



CONCEPTS OF LITERARY ANTHROPOLOGY

AN INTRODUCTION



FICTION AND FACTION

Examples of Susan Sontag's books:

Illness as Metaphor (1978)

Aids and Its Metaphors (1988)

Considers the metaphors with which acquired immune deficiency syndrome is cloaked, the presentation of the illness as a plague, and its bearing on the way society views disease, sexuality, and catastrophe.

Regarding the Pain of Others (2003)

Considers the problem of war-photography as an esthetic and ethic object.



PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

A couple of assumptions regarding literary anthropology:

1. interdisciplinary field;
2. transdisciplinary field;
3. multidisciplinary field.

Closely connected to 'anthropological turn' in the humanities and social sciences – literary studies vs. cultural studies (reframing of traditional literary criticism and critical theory to cultural criticism and cultural theory).



CLASSIFICATORY FIELDS

Two rather different classificatory fields are being joined under the same academic and epistemological roof:

1. neo-philological field of literary studies;
2. cultural field of socio-anthropological studies.

Result: Literary text is being monitored as cultural and historical, as well as culture is being monitored as deeply textual (basis in cultural materialism, new historicism and Marxist literary theory and criticism).



METHODOLOGICAL MARKET

Literary anthropology as a:

1. hybrid discipline (hybridization is done by means of methodology and choosing topics);
2. transhistorical discipline (this is done by means of reevaluation of concepts of history and historical writing; example: ethnography as a transhistorical writing);
3. self-reflective discipline (autoimmune methodology, critical towards its inputs and outputs).
4. concept 'blurred genres' (Clifford Geertz's concept of eliminating limitation, borders between cultural and textual analysis, like in ethnological case, where culture reproduces signs, that are textual).



ANTHROPOLOGY?

Anthropological analysis is textual because of 'thick descriptions' of cultural artifacts (C. Geertz) – it is indeed *a story*.

Consequences:

1. anthropological and ethnological experience is transmitted by a narrative and formed using narrative techniques;
2. anthropologist is just a participant observer;
3. anthropological field is constructed of 'literary facts', such as oral expressions, folk-tales, testimonies and memorials etc.

Culture is thus equivalent to con-texture, but not from a Marxist standpoint:

1. culture = text (narrative) + (anthropological) interpretation;
2. text (narrative) = context + (critical) interpretation.

Semiotic field is the same – textual practice encouraged by different contextual signs (period, education, political system) and interpretative signs (critical theory, academic background, expectations).



HISTORY?

Postmodernist reinterpretations of historical emphasis deeply influenced the field of literary anthropology:

1. postmodern historiography (Hayden White, Dominic LaCapra, David Perkins) – concept of history as an imaginative textual practice (reproduced according to the logic of metanarrative ('a big story', 'great figures'));
2. one history produces several autonomous historiographies (several standpoints of one historical event, several interpretations);
3. 'skeptical standpoint' and heterogeneous discursive strategies (Michel Foucault) – historical truth or any kind of truth is regulated by different political, sociological, ideological, pedagogical and cultural inputs;
4. antidisiplinary frame of new historicism and cultural materialism (or its equivalents in Italy and France, for example *microstoria*);
5. ideological historiographical frames, for example in gay and lesbian studies, postcolonial studies, etc.



TEXTUALITY?

Problematic status of textuality is deeply reinterpreted in literary-anthropological studies and hermeneutics:

1. text is to be comprehended semiotically (Roland Barthes presumption of textual strategies as intertextual and palimpsestic strategies);
2. text is to be comprehended intersemiotically (Foucault's discourse, Bourdieu's literary field);
3. text is to be comprehended ethnographically (Nigel Rapport's vision of 'liberal literary anthropology');
4. text is to be comprehended reader-responsive (Wolfgang Iser's reader-response criticism and Stanley Fish's theory of interpretative communities).



DEFINITION OF/OR DISCIPLINE?

