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DIALOGISM AND INTERTEXTUAL CODES IN H. MELVILLE AND J. F. COOPER

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Abstract

This article reveals the intertextual relationships between the literary works of Herman Melville and James Fenimore Cooper. The legacy of William Shakespeare and John Milton can be defined as dominating among the other sources of intertext in the novels of the two writers. Certain attention is given to the approaches the authors apply to address the classics. Impacted by the British Bards and developing American culture, Cooper succeeded by Melville, contributed to the evolution of the genre of the sea-novel which serves as the “bridge” between the British and American belles-lettres. Both writers perceived British literature as a basis for American, and fruitfully used the masterpieces of the classics to add special stature to the portraits of their characters and appeal to the tastes of the reading audience. By analyzing a motley assortment of allusions and quotations functioning as markers of intertextuality in the texts under study, the authors of the present paper tend to believe that while in the novels by Cooper the intertext is mainly manifested through the epigraphs and certain narrative patterns, in Melville’s writings the results of the author’s contact with different epochs is primarily recognized through the employment of actualized subplots and transformed character types.

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1. Introduction

Intertextuality is a crucial element in the attempt to understand “the problem of relationship between reality, thought, language and culture” (Chupryna et al., 2018, p. 125). Being an interdisciplinary phenomenon, it is apparent in different domains of the modernist and post-modernist culture. Recent research attests to the fact that “the theory of intertextuality has its origins in twentieth-century linguistics” (Liu, 2017, p. 10). Despite the relative novelty of the term in question, linguists and literary critics maintain that this phenomenon is as old as human history, and identify this discourse strategy in numerous ancient texts such as the Hebrew Bible, the writings of Aristotle and the works of Hellenistic Greek poets, which contain cases of intertextuality as well as stimulate the occurrence of the new ones. The first contributions to the development of this theory are known to have been made by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bulgarian scholar Julia Kristeva. Although, to our knowledge, the term *intertextuality* does not appear in Bakhtin’s writing, he can be regarded as a founding father of this theory as he put forward the now widely accepted semiotic principle of *dialogism* asserting that language necessarily enters into dialogue with the words of others. Some three decades after Bakhtin published *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1929), Kristeva introduced the Russian theorist to Western scholars. Commenting on the dialogic nature of texts, the Bulgarian semiotician claims that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 66). In the post-modernist view, intertextuality has become one of the central concepts within the contemporary discussions of culture, and inspired various critical positions (Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Michael Riffaterre, Harold Bloom and others).

Accepting that “the concept of intertextuality points to the relevance of the cultural context and postulates multiple links between different texts” (Turaeva, 2016, p. 34), the authors of the present paper aim to identify this crucial element of poetics in the novels by the nineteenth-century American writers of the Romantic era, the period which as many other ideological trends “was not homogeneous either by its nature or by the chronology of existence” (Levishchenko, 2018, p. 187).

2. Problem Statement

Being the founding fathers of the national literature, James Fenimore Cooper (1789 – 1851) and Herman Melville (1819 – 1891) perceived British culture as a progenitor of American. Despite the significant body of research focusing on various aspects of Melville’s and Cooper’s poetics there has been a paucity of comparative studies investigating the intertextual codes noticeable in their writings. Seen as the author’s interaction with the related works of literature, both classic and contemporary, these discourse strategies are believed to stimulate dialogue with the reader, maintain the preservation of existing cultural and literary knowledge and generate the new one.

3. Research Questions

The research questions of the present study are the following:

To what extent do J.F. Cooper and H. Melville employ the intertextual potential of pre-existing literature?

What are the common sources of intertext in the works of J.F. Cooper and H. Melville?

What are the examples of particular influences between the two authors?

4. Purpose of the Study

This article aims at a comparative analysis of the intertexts existing in the literary heritage by J.F. Cooper and H. Melville. The literary works under study include: *The Pilot* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Water Witch* (1830), *The Two Admirals* (1842), *The Sea Lions* (1849) by Cooper; and *Moby-Dick, or The White Whale* (1851); *Pierre, or The Ambiguities* (1852) by Melville. For the purposes of this article, we rely on a large body of textual evidence provided by the corpus of Cooper's epigraphs collected by the contemporary literary critic Hugh MacDougall (2009) and the visual archive of books owned and borrowed by Melville (Melville's Marginalia Online, 2020).

5. Research Methods

The present paper employs a complex system of methods and comes to conclusions about the intertextual codes in writings of H. Melville and J.F. Cooper on the basis of a system of methods usable for literature and language studies including typological and comparative analysis as well as the biographical method, textual analysis and narrative inquiry combined with historical and cultural approaches.

