The Pragmasemantics of Quotation, with Reference to Postmodern Romanian Poetry[*]

Carmen Popescu
University of Craiova (Romania)

Abstract

A corpus of postmodern Romanian poetry reveals truly innovative quotational strategies. Here quotation as signifier is vital for the construction of the poetic meaning. As a sui generis poetic device, it can function as metonymy, metaphor and syllepsis; also, as graft and inscription. (Non)literary quotations are present in the body text and in paratexts (titles, epigraphs, footnotes), thus emphasizing the (meta)communicative, contractual dimension of the poetic message. This consistent citational practice has some interesting consequences:

a) it works as an interpretant and, at the same time, as a perfect catharsis to a Bloomian «anxiety of influence»;

b) it generates polyphony and polyglossia: the quoted material is frequently in foreign languages;

c) it contrasts the rhetoric of quotation to the rhetoric of allusion, with respect to the type and degree of interpretative cooperation they elicit from the reader.

An important goal of this research is to establish a new typology of literary quotation. Along with standard varieties (pure, direct, indirect, mixed, open, closed quotation), the study of the corpus brings into attention: the (Borgesian-like) fake quotation, the «ready-mades», the parodically distorted citation, the «scare quote» as metalinguistic commentary, the ironic-Flaubertian italicization of cliché, the impersonation of the many voices of doxa. These are eccentric devices that Compagnon would have listed under his «teratology of quotation». An insight into the citational enunciation in a poetic context can bring about a re-evaluation of the whole problematic of interdiscursive dialogism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Romanian postmodernism is neither the product of «late capitalism» (Jameson 1991), nor of post-industrial or consumer society, but a cultural import, and a cultural palimpsest in itself. While «the ironic dialogue with the past» and the propensity for «critical reworking» (Hutcheon 1988: 4) of traditional forms are features easily identifiable in the Romanian version of postmodernism as well, the cultural and political content of that past is not exactly the same as in Western postmodernism.

Apart from «naturalizing» the postmodern paradigm, the Romanian promotion of the eighties has absorbed the basic tenets of semiotics. Intertextuality is a major component of the model. With poets of the eighties, quotation is turned into a poetic device *per se*: «For each particular text the reader has to determine if the quotation is autonomous with respect to the deep structure, in this case its function being that of a figure of speech, or if it is inserted in the deep structure, thus becoming a meaning-generating metaphor» (Parpală Afana 1994: 72).

Recycling of previous discourse has remained a hallmark of even more recent poetry, although it tends to be less bookish and more open to the new media. In Romanian poetic postmodernism, quotation may have the function of various rhetoric strategies: metaphor, metonymy, syllepsis (Riffaterre 1979a). Either the signifier or the signified of the quoted material are affected by the poetic treatment.

The goals of the pragmasemantic approach are:

1) to assess the communicative functions of quotations in a poetic context;
2) to determine the consequences of the textual graft with respect to the structure and significance of embedding poems;
3) to contrast the standard (scientific) use of quotation to the literary use.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My approach is twofold: 1) intertextual-polyphonic (Barthes, Kristeva, Compagnon, Riffaterre, Genette, Culler etc.) and 2) linguistic-philosophical (Davidson, Recanati, Saka, Capellen & Lepore), but with a semiotic (pragmatic) focus in each of the two fields.

As the most obvious presence of the other's discourse inside one's own, quotation epitomizes, in a way, the entire practice of intertextuality. Inside the first line of analysis, Kristeva and Barthes illustrate the poststructuralist framework, where the concept of intertextuality was coined. Here quotation and intertext had been used rather loosely: «any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations» (Kristeva 1980: 66), any text is «a tissue of quotations» (Barthes 1977:142). According to Barthes, the «quotations» of which the text is made are «anonymous, irrecoverable and yet already read: they are quotations without quotation marks» (Ibid.) A. Compagnon has dedicated an entire volume to quotation (1979), where he outlines a phenomenology, a semiotics, a genealogy and a teratology of quotation, whereas Genette, the author of *Palimpsests*, defines quotation as «the actual presence of a text within another» (1997: 1-2). In Riffaterre's model, quotation is an «intertextual interpretant» (1979b).