If anthropology and literary criticism are really united by common notion of the textualisation of culture and culturalisation of text, what is the basic difference in source and the method?

First solution: anthropological view will relinquish the concept of reality or at least redefine it (*world* becomes *word*).

Second solution: the method of literary anthropology should be based on *zigzag ramblings* from text-literature to text-culture, where the position of the individual is always transcendent (N. Rapport).

Third solution: the method of literary anthropology should rely on the critical but also activist approaches of gender studies, feminist movement and criticism, postcolonial criticism (J. Hills Miller).

Fourth solution: literary anthropology should concentrate on the actual problems of anthropological-ethnological research, using literary studies methods, but acknowledging the textual-narrative nature of anthropological research (for example, literary-anthropological studies will concentrate on the problems of identity, class, ethnic, national, sexual, gender and other forms of stereotypes etc. – example of 'literary imagology').



JOINT SOURCES

There are different sources of establishing or hybridization of this discipline in the academic milieu:

1. Konstanz University group (W. Iser as a leading figure in reader-response criticism; *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, 1989; *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, 1995);
2. generative anthropology group (René Girard, Eric Gans, Richard van Oort) – concepts of minimal representational scene and mimetism;
3. Northrop Frye's analysis as a mixture of archetypal criticism (C. G. Jung) and hermeneutics ('the Great Code');
4. Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics;
5. Roland Barthes's semiotics of culture (Japan studies, compared to Darko Suvin), etc.



KEY-WORDS AND KEY-TOPICS

Field of social interaction: ritual, cult, ceremony, interactivity, speech, aggression, war, conflicts, etc.

Mental worlds: imagination, fantasy, topology, projection, cognition, emotions, memories, etc.

Body and embodiment: gestures, grotesque, illness, media bodies, virtual bodies, etc.

Everyday and intercultural communication: political discourse, colonialism, political correctness, etc.

Epistemology: intermediality, law, esthetics, ethics, hypertextuality, etc.

Examples: Victor Turner's work on ritualization of everyday life and Erving Goffman's work on interactivity; Martha Nussbaum's studies of emotion and Florence Dupont's studies on criminal acts; cultural materialist's studies on body and concept of grotesque stereotyping; Stanley Fish's studies on politically correct speech in literature; studies on body movements and gestures (Jasmina Vojvodić), Nelson Goodman's on 'ways of worldmaking', etc.



CONTEXT

1920s-1930s – performance experiments (*Zenit*, Ljubomir Micić, Miloš Crnjanski, Stanslav Vinaver, Stanislav Krakov, Dušan Matić; idea of 'cosmic expressionism' that is indeed intercultural, with the influence of Asian theatre in the beginning and Nikola Tesla's mechanicism later on)

1940s – experience of the theatre avant-garde movements

1950s-1960s – BITEF (Serbia), DLJI (Dubrovnik)

1960s-onwards – experimental groups in England (Living theatre) and America

1970s-onwards – intercultural experiments (Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba)

Radovan Ivšić's plays – 1940-1946 (radio performances, working-class performances)



THEORETICAL EXPLICATION

Two types of theatre avant-garde movements:

1. historical avant-garde (Peter Bürger);
2. transhistorical avant-garde (Renato Poggioli, Aleksandar Flaker's 'poetics of negation').

Avant-garde as a negation of social matrix that is usually monocultural and massive-productive (Clement Greenberg).

Avant-garde and the anti-class society – connection of Marxist criticism with the avant-garde movements in literary theory and criticism, literature, theatre and performance studies.



EXAMPLES – AVANT-GARDE CONTEXT

A couple of examples of diversity:

1. intersemiotic and intermedial groups – Asemic writing, Bauhaus, Constructive art (Kazimir Maljevič), Dogma 95, Minimalizam, Konkretna glazba, Neo-Dada, Neoizam, Neoterici, Neue Slowenische Kunst. Noise Music, No Wave, EXAT 51 (transcultural 'total design'), Earth Group (connection with Miroslav Krleža) etc.
2. monomedial groups (?) – epic theatre, antitheatre, Living theatre, theatre of aggression, theatre of the oppressed, theatre of the absurd, etc.
3. examples of interculturalism: E. Barba, P. Brook, A. Mnouchine, A. Boal, R. Schechner, etc.