6. Findings

A characteristic feature of Cooper's personal style was to antedate every chapter of his novels by a line or a quatrain from a poem borrowed from various sources. The number of quotes used by Cooper in his thirty-two novels (each consisting of thirty chapters on average) approximates to a thousand. The analysis of the abovementioned novels convincingly demonstrates the reading preferences of the writer. Significantly, 80% of the total number of borrowings is constituted by the quotations from Shakespeare. The rest of the corpus primarily builds on the heritage of his contemporaries (Burns R., Byron G. G., Dana R. H., Hemans F. D., Longfellow H. W., Scott W., Wordsworth W., and others).

The prevalence of citations from Shakespeare is especially notable in several novels by Cooper. For instance, out of the twenty-nine chapters in *Home as Found* (1838), twenty-eight of them start with quotes from Shakespeare. Both *The Prairie* and *The Water Witch* contain thirty-four chapters and all of them but one have epigraphs derived from Shakespeare. Undoubtedly, Cooper considered Shakespeare an unexcelled classic and was his profound reader. Obviously, the American novelist knew the Bard's writings well and could easily rely on them. Actually, it may be not the only reason for Cooper's devotion: the explanation can be far more personal. The American writer considered Shakespeare to be his associate due to their common origin. According to genealogical data, the history of Cooper's family goes down to the year 1661 when James Cooper, the writer's ancestor, was born in Stratford-on-Avon where William Shakespeare had died forty-five years before. At the age of twenty-one J.F. Cooper's

ancestor immigrated to the American Promised Land to become one of the first settlers of Philadelphia. Being a true patriot of America, Cooper did not neglect his ancestry and paid particular honour to William Shakespeare, the native of his grandfathers' land.

Cooper maintained that both British and American people had equal cultural rights to the literary heritage of the famous Bard. As a result, the allusions to Shakespeare's plays are so abundant that it seems barely possible to conduct a detailed analysis of them within the framework of this paper. Nevertheless, throughout the corpus under study Cooper's favourite sources can herein be listed. *Merchant of Venice* (1596-1599), *The Twelfth Night* (1601-1602), *The Tempest* (1610) are among them. For example, the text of Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1837) solely contains seven quotations from *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare's heritage was not only the source of wisdom for Cooper. Also, the comedy of the Bard served as a model for the American's own writing. In particular, *Midsummer Night's Dream* is considered to be the basis for Cooper's most "as complex as perhaps mystifying" (MacDougall, 2015) novel *The Water Witch*. Thus, a case of genre imitation can be noted. A set of patterns recognized as the typical poetic elements of Shakespearean comedy compose a number of Cooper's artistic works. Supposedly, the image of twins (Sebastian and Viola) originating with Shakespeare's comedy *The Twelfth Night* is reinterpreted by Cooper and used in *The Sea Lions* depicting the two absolutely identical vessels (even their names coincide). The next pattern to be mentioned is 'a person in disguise'. Firstly, 'a woman disguised as a man' recognized in the image of Rosalind in Shakespeare's pastoral comedy *As You Like It* (1599) was recreated by Cooper in the image of Katherine, the fiancée of the protagonist in *The Pilot*. Another example is the image of 'a man disguised as an animal' depicted in the abovementioned play. As the prominent Shakespearean scholar Francois Laroque concludes, "Shakespeare uses the animals, particularly horned ones, as a pretext of introducing farce and buffoonery into his comedies" (Laroque, 1993, p. 234). A similar grotesque effect is achieved when Cooper adapts this image and transfers it on the American colonial setting dressing up the protagonist of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Nathaniel Bumppo, in a bear's skin. Thus, Cooper uses Shakespearean patterns from comedies to take a break from the atmosphere of tension and suspense and to cause the reader to have a good laugh. Shakespeare was a constant source of inspiration for the American which is traceable from the first till the last novel by Cooper.

The outstanding heritage of another seventeenth-century Englishman should be noted in reference to Cooper's work. The influence of John Milton and his best-known poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) on Cooper has been proved by numerous scholars including R. Weisbuch, R. Milder and D. Richardson. The researchers registered Cooper's response to the heritage of the English poet, particularly, with regard to certain similarities in the usage of narrative techniques and plot structure. Moreover, it has been convincingly demonstrated in critical literature that Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* can be viewed as the prototype for Cooper's Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans*, while the group of Cooper's travelers towards Fort William Henry in the same novel reminds the reader much of Milton's Babel in his epic poem.