On the second approach, quotation is described as a form of reported speech (represented discourse). All these authors agree that quotation is a topic relevant for the semantics / pragmatics interface. This type of analysis is also the basis for contrasting poetic quotation to the normal or standard use (and status) of the device.

On the background of this theoretical account, the demonstrative theory (Davidson 1984) seems to be the most appropriate for literary analysis. Demonstrations belong to «a family of nonserious actions that includes practicing, playing, acting and pretending.» (Clark & Gerrig 1990: 766). Indeed, in the corpus under scrutiny, many playful effects are attained by simulating misquoting (the erroneous or dishonest version of scientific citation). According to a more recent version of the demonstrative theory, quotations are seen as *pictures*, whereby «the quoted material is *displayed* or *presented*». (Recanati 2001: 639). Although not all quotations are mimetic, «all quotations are iconic.» (Ibid: 645).

2.1. Quotation in poetry

Quotational practices are signifying practices and, in the broadest sense, communicative strategies. Postmodern culture is sometimes perceived as «a palimpsest of citations and quotations that are half-recognized» (Garber 2003: 6). Nevertheless, a universal grammar of quotational strategies is apparently not within our reach, despite undeniable invariants which have been emphasized by logical description and formalization. M. Bakhtin claimed that quotational styles are historically and culturally differentiated. In the Hellenistic period (in many respects a cultural age as heteroclite and diversified as the postmodern age) he identified a stylistic feature which he titled «the problem of quotation» (Bakhtin 1981: 68-69).

Since the modernist movement, quotation has been more and more present in poetry. Two studies (Diepeveen, 1993, Gregory, 1996) have focused on this issue, with application on modern American poetry.

Before the early part of the twentieth century, when American poets like Pound, Zukofsky, Williams, Moore, Brown and Crane started to «employ borrowed words meant to be recognized as such», allusion was «the preferred and time-honored mode of intertextual reference in poetry», while quotation appeared rather rarely. (Gregory, 1996: 2).

While Gregory addresses issues of cultural authority emerging in the quoting process, as well as American «secondariness», Leonard Diepeveen had previously argued for the structural effects that the exact duplication of a different texture has on the «modern quoting poem» (1993). Alien discourses leave a mark, and quotations are chosen due to their «idiosyncratic texture» and «unparaphrasable content» (Diepeveen 1993: 2-3). Together with the alternating voices it engenders, this technical change also affects the reading process.

Modernist innovations are prolonged and radicalized by postmodernism. Quotation as a postmodern dominant should be somehow correlated with postmodernism's most important features. Among these, I would highlight Jameson's judgement about «the emergence of a new kind of flatness or *depthlessness*, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense» (1991: 68). Choosing quotation over allusion might entail bringing to the surface the processes that were supposed to take place in the intricacies of the poetic realm and in the intimacy of the poet's relation with tradition's otherness. Another postmodern characteristic that might be relevant for a renewed interest in quotation is Ihab Hassan's observation about a *paratactic*

postmodernism as opposed to the hypotactic modernism (1987: 90-91). To sum up the two arguments: depth and hierarchy, already questioned by modernists, are utterly undermined by postmodern artists.

Inside the poetic discourse, quoted elements will generate semantic and pragmatic complexity: «Thus, as a general rule, a quotation does not only include a single (isotopic) but two or more (poly-isotopic) levels of meaning that need to be interrelated by the recipient.» (Plett 1991:10).

3. THE PRAGMATICS OF QUOTATION IN THE PARATEXTS

Any text's paratextual apparatus is rich in pragmatic signals. In fact, we could assert that the paratext's ontology is pragmatic by excellence. Paratextuality is the (communicative) space of liminality, a *threshold*, and one of its major coordinates is its illocutionary force:

> This fringe, in effect, [...] constitutes, between the text and what lies outside it, a zone not just of transition, but of transaction; the privileged site of a pragmatics and of a strategy, of an action on the public […] (Genette, 1997: 3).

