

PLAYING INTERTEXTUALITY GAMES: TRANSFORMATION OF CLASSICAL CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS BY CARLOS MORTON

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The paper discusses the phenomenon of intertextuality in the plays of the renowned Mexican American writer Carlos Morton who in his most significant plays resorts to reworking plays by outstanding playwrights of the past. It shows the ways in which intertextual links reveal themselves in his creative work: the borrowing of characters, plot motives, separate details, quotations, allusions and the reminiscent layer of the text, thus demonstrating the appropriation of the classical literary heritage by postmodernism.

Key words: intertextuality, multiculturalism, Chicano, postmodernist games, pretext.

Recent US literature has been characterized by a very strong influence of multiculturalism that played a great role in the changes of social attitudes during the last few decades. In literature, representatives of national, ethnic and other minorities came center stage, largely enriching the current literary process in the USA. According to Prof. A. Zverev, "the culture of diversity is regarded as a necessary challenge to the former predominance of integral culture based on the idea of the universal American values and attitudes" [7, p. 46]. Stanford Professor S. Fisher Fishkin is even more outspoken in assessing the changes: "During the last two decades, the canon of American literature has increasingly embraced writers who, in an earlier generation, might have had a place only in segregated ethnic literary canons but who were generally excluded from the class of mainstream "American writers" [2, p. 359].

The question of minorities literatures and their specificity has been dealt with in a wide range of books and papers by outstanding Ukrainian, Russian and foreign researchers, particularly in the works of T.N. Denisova, A.V. Vashchenko, T.V. Voronchenko, N.A. Vysotska, M. Herrera-Sobek, F. Lomeli and others. The discussion of the plays by the well-known Mexican American playwright Carlos Morton might be of value as they draw attention to the processes that are characteristic of the tendencies in current US literature.

In recent decades the work of Chicano/a writers has become a significant phenomenon in US literary life. Many of them use the so-called Spanglish, a peculiar concoction of English and Spanish that is spoken by American Hispanics. Chicanos is an ethnic group of Americans of Mexican origin which is quickly growing because of the influx of newcomers from other countries of Central and Latin America. Their destiny is quite dramatic as they owe allegiance to the USA and Mexico but feel homeless in both countries. According to Maria Herrera-Sobek, the well-known expert in Chicano literature, the issue of *mestizaje* (race mixture) and its dramatic consequences begins to figure out in the works of Mexican Americans already in the 1930s. She quotes the Mexican American scholar and poet Americo Paredes who "caustically indicts both the United States and Mexico for the unjust treatment of Chicanos... who have been left orphaned of a nation". One of the reasons for their harassment is "the use of Chicano Spanish and non-standard English" [3, p. 4].

Chicano/a literature is rooted in the 19th century, but its renaissance dates back to the 1960s when the marginalized national and ethnic minorities, including Chicanos, have acquired a voice. Chicano/a writers address the topical aspects of Otherness trying to understand the mechanism of how and at what price Otherness can be realized in American society. Their protagonist is a person who is stigmatized because of being The Other, which manifests itself in the skin color, affiliation with a minority, etc. This results in marginalization in relation to those who symbolize normativity, i.e. power, authority, which was traditionally associated with WASPs, and nourishes the feeling of alienation and rejection of "white man's values". Therefore, Chicano literature, like other minority literatures, is ideologically charged and serves a clear political purpose addressing topical social problems and being critical of the present state of affairs. Its hybrid nature is revealed in the concept of *mestizo* that permeates all Chicano writing. One of the peculiarities of Chicano literature is that political protest is poeticized.

Mexican American authors prioritize the conflict between the dominant culture and Chicano traditions and beliefs, between fathers and sons, the stereotypes enforced by the dominant culture, the influence of indigenous mythology on the new generations of Chicanos and its links with the present, "I" vs. the "nahual" and the relationship between men and women that is greatly affected by *machismo* that focuses on "the traditionally meek and silent woman of the Chicano community who stands by her man" [6, p. 199]. In various ways Chicano literature reveals male dominance in the community where the woman is expected to submit and remain invisible.

Carlos Morton, a Mexican American playwright and university professor, is a key figure in contemporary Chicano drama. He has been awarded a number of prestigious literary prizes, and his plays have been staged all over the USA. *Johnny Tenorio* is his most popular play that was shown to audiences in Mexico, Germany, Spain and France. The playwright is recognized as one of the most gifted Spanish-speaking American authors. Morton teaches drama at the University of California at Riverside. His search of new horizons in Chicano drama and his formal experiments based on the use of literary classics deserve close attention as they vividly demonstrate the mechanisms of intertextuality.

Some of his numerous plays are a kind of remakes of famous works of world literature. Morton's experiments reflect the dialogical nature of literature and show the links between the classics of the past and the new literary tendencies. For him

intertextuality is a deliberate literary device in which citation, paraphrase and parody occupy an important place. He establishes obvious connections with the pre-texts borrowing plot moves but making his characters undergo significant metamorphoses in comparison with their literary precursors. As a result, in his plays some classical characters acquire a new dimension while others only get additional colors in new historical circumstances. Although he reaches out to a wide range of readers and viewers his target audience is primarily Chicanos, and like other Chicano writers he sends a strong message in the hope to achieve the required changes in the community. For Morton art holds the key to a deeper understanding of the world, and integration of Chicano art in the classical literary tradition helps to expose it to the world.