Of certain interest is the fact that Milton's poem is not quoted in the abovementioned novel of Cooper. However, direct citations can be easily identified in other works of the writer. For instance, in the book *The Two Admirals* (1842) defined by Gulyants (2019) as "a novel on Christianity" the following

epigraph is found: “So glozed the Tempter, and his poison tuned; Into the heart of Eve his words made way, Though at the voice much marveling” (Milton, 2019, p. 120). The epigraph is drawn from Chapter XVIII and summarises the content of this part of the novel where the protagonist Gervaise Oakes is beset by temptation.

A quote from a contemporary is hard to find within the corpus of Cooper’s novels. The writer confessed that though it was challenging, he sometimes succeeded in his search for epigraphs in the works of his coevals and was pleased to praise and mention some of them in his literary work (MacDougall, 2009). Multiple among such examples are the allusions to the poems of Sir Walter Scott. The relationships between Cooper and Walter Scott can be characterized as rather controversial. On the one hand, according to M. Phillips, Cooper (2017) referred to Scott as “one of the pleasantest companions the world holds” (Cooper, 2017). The evidence of respect for Scott’s writings can be found in the letter of 1831 where Cooper states: “I have always spoken, written and thought of Sit Walter Scott (as a writer) just as I should think and speak of Shakespeare – with high admiration of his talent, but with no silly reserve, as if I thought my own position rendered it necessary that I should use more delicacy than other men” (Shields, 2016, p. 87). This textual source also ensures us that Cooper did not ever use to think of Scott as a rival.

On the other hand, when Cooper was named ‘American Scott’, he disgusted it. What irritated Cooper the most in Scott’s works was the lax plot of his narratives, which is why it was the development of the captivating plot structure that served as the guiding principle and the stimulus to the development of his own fiction. To put it simply, the works of the Scottish poet inspired Cooper with ideas, he used them in his own writings but filled them with action and moved the setting to his native land. Scott’s *The Pirate* (1822) disappointed Cooper but at the same time motivated him, which resulted in the author’s decision to create a more precise and detailed marine novel given his real experience in sea navigation. Suchwise, Cooper’s *The Pilot* with the American naval hero gained immense popularity and was followed by a number of many more maritime novels including those by R. Dana Jr. and H. Melville. Supposedly, to thank Sir Walter Scott for the appearance of *The Pilot* Cooper quotes him in this book. Though, the citation comes not from *The Pirate* itself, but from the poem which brought its author great popularity. It was *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field* (1808) that Cooper chose as a preface to Chapter XXVIII of *The Pilot*: “He looks abroad, and soon appears, O’er Horncliffe-hill, a plump of spears, Beneath a pennon gay” (Scott, 2018, p. 21). Borrowed by Cooper, this quotation anticipates the appearance of the main hero: the unexpected arrival of the protagonist which illustrates the climactic scene in the narrative. The similarity between the personalities of the characters is traceable: both writers depicted brave warriors of noble origin, but Cooper made his heroes American patriots.

Although the English classics were valuable sources of Cooper’s inspiration, the writer did not neglect the works of his American contemporaries. To illustrate, a letter of praise to Cooper’s talent that the American poet Richard Henry Dana Sr. once wrote after the publication of the first truly national novel *The Spy* (1821), resulted in a continuous correspondence between the artists. Cooper’s borrowings from Dana’s poems are numerous. Significantly, Chapter XVII of Cooper’s *The Sea Lions* – the book which was one of the two novels “given a boost for posterity because they were reviewed by Herman Melville” (Madison, 2015) – opens with a line from the longest poem written by Dana, *The Buccaneer*

(1827), “The morning air blows fresh on him; The waves dance gladly in his sight; The sea-birds call, and wheel, and skim – O, blessed morning light!” (Cooper, 2017, p. 233). The hero of the poem is an erring pirate who is deeply regretful of his sins, nothing, even the ocean, can soothe him. In Cooper’s chapter introduced by Dana’s citation the same murky motives can be noted as it describes the mariners approaching on the Babylonian activity: the extermination of the endemic to the island animal species. The characters of Cooper’s novel will regret about their acts later just like Dana’s pirate does in *The Buccaneer*.

Dana’s inspiration by Cooper’s works, particularly the marine novels, was inherited by his son Richard Dana Junior. Eventually, he was sent to sea to cure his eyes because of too much reading. Obviously, the novels by Cooper were in his library. On his return having obtained some experience of a working seaman Dana Jr. writes *Two Years before the Mast* (1840). According to the research by a contemporary critic Hester Blum, Dana’s main concern was not the loftiness of Cooper’s romance, but the “supposed facts of life at sea” (Blum, 2020, p. 154) which made him a “sea-brother” of Melville (the way the latter calls him in their correspondence).