PROBLEMS OF INTERCULTURAL MATRIX

- Culture, and how is it constructed, particularly in relation to globalization?
- Dramatic and theatrical strategies as means of deconstructing cultural stereotypes, and challenging conventional definitions of national cultures.
- How context affects issues of language, identity, and reception of performance.
- The implications of the way groups are represented – either as an essentialist discourse (exclusively) or as a constructivist discourse (inclusively).
- If we are working across cultures, languages and contexts, how the issues of translation, exploitation, and representation affect performance practices between and across cultures,
- The relationship between the postcolonial and intercultural in the context of globalization and media.



RADOVAN IVŠIĆ'S *SUN CITY*

Several possible meanings distinguish this play from the author's dramatic opus:

1. Greek Heliopolis;
2. Egyptian capital in the old ages;
3. fictional planet in SF serial Stargate SG-1;

The span of meanings can easily cover something classical or even ancient but also something modernistic and even utopist, such as fictional planets of the undiscovered galaxies.

Conclusion: concepts of achi-time and achi-space on one side and utopist future-time and future-space are not so far a way, even though they are on the opposite sides of the logic curve.



ANTIMODERNIST DISCOURSE

Theory of antimodernism (A. Compagnon, Z. Kravar):

1. two different standpoints of the authors of the early 20th century – skeptic belief in (a) transhistorical essence of everything and (b) transhistorical eshaton (future);
2. projective thinking – visions of the better world, far away from the civilization of progress, modernism, technicism; return to nature, esotery, mysticism, primal values, ceremonies and rituals;
3. negative critic of the modernist and avant-garde movement (futurism, dadaism, surrealism);
4. neoromantic philosophy of life (circular vision of history, anti-economism, anti-liberalism, anti-capitalism, Nietzsche's pesimism).



EXAMPLE 1.

Radovan Ivšić's play *King Gordogan*:

- a story of the autocratic king, eager for power, destroying everything on his way, even his followers and potential inheritors;
- problem of the so called 'great mechanism of history' (Jan Kott), common in Shakespeare plays and in Kurosawa's films (every new king is even more autocratic then the previous one, eager to kill his own ancestors, not realizing that this will eventually happen to him);
- a vision of anti-utopia – bloodhound tyranny that multiples itself on the way (for example, when there's no one else to kill, to execute, Gordogan decides to cut the trees)

These type of plays, as well as their subjects, were meant to be the explicit critique of the autocratic communist and socialist regime (Radovan Ivšić wrote these plays in the 1940s, after the war, but they were published in the 1980s and he had to go in exile).



EXAMPLE 2.

The great western civilization of mechanicism and engine is thus criticized (antimodernist input) in *Sun City*.

Several possible interpretation possibilities:

1. intertextual potential (V. Majakovsky, T. S. Eliot);
2. ideological potential (war aftermaths from the Slavic perspective, 'the civilization of mechanicism is the civilisation of war');
3. intercultural, transcultural potential (different influences, Asian drama and theatre, Elizabethan dramaturgy, antic tragedy, Indian theatre).

The focus will be put on the problems of INTERCULTURALISM and TRANSCULTURALISM.



PRELIMINARY ASSUMPTIONS

There are several preliminary theses considering Radovan Ivšić's play:

1. the author's dramaturgy is contaminated by many influences, Eastern and Western, and this is the essence of his interculturalism;
2. furthermore, his dramaturgy is also a constant search for the gathering points, similarities and common places, in these traditions, for example classical Japanese nō and early modern tragediography;
3. his ambition is to gather these different influences in one melting pot, in a unique and universal dramatic code;
4. if it is to be transcultural, this dramatic code should be pre-logical and para-logical (universal language is thus imagined, sequence of sounds and etymological experiments),



DRAMATIC AND THEATRE INTERCULTURALISM

Theories of interculturalism in drama and theatre are often found in the field of performance studies and so-called new theatre studies (Marco de Marinis, Patrice Pavis).

