards, the pains and satisfactions that accompany it, and I am fully aware that it is necessary to the advancement of knowledge. But knowledge is not my concern here, nor is erudition, since what I have been trying to describe as the intertextual effect takes us to the edge of what Eliot called "the unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being,"[61] and to the brink of the truth of which, at the very end of his life, Yeats said: "Man can embody [it] but he cannot know it.[62] Erudition must know its place. For lovers of poetic language, writers and readers of poems, erudition is all very well so long as it "will not", as Eliot puts it, "encroach upon [their] necessary receptivity and necessary laziness."[63] We are all conditioned by the same cultural, intertextual "deposits," and "to say that one draws upon such deposits," says David Jones, "does not imply erudition; it suggests only that these form the *materia* that we *all* draw upon, whether we know it or not […], whether we are lettered or illiterate."[64] The intertextual effect, however, is only one of the ways in which

[58] Quoted in A. N. Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan, 1968), 353.

[59] *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, ed. Michael Roberts, rev. Peter Porter (London: Faber, 1982), 50.

[60] Plett, ed., *Intertextuality* 1991, 25.

[61] T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933, London: Faber, 1964), 155.

[62] Letter to Lady Elizabeth Pelham, 4 January 1939, quoted by Joseph Hone in *W.B. Yeats* (1943, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 480.

[63] Eliot, *Tradition* 1951, 17.

[64] Jones, *Anathemata* 1972, 40.

poetic language manages to combine what Jacques Lacan calls "effet de sens" and "effet de trou" – to produce in the same movement meaning and the exemption of meaning, its absence, lack or "hole." Rhythm, rhyme and metaphor also contribute to Jakobson's poetic function of language; they also "promot[e] the palpability of signs,"[65] and like the intertextual effect they tend to make us suddenly feel language again as something enigmatic, *unheimlich*, uncanny, *other*, and yet obscurely and intimately entwined with that core of darkness in us which Freud calls the unconscious. In "The Figure a Poem Makes" Robert Frost says of the poetic effect: "For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn't know I knew."[66] Among the scraps, orts, fragments of *jouissance* which now and again I receive as gifts from the intertext, some are likewise caused by my remembering something I didn't know I knew, others by the uncertain feeling that in the word-hoard of my forgetful memory, on the tip of my brain's hippocampus, there lies something I know but cannot remember of the great memory of literature.

[65] Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," *Style in Language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), 356.

[66] James Scully, ed., *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry* (London: Collins, 1966), 55.

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