In Romanian postmodern poetry, quotation may appear in titles, subtitles, epigraphs, footnotes (all, instances of the *peritext*, i.e., paratext placed inside the book).

3.1. «*All This Had to Bear a Name*» or the palimpsestic logic of cultural signs

«*All This Had to Bear a Name*», a poem by Cristian Popescu («*Trebuiau să poarte un nume*», 1994), is a parodic palimpsest to a famous poem by the same title written by Marin Sorescu (1976). The paratext is consequently an explicit quotation, working as a signal of intertextual reference, and also of metatextual, self-referential commentary. It is the quotation in the title that turns the poem into a palimpsest, that is, a hypertext which requires reading through constant paralleling with the suggested hypotext.

The use of quotation marks appears to be somehow excessive, considering the target's notoriety. If quotation marks «are used to signal mentioning and thus serve to disambiguate» (Saka 2005: 187), this careful acknowledgement of the borrowing might indicate the half-serious preoccupation of «educating» the readership that is characteristic to at least a part of the postmodern production.

But this very ostentatious manner of revealing the derivative nature of the text is also a marker of irony. Inverted commas are here used for citational mentioning and at the same time for ironic distancing, as in the case of «scare quotes». Marjorie Garber points out: «one of these curious properties of these typographical signifiers; for in their present condition of use, they may indicate either authenticity or doubt» (2003: 8). An important task is ascribed in the text to these graphic signs: to make the difference between reverent and irreverent quotation, between pastiche and parody.

The hypotext is a poem about Mihai Eminescu's mythical stature. The Romantic poet enjoyed a special cult during the communist period, when the nationalistic tendencies of the

public discourse became rampant. Eminescu was called the «national poet» and every evocation and homage of this iconic figure was expected to be solemn and encomiastic. Sorescu's poem brought about a major shift in this kind of celebratory discourse: it was the modern, intellectualistic, tongue-in-cheek version of the cult. It had a certain striking and surprising quality. It became very popular with school festivities and contests and, of course, it was welcomed by textbooks.

The first line is a shocking statement, which denies Eminescu's historical existence: «Eminescu did not exist». However, the *name* detains a signifier. It needs a signified, which will predictably be a cultural signified, composed of such elements as: folklore, beautiful landscapes and the glorious national history. «Eminescu» is, by now, a symbolic name /label in the Romanian collective imaginary.

> Eminescu did not exist. // Only a beautiful country existed, /At a sea's margin [...] / But, above all, there were some simple people / Whose name were Mircea the Old, Stephen the Great / Or, more simply put: shepherds and ploughmen /Who enjoyed sitting at night by the fire and recite poems / *The Little Ewe* and *The Evening Star* and *The Third Letter*. (Sorescu 1976: 54, my trans.)[1]

Sorescu's experiment raises a challenge as regards the semantics of proper names (cf. Gouvard 1998). In the last strophe the «bouquet» of cultural semes is brought back together so that Eminescu's name is recomposed as a motivated sign, a symbol, since the poetic argumentation has established a relation of necessity between the signifier and the signified (the one previously attributed by the poem itself, as we have seen): («And because all these had to bear a name / A single name / They were called / Eminescu.») (Ibid: 56)[2]. As a consequence of the metaphoric-mythological treatment, the poet has become an artifact, a cultural emblem, practically, a *brand*.

The hypertext re-uses or «quotes» the framework of the hypotext. By mimicking the structure of Sorescu's poem while inverting its meaning or message, Popescu's parody de-naturalizes and de-*doxifies* the stereotypes underlining the cultural myth reconfirmed and re-validated by his predecessor's apparently innovative rhetoric. The canonical emblem is substituted by another, which will predictably be attributed a cultural signified. Caragiale was the perfect candidate for representing Eminescu's symbolic counterpart.