A couple of models:

1. dramatic interculturalism (mixture of different theatre and dramatic traditions recognizable in the text, a dramatic melting pot in which the traditions can be easily seen on all of the levels);
2. dramatic multiculturalism (long-term mixture and interdependence of different traditions in the communities that are ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, such as Aboriginal dramatic performances in Australian context of predominance; IMPORTANT: (a) concept of 'cultural fusion' where every culture keeps its complexity, dominant and subdominant; (b) tuning of cultural layers or cultural *réglage*);
3. dramatic cultural montage (the layer of different cultures in a dramatic text are deliberately marked, as a creative reinterpretation without hierarchy, for example 'cultural appropriation' by Wole Soyinka).



INTERCULTURAL APPROPRIATION OR?

There are different kinds of false appropriation and intercultural reinterpretations:

- postcolonialism;
- Orientalism;
- 'Third World' literature;
- transition countries literature etc.



TRANSCULTURALISM

Patrice Pavis avoids the problematic field of transcultural dramatic and performance activity.

But this could be subsumed as follows:

1. transculturalism as a field of culturally universal signs, pre-expressive and pre-logical, that can be shown in the performance text or in pure dramaturgy (Eugenio Barba's project ISTA);
2. actions spread over different cultures with the unique consciousness of the existence of culturally uniform signs, easily understandable to every culture (Richard Schechner);

Sun City as a play is intercultural in its form, connecting Japanese *nō* dramaturgy and Western surrealist theatre practice, but also transcultural – mainly because of the constant search for universal linguistic and performance signs.



SYMBOLISM

Problems:

- construction of the city (Mayakovski, Aristofan);
- metaphors of revolution (building and construction metaphors, mythic project);
- sounds of technicism and construction working (hammers);
- universal figures (man, woman, chorus);
- recitative discourse (many unarticulated sounds).



ELEMENTS OF NŌ

Basic elements:

- simple actant model;
 - main actor, *shite*, is the motivator of the plot;
 - followed by *jiutai*, as a chorus, nominating the plot's motivator (fisherman in this play), has an onomatopoeic function (sounds of construction);
1. vocal arrangement (*uta*) is similar to *nō*, as a mixture of recitation and half-singing;
 2. every movement and gesture has to be clean and enrolls the process of ritualization, like in *nō*;
 3. each character has a specific mask, not allowing the mimic gestures (*omote*);

In this way, the play is to be considered as a neo-symbolist and post-symbolist experiment with the classical traditional forms of theatre and drama in an avant-garde, basically surrealist key (Radovan Ivšić's connection with Tristan Tzara, André Breton, Maurice Naudeau).



COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS OF NŌ

Basic elements:

1. main actor enters the play and disappears immediately (the fisherman);
2. main part of the drama is based on *monogatari*, monological and narrative recitation (recitation about construction process covers the two third of the play);
3. simplicity of the plot (*kihon*).



CONCLUSION

Some critical points concerning the reception and possible influences:

1. 'theatre out of joint' (Shakespeare's influence on the level of basic tragic dramaturgy);
2. avant-garde 'total theatre' (seeking for the total and universal semiotic mode of communication, whether signs, basic sounds, consonants);
3. postdramatic theatre (Hans-Thies Lehmann);
4. theatre of the absurd (evident influence of Alfred Jarry as a pre-absurdist figure in the history of European theatre);
5. epic theatre (Bertoldt Brecht);
6. avant-garde performative movements (Stanislavski, Craig, Mejerhold);
7. surrealist theatre (John E. Matthews).