Scholars have repeatedly admitted Melville’s exceptional manner of presenting complex theoretical and philosophical points through his intricate interpretations of canonical literary texts (N. Arvin, S. Foster Damon, E.H. Eby, F.O. Matthiessen and others). As D. Herd emphasizes in his Introduction to the Wordsworth Classics edition of *Moby-Dick*, Melville “sat down to write *Moby-Dick* full to the brim with the world’s literature, in a state of something like intellectual frenzy” (Melville, 2002, xi).

Indeed, the starting point of the voyage Melville takes us on, is “*Extracts (Supplied by a Sub-Sub-Librarian)*” which can be interpreted as the act of the articulation of multiple voices woven into the text. This section totals 80 allusions to whales and whaling from various random sources including the Bible, Milton, Shakespeare, Rabelais and Hawthorne, as well as excerpts from British and American folklore, political speeches and numerous contemporary tales of whale voyagers. Among the cited statements there is a quotation from Cooper’s *Pilot*. Literally, Melville never took part in a dialogue with Cooper during his lifetime. However, metaphysically, with regard to his creative and literary legacy, Melville should be seen as Cooper’s worthy successor. Indeed, the echoes of Cooper’s heritage commonly appear on the pages of Melville’s novels. The ultimate goal of both writers was to shape maritime nationalism and American identity in their sea fiction. The author of *Moby-Dick* was well aware of the large body of sea literature when he began his writing career. He had read Cooper’s novels and Dana’s *Two Years before the Mast*. In his private correspondence with Richard Henry Dana, Jr. Melville writes: “[I] am more pleased than I can well tell, to think that any thing I have written about the sea has at all responded to your own impressions of it” and adds that he felt “tied and welded” to his compatriot “by a sort of Siamese link of affectionate sympathy” (Shonstrom, 2015, p. 58). However, what seems to be a seafaring or whaling adventure only thinly disguises the network of intricate imagery patterns, the breathtakingly intellectual matrix of multiple cultural and literary codes within the vast canvas of this novel.

Admittedly, “Melville’s tremendous debt to Milton – and to Homer, Virgil, the Bible, and Shakespeare – might be evident to anyone who has wrestled with the moral and intellectual complexity that lends *Moby-Dick* its immortal heft” (Giraldi, 2013, para. 1). At the same time, it should be

pinpointed that Melville's primary purpose in reading the epic literary works of Western civilization was to learn how to write rather than to accumulate knowledge for its own sake.

Melville came to Shakespeare relatively late in life. In a letter to Evert Duyckinck, his friend and editor, the author of *Moby-Dick* wrote: "I have lived more than twenty-nine years, and until a few days ago, never made close acquaintance with the divine William" (Leinwand, 2016, p. 209). However, paying a special tribute of admiration to Shakespeare, in less than a fortnight later Melville would write: "And do not think ... that, therefore, I am of the number of the snobs who burn their tuns of rancid fat at his [Shakespeare's] shrine. No, I would stand afar off and alone, and burn some pure Palm oil, the product of some overtopping trunk" (Ibid.). In fact, he did stand afar off and alone.

Interestingly enough, compared to the sheer abundance of explicit references to Shakespeare in Cooper's writing, identifiable quotations from "the divine William" in Melville are relatively few. Also, while Cooper seems to be primarily engaged with echoes of Shakespeare's comedies (as demonstrated in the first part of the present paper), Melville's tone in his dialogue with the Bard is more pessimistic, as he is more interested in dealing with the problems of evil and the tormented human soul.

Even so, half a hundred examples of textual references to the shadows of Shakespeare's tragedies in the novel about the White Whale can be provided including excerpts from *Julius Caesar* (1599), *Hamlet* (1599–1601), *Othello* (1603–1604), *King Lear* (1605–1606) and *Macbeth* (1606) to show how they parallel the work of Melville. Cliché as it may sound, Shakespearean legacy as revised by Melville goes far beyond the aforementioned observations. The intertextual relationship between the American author and Shakespeare is rather complex. Admittedly, Melville's dialogue with the greatest of all playwrights is covert and can be detected on the levels of character construction, use of language, key themes and ideas, genre and literary form.

A close reading of *Moby-Dick* enables us to see that Melville followed Shakespeare in his use words. For instance, the linguistic units that the American author was likely to borrow directly from the English playwright include 'anon', 'ere', 'ergo', 'methinks', 'waxes' just to name a few. The number of textualized echoes of Shakespeare's tragedies in *Moby-Dick* is significant with much reminding the reader of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

Ahab's "madness maddened" might be said to descend from Macbeth's ambition, Othello's jealousy or Hamlet's resolution. The captain of the Pequod is a multi-accentual character with the feelings of pride, obsession, maniacal perseverance deeply embedded in his personality. Still, his scheme of revenge was doomed to failure. Remarkably, the partially erased pencil note that Melville took in the margin of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) annotating the line "The nature of bad news infects the teller" from Act I Scene II of the tragedy reads: "It is curious in how many ways this idea is expressed by Shakespeare. – *The bearer of evil tidings hath but a [losing office.]*" (Melville's Marginalia Online; italics ours). Thus, we may conclude that the course of actions of both writers' characters is determined by the prophecies of the tragic lot.