The very titles of Morton's plays allude to the pre-texts. *Johnny Tenorio* (1983) reexamines one of the iconic characters of world literature - Don Juan and refers not only to the tradition of Tirso de Molina and Moliere but also to the 19th-century Spanish-Mexican playwright José Zorrillo who made his own version of the Don Juan legend making use of the plays of his predecessors and A. Dumas's *Don Juan de Marana*. In *The Miser of Mexico* (1989) Morton offers a contemporary reading of Moliere's great comedy *The Miser*, which, as Morton claims, in its turn has certain intertextual links with Plautus's work.

Each historical period had its own interpretation of the legendary womanizer emphasizing those traits of the personality of Don Juan that society found topical at that particular time. Polysemanticism and plasticity of Don Juan's character give the playwright a free rein to comment on society's moral state and its values. Starting a dialogue with his predecessors, Morton deconstructs the character trying to look at the constituent elements that his character is made of and to understand the meanings his predecessors encoded in the figure of Don Juan. Morton's Chicano Johnny Tenorio is the product of the Chicano community with its machismo principles. According to Jorge Huerta, a renowned student of Chicano theater, "one culture's mythical hero is another culture's nemesis" [4, p. 16]. With the help of postmodernist games Morton creates his variant of the legendary figure. Johnny Tenorio becomes the son of the immoral Don Juan who is disgusted with his son's cynicism and degradation, but he is the product of his own doing. Johnny challenges the skies with his immorality, but new victories over women no longer bring joy. Moliere's atheist character defies God but dies swallowed by Heaven's wrath. Morton's Johnny Tenorio is a nihilist who repudiates everything, and death is for him is the price that he pays for the life that has no purpose in life and brings no hope. Everything is monotonous, repetitive and senseless in spite of the mosaic of changing faces and emotional states. Moral depravity has a devastating effect on him, making his soul cold and cynical. Johnny has no backbone to him, and the world around looks hypocritical and impious.

Retaliation for his misdeeds comes on the Day of the Dead when Mexicans pay tribute to their ancestors. For fear of retribution Johnny pleads for forgiveness with the people whom he has wronged in his licentious life. Morton makes use of Moliere's characters but they act in a different cultural environment. Ana is a schoolgirl whom he seduced and left when she was still a teenager, Louie is his buddy and rival in chasing women only to be killed by Johnny. His father Don Juan is responsible for introducing him to the world of sin and hypocrisy but even he could not imagine the consequences of his "upbringing". Finally, Berta who is both the traditional Chicano curandera and the Native American goddess - "of the here, then and will be" [5, p. 51] takes him. Through death he achieves absolution because "[H]is heart pounds fiercely inside all of us - the men who desire to be like him, the women who lust after him. He is our lover, brother, father and son" [5, p. 51-52].

The Miser of Mexico is set in Mexico on the eve of the 1910 revolution. The protagonist has got a real prototype in the history of the country, and the relations between the characters of the play are determined by the social and political situation in Mexico during the crisis that finally developed into a revolution that, according to different estimates, cost the nation two million lives. Morton uses his satirical talent to create the atmosphere of corruption, immorality, contempt for all norms of civilized society and permissiveness characterizing people of power. That is why Don Profundio's environment plays such an important role in revealing the evils of Mexican society that led to the revolution. In Morton's play intertextuality functions at different levels allowing the playwright to achieve conspicuous artistic results. Through the intersections of plot development, literary games that involve rethinking of characters and transformations resulting from the attempt to transfer the classical text into a new artistic environment the author produces an aesthetic effect. Prof. T. Denysova maintains that "[T]he plurality of levels, ambiguity as a sign of a true artistic text is based on the very nature of means of aesthetic generalization in literature" [1, p. 212]. Among them she points out genre variations, polysemy of artistic images, countless possibilities for combinations, parallels, overlaps, etc., which are skillfully used by Morton. The characters and the sequence of scenes in Morton's play seem to repeat Moliere's moves. Tan-Tan reminds of Moliere's Master Jacques, only his tasks are more numerous than Jacques' as he is a "valet, cook, coachman, waiter, butler, etc. to Don Profundio" [5, p. 107]. Though his master's rewards are a good kick in the ribs he is, nevertheless, loyal to his master. Marian's aunt Fanny, a hypocritical matchmaker, loses her honor and dignity trying to profit from Don Profundio who is so obsessed with money that he loses his common sense. In this she is very much like Moliere's Frosine. To arrange his marriage with Eliza Valentin winds his way into Don Profundio's confidence and pretends to act as his servant in spite of his aristocratic origin. The cowardly and iniquitous old Rabioso Resbaloso is declared el generalísimo and longs to marry the beautiful Eliza. There are a few other characters who are genetically connected with Moliere's characters.