> Caragiale did not exist. There only was a beautiful and sad country where virtually everybody was damned to pub-for-life. With beer-mugs chained at their wrists. So that taverns would rattle at every sip. There was a sort of worn out paradise in the trees of which would grow hen claws and necks and especially pork feet and heads. But the women of the land would in vain tempt their husbands to taste those things. For no matter how greedily they

[1] «Eminescu n-a existat. // A existat numai o țară frumoasă/ La o margine de mare // [...] / Și, mai ales, au existat nişte oameni simpli / Pe care-i chema: Mircea cel Bătrân, Ştefan cel Mare, / Sau mai simplu: ciobani şi plugari, / Cărora le plăcea să spună, / Seara, în jurul focului poezii /*Mioriţa* şi *Luceafărul* şi *Scrisoarea III*».

[2] «Şi pentru că toate acestea trebuiau să poarte un nume / Un singur nume / Li s-a spus/ Eminescu».

> would have bitten, they still weren't able to fall out of that paradise. [...] / No. Caragiale did not exist. What did exist were some destroyed cemeteries, excavated by bulldozer. So that first-grade kids could come and write calligraphically, notch with a little knife on every skull of every skeleton: MADE IN ROMANIA. So that our dead be the very first, the champions of them all, volunteers there at resurrection, at The Final Judgement. [...] / And because all these had to bear a name, a single name and in order for that people to be able to roar with laughter at all these — they were simply called: Caragiale. (Popescu 1994: 62, my trans.)[3]

Ion Luca Caragiale, Eminescu's contemporary, was a satiric writer, notorious mostly for his comic plays and his sketches. The two writers outline in their works two antonymic versions of the national «soul». Not only does Popescu replace an iconic figure by another; he also replaces a cultural cliché by a series of stereotypes regarding ethnic character. Moreover, he seems to endorse them.

4. QUOTATIONS WITH METALINGUISTIC AND METAPOETIC EFFECTS

In the postmodern poetic frame, the material enclosed in quotation marks is both used and mentioned. It generates autonymic modalization. The mentioning dimension of quotation is part of what has been called «language turned on itself»: quotation is «our primary metalinguistic tool» (Cappelen, Lepore, 2007: 1). Quotation marks and italics (or other iconic strategies for drawing attention to the words) reinforce the self-reflexive use of language.

«Quoted» sentences or fragments that do not seem to be ascribable to anyone in particular are used as building-blocks of the poetic meaning and commented upon in Radu Andriescu's series of poems *Mirror Against the Wall*: «"This is the first time I've written at five in the morning" / is a sentence with which I feel tempted to perpetrate a literary fraud [...]» (Andriescu 1992: 18, trans. by Adam Sorkin)[4].

During the nineties, the idea that the newly gained freedom of speech could be also liberating for the poetic discourse proved to be just another «doxic» pre-conception, like in the poem *Curriculum vitae* by Letiția Ilea:

[3] «Caragiale n-a existat. A existat numai o țară frumoasă şi tristă în care mai toți oamenii erau condamnați la crâşmă pe viață. Cu halbe de bere legate la-ncheietura mâinii în lanțuri. De zăngăneau cârciumile la fiecare sorbitură. A existat un fel de rai ponosit în pomii căruia creşteau gheare şi gâturi de găină şi mai ales picioare şi capete de porci. Dar femeile acelui loc îşi îmbiau degeaba bărbații să guste din ele. Căci oricât au muşcat ei de pofticioşi n-au reuşit să cadă de tot din raiul acela. [...] / Nu. Caragiale n-a existat. Au existat nişte cimitire desfundate, săpate cu buldozerul. Ca să vină copilaşii de clasa întâi şi să caligrafieze, să scrijelească cu un cuțitaş pe toate țestele scheletelor: MADE IN ROMANIA. Ca să fie morții noştri cei dintâi, ăi mai prima din toți, volintiri acolo la-nviere, la Judecata din Urmă. [...] / Şi pentru că toate acestea trebuiau să poarte un nume, un singur nume, şi pentru ca oamenii aceia să poată hohoti în voie de toate acestea — li s-a spus simplu: Caragiale...».