In *Moby-Dick* Melville also provided creative response to John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) which is twice quoted in the *Extracts* section of the novel. Miltonic language and allusions to the loss of Eden in the whaling adventure can be recognized through the analysis of the direct references between the two iconic texts. Special attention should be given to how the American writer succeeds in

establishing particular links between Ahab and the Satan of *Paradise Lost*. Just like Ahab “was *intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge*” (Melville, 2002, p. 155) so felt Milton’s Satan “*bent ... On desperate revenge*” (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, 84-85; italics ours), as depicted in Book III of *Paradise Lost*. Based upon the evidence of Melville’s marking of these lines in the margin of his personal copy of Milton’s poetry (Melville’s Marginalia Online, 2020), we maintain that both writers made their protagonists “just and right, *Sufficient to have stood, but free to fall*” (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book III, 99; italics ours). Numerous (however, impossible to be embraced within the framework of the present paper) cases of verbal, symbolic and thematic parallels can be identified in *Moby-Dick* justifying Melville’s general indebtedness to Milton.

The feelings overwhelming Ahab in his burning desire to beat his foe, to ‘dismember the dismemberer’ in Chapter 130: “*joy and sorrow, hope and fear, seemed ground to finest dust, and powdered, for the time, in the clamped mortar of Ahab’s iron soul*” (Melville, 2002, p. 437; italics ours) parallel Satan’s words inflamed with rage: “*So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear, Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; Evil be thou my good*” (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, 108-110; italics ours). The complex matrix of references and allusions to *Paradise Lost* in *Moby-Dick* also includes abundant verbal and thematic parallels between the stunning beauty of the ocean and the Garden of Eden; the symbolic meaning of the White Whale which can be roughly compared with the Messiah in Milton’s epic and more, with all of them deserving much greater attention than could now be allowed.

Discussing the intertextual codes in Melville’s *Pierre, or the Ambiguities* (1852) critics maintain that the motley collection of suggested sources in this novel comes down from British literature, including “Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, in particular); Bacon; “the old novel of sensibility, the Gothic romance, the novel of romantic sophistication”; and such nineteenth-century writers as Byron (especially *Manfred*), De Quincey, Carlyle, Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens and Thackeray” (Howard & Parker, 1999, p. 404).

Melville’s enthusiasm for Shakespeare is evident in *Pierre* as well as in *Moby-Dick*. In fact, the author himself invites his reader to make comparisons with Hamlet, as he introduces the protagonist tossing with the books and papers in his chamber: “Uppermost and most conspicuous among the books were *the Inferno of Dante, and the Hamlet of Shakespeare*” (Melville, 2017; italics ours).

The above given excerpt is one of the two direct cases of mentioning the Bard in the novel, alongside the passage which describes Melville’s reflections on the intertextuality of *Hamlet* and Shakespeare’s dialogue with his literary forefathers: “... in this plaintive fable we find embodied the Hamletism of the antique world; the Hamletism of three thousand years ago: “The flower of virtue cropped by a too rare mischance. And *the English tragedy is but Egyptian Memnon, Motaigned and modernized; for being but a mortal man Shakespeare had his fathers too*” (Melville, 2017; italics ours). This observation of the famous American once again justifies the idea that intertextual codes can be identified in the literary works created long before the rise of Modernism. As one may notice, Melville’s works have little to do with direct borrowings from famous literary sources. Instead, what this distinguished American novelist does employ in his creative writing includes cases of revised narrative strategies, reconsidered and actualized subplots, transformed character types and rewritten symbolism.

7. Conclusion

Whether consciously or subconsciously used by the two American writers, numerous parallels to British and American literature are meant to add symbolic grandeur to the portraits of their characters. However, luckily, there still remain no definitive answers to the questions about the meaning of the above analyzed texts, nor can there be, given the cosmic scope of the authors' contribution to the corpus of American literature. The texts whose intertextual codes serve as connections between different generations and paradigms of thought have now provoked and are still provoking the emergence of new intertextualities in various domains of contemporary culture including the fields of art, cinematography, and even marketing, which makes them truly iconic products of the two extraordinary minds.

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