At surface Morton's *Miser of Mexico* looks like a contemporary interpretation of Moliere's play. However, as the comedy moves to its finale the tragic tonality begins to grow turning it into a tragicomedy, and the ending explodes in a burlesque. Having lost both his son and wealth, Don Profundio is left alone, deserted by everyone, and the play ends with his moan that is so unexpected from the man who seems to have no heart, "DON: Oh no, my son! My country! My life! (DON starts to wander off in the direction of the shooting. A stray banknote catches his eye. He stops, kneels, picks it up and holds it high. A cry, something between laughter and sorrow, escapes his throat. Slow fade.)" [5, p. 151]. The ending is ambiguous as we do not know what he is going to do with the banknote, and it is a dramatic cross-reference to Moliere whose play ends with Harpagon happily rushing home to see his "dear cash-box". Morton proceeds from the events of Mexican history, and for him the revolution of 1910 bears the stamp of tragedy that plunged the country into a civil war that lasted for nearly a decade. That is why he changes the tone of play so sharply arousing mixed feelings towards the protagonist who used to look like a symbol of avarice and heartlessness throughout the play.

Ridiculing the mores of the "elite" of Mexican society, Morton does not spare the revolutionaries, either. He mockingly makes cultural allusions to the 20th century that are revealed in quotations and ample use of revolutionary rhetoric borrowed from the time of the Mexican revolution, Cuban revolution, Civil War in Spain, "Quotations from Chairman Mao" referred to as "The Red Book". Morton emphasizes the idea that violence breeds only violence. One camarilla takes over another, but they are all driven by lust for power that money gives. The difference is that for people like Don Profundio (Moliere's Harpagon) money is an obsession, an end in itself while others hypocritically disguise their lust for power by the "concern for the poor" whom they send to the slaughter of the revolution. It is hardly accidental that the name of the revolutionary rebels in the play is Pancho - by analogy with the leader of the Mexican revolution Pancho Villa who believed that the end justifies the means. The end of Act 1 in which Clemente and Valentin are discussing the future of Mexico is symptomatic of Morton's cross-references:

"CLEMENTE: .. Valentin, the pen is mightier than the sword. I'll prove it to you! Look, here is the manifesto! ... A call for reform!

<...> VALENTIN: Very well. But if it fails, we'll do it this way! (*Raising his pistol up in the air.*)

CLEMENTE: Agreed!

VALENTIN: Agreed! (*They embrace.*) ¡Que viva la Revolución! CLEMENTE: ¡Hasta la victoria!

VALENTIN: ¡Venceremos!

CLEMENTE: ¡No pasarán!

VALENTIN: ¡Patria o muerte! (They go off together. Curtain.) [5, p. 127] The playwright goes beyond the framework of one family. Don Profundio's downfall is also the collapse of the country and its foundations that resulted from the avidity of its rulers who mercilessly exploited the poor and created the insurmountable barrier between the authorities and the people. Morton makes his characters take off the masks that disguise repellent liars, hypocrites and bribe-takers but does it in a typically postmodernist way - through irony.

Ironically rethinking classical pretexts Morton destroys the hierarchy of the relations between classical and contemporary literature and leaves his patch on the quilt of American literature.

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Стаття надійшла до редколегії 19.12.2010

Прийнята до друку 26.12.2010

ІНТЕРТЕКСТУАЛЬНІ ІГРИ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ КЛАСИЧНИХ ПЕРСОНАЖІВ В ДРАМАТИЧНИХ ТВОРАХ КАРЛОСА МОРТОНА

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У статті висвітлено явище інтертекстуальності у п'єсах видатного американського письменника мексиканського походження Карлоса Мортонна, який у своїх найвідомі-ших творах переспівує п'єси драматургів минулого. Показано шляхи самовиявлення інтертекстуальних зв'язків у творчості письменника - запозичення персонажів, повтор сюжетних мотивів, окремі деталі, цитування, алюзії та прихований рівень тексту. Усі вони демонструють засвоєння класичної літературної спадщини постмодернізмом.

Ключові слова: інтертекстуальність, мультикультуралізм, Чекано, постмодерністичні ігри, контекст.

ИНТЕРТЕКСТУАЛЬНЫЕ ИГРЫ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ КЛАССИЧЕСКИХ ПЕРСОНАЖЕЙ В ДРАМАТИЧЕСКИХ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯХ КАРЛОСА МОРТОНА

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В статье исследовано явление интертекстуальности в пьесах известного американского писателя мексиканского происхождения Карлоса Мортонa, который в своих самых известных произведениях использует мотивы пьес драматургов прошлого. Показано пути самовыражения интертекстуальных связей в творчестве писателя - заимствование персонажей, повтор сюжетных мотивов, отдельные детали, цитаты, аллюзии и невидимый уровень текста. Все они демонстрируют восприятие классического литературного наследия постмодернизмом.

Ключевые слова: интертекстуальность, мультикультурализм, Чекано, постмодернистические игры, контекст.