[4] «"E prima dată când scriu la ora cinci dimineața" / e o frază cu care mă simt tentat să comit un fals literar».

> ...so I write «god. church. black. angel.» / look how these words give me the illusion of freedom / they couldn't have been published a few years ago so what / I won't enter the history of literature just for that / meanwhile I am still there training the black cat / to go into my way every morning/so I may have someone to blame.» (Ilea 1999: 8, my trans.)[5]

Free words are denounced as empty words. This unusual string of «parole in libertà» illustrates the process that Bakhtin termed *reification* (1981: 336): when words are like this *displayed*, *exhibited* outside a living context, they lose the capacity to refer and to mean something.

With the censorship gone, these «dangerous» words are no longer forbidden (and therefore no longer subversive); they are given back to their rightful «owners», except that now they are devoid of meaning (or at least of that surplus of meaning that the political context was lending them). The locutor is free to utter them, to enunciate them, but she is (yet) incapable to lend them a living / lived, authentic context. Anyhow, they could never have the same illocutionary force within the new parameters of the literary institution. At the same time, inner freedom is not automatically gained and it might not be coincident with the change of political regimes or dominant ideologies — this is what the poem seems to suggest.

4.1. Reported speech and polyphony

Mikhail Bakhtin has extrapolated the concept *polyphony* from the musical field. Obviously, in the Russian author's studies, it refers mostly to the novelistic discourse, where different, often conflicting voices and points of view intersect and mingle. Dostoevsky's prose is the epitome of this complex feature of narrative. When reduced to the Romantic-lyric model of expressing subjectivity, poetry is indeed monologic / monophonic. It displays much less dialogism and polyphony than the novel. Still, in hybrid, postmodern texts, multivocality finds its rightful place.

In many Romanian contemporary poems there is a tendency to reproduce real or imaginary conversations or fragments of conversation. Interior monologue intertwined with simulated dialogue has become a rhetorical strategy with polyphonic effects. Direct, indirect speech, free indirect quotation, with or without quotative verbs — all situations are represented.

One consequence is the apparent enunciative «fading-away» of the poetic Subject or the Locutor. These so-called realistic «snapshots» may take the form of overheard conversations, diary-like registering of apparently trivial events or encounters that occur in the course of the day and more or less realistic descriptions of other people's banal or weird gestures or utterances. Conversely, the mimetic convention is replaced, in other poets' productions, by imaginary projections, fantastic or absurd scenarios with symbolic value.

If I were to formulate an interpretive hypothesis as to the significance of this widespread poetic practice, I would see it between the extremes of empathetic vs. ironic ventriloquism. Also, it could the postmodern response to what Simon Dentith has called «karaoke culture»,

[5] «scriu deci "dumnezeu. biserică. negru. înger." / uite cum îmi dau iluzia libertății aceste cuvinte/ n-ar fi apărut acum câțiva ani şi ce dacă/ n-o să intru cu asta în istoria literaturii / şi eu tot acolo sunt dresând pisica neagră/ să-mi iasă în cale în fiecare dimineață/ să am şi eu pe cine da vina.»

with reference to contemporary popular culture. By that, the author understands the «voracious circulation of cultural material» and «an obsessive recycling or revoicing» (Dentith 2000: 184). In the case of literary quotations, the technique functions as the perfect antithesis and, as the same time the catharsis to the inescapable «anxiety of influence» (cf. Bloom 1973). Of all possible reasons for invoking other discourses in the space of one's writing I remind two: the *ethical* one and the *heuristic* one. Postmodern authors are comfortable with being hospitable «orchestrators» of various intertexts and, at the same time, they need other points of view in order to accurately articulate a certain topic.

Multi-layeredness and «enunciative heterogeneity» (Authier-Revuz 1984) are obvious consequences of this procedure of inviting other voices and other consciousnesses in what ought to be (according to the traditional model of the lyric genre), the emanation, the effusion of one single, unique voice, of one particular subjectivity and sensitivity. Polyphonic strategies will inevitably undermine any coherent model of poetic representation. The reader senses that «the quotation radically interrupts the poem's voice; disrupting the discursiveness of a poem causes the poem's persona to diminish in centrality.» (Diepeveen 1993:100)

Impersonating other people's voices and points of view relies on the metarepresentational and metacognitive ability. The device can be misleading, in that it usually tells more about the quoter's inner world than about the original speaker. The *talk* poetry practiced by postmodernists plays upon this very ambiguity. The subject's status in postmodern poetry is quite complicated: configured on the background of the poststructuralist undermining of a unitary subject, post-modern literature has found multiple ways of re-focusing on identitary issues. *Stylization* and *hybridization* are modes associated with the various types of inserting the others' discourses into one's own. These devices are quite «natural» to postmodern poetry. They reflect Bakhtin's prophecy about the *novelization* of various genres (cf. Bakhtin, 1981: 39).

Of course, with many of the poems the alien inputs are blatantly fictive. The master of pseudo-polyphony is in this respect Cristian Popescu, who attributes incredible monologues to the members of his family, turning them into grotesque — mythic characters; their discourses, however, are not stylistically distinguishable from the idiolect associated with the main locutor, the poet's persona («Popescu») and are in fact embedded in the «master» discourse — an irrepressible stream of consciousness of a person tormented by mental illness:

> «With my Cristi, you've got to understand him. He may be saying a lot of things about us, but you mustn't take him seriously. He loves and respects us. [...] That's him. He's not made for this world. [...]» Mother's very considerate. When I cut the bread, she bandages it, and when I break it, mother immediately puts it in a plaster cast. (C. Popescu, *Advice from My Mother*, in Bodiu et alii 1999: 209, tr. by Adam J. Sorkin & B. Ştefănescu)[6].

We will not infer from here, however, that this kind of quotation use is a proof of a *parasitic* use of language characteristic to poetry. Even in everyday exchanges, reported speech

[6] «Pe Cristi trebuie să-l înțelegeți. Spune o mulțime de lucruri despre noi, dar nu trebuie să-l luați în serios. Ne iubește și ne respectă. [...] Așa e el. Nu e făcut pentru lumea asta. [...] Mama e foarte grijulie. Când tai pâinea, o bandajează, și când o rup, mama o pune imediat în ghips.» (Popescu 1988: 20).

need not have a content previously uttered. People frequently «quote» inner thoughts, or attribute sentences to other persons in order to tell a coherent and vivid story. Besides, there is such a thing as «hypothetical reported discourse» (Myers, 2000) and «quoting the unspoken» (Sams, 2007). Researchers agree that the opposition between the real and the invented quoted discourse is immaterial. «All quoting exploits an alien texture, whether such texture be real or imagined» (Diepeveen, 1993: 15).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Inside the embedding palimpsest the borrowed fragment can be either disruptive or enriching. With respect to the dialogic/interdiscursive dimension, the quoted discourse is treated as:

1) an object (reified, displayed, exhibited) — intertextuality in the poststructuralist sense;
2) a voice, a manifested *Other* — polyphony, dialogism, intersubjectivity.

In the case of fake citations, what is actually cited is the gesture, the action of citing, with the pragmatic prerequisites attached to it; or, we could, say, the *shape* of standard quotation is used for various communicative purposes. The invented quote produces its own pre-text, making the quoted simultaneous with the quoting discourse. This unreliable use of the quoting activity exploits some features inherent in «normal» quotation, which already includes an important part of simulation (cf. Recanati 2001).

By exploiting the intertextual presupposition, Romanian postmodern poets extrapolate and re-frame the «serious» way of appropriating another discourse, without giving away any of the liberties and advantages inherent to the literary game: indirection, obliqueness, vagueness, concealing, misquoting, misattribution, «ungrammaticalities» etc.

Quotation has, in the context of poetic postmodernism, on the one hand, an argumentative / persuasive function, and, on the other hand, an aesthetic function.

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