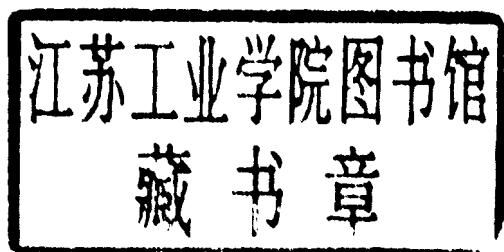


Andrzej Kopcewicz

# Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fictions

Edited by Janusz Semrau

Intertextual Transactions in American and Irish Fictions



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Contents

Editor’s preface ..... 7

    The intertextual paradigm ..... 9

    Auster, Emerson, Borges, Burton, and Melville’s Scrivener ..... 21

    The machine in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas Pynchon .. 35

    Donald Barthelme’s *Snow White* and James Joyce’s *Finnegans wake* ..... 59

*Finnegans wake* and Donald Barthelme’s *The Dead Father* ..... 73

    From *Finnegans wake* to Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* ..... 105

*Finnegans wake* in *At Swim-Two-Birds* and in Gilbert Sorrentino’s *Mulligan stew* ..... 131

Index of names ..... 189



## Editor's preface

This volume is a posthumous revised edition of selected essays by Andrzej Kopcewicz on intertextual transactions in classic works of American and Irish fiction, published originally between 1992 and 2005. Nobody needs convincing that the notion of intertextuality/intertextualities is an axiom of contemporary literary and cultural theory and practice. "Originally conceived and used by a critical avant-garde as a form of protest against established cultural and social values, it today serves even conservative literary scholars ..." (Heinrich Plett quoted in Klooss 1998: 3). Professor Kopcewicz was never really any part of that discourse. His interest – *sine ira et studio* [without anger or partisanship] – was always informed by a genuinely humanistic motivation, including the erotics of intellectual curiosity and the sheer love of reading. And when he eventually admitted to being "a paranoid intertextualist", he would offer it in good humor, characteristically tongue-in-cheek.

Andrzej Kopcewicz (1934-2007) earned his academic distinctions on the strength of his main book publications in the field of Modernist poetry and the history of U.S. literature. However, his special literary fascination and scholarly pursuit – essentially its own reward – seems to have been precisely Intertextuality. It was first sparked in his student days by James Joyce's notoriously formidable *magnum opus*, a work that was to continue stimulating it for the years. Professor Kopcewicz had meant to write and publish, or trans-act, a much bigger intertextual study. The present publication is perforce merely a transcription of some of the ideas he had been developing towards that project. By way of apology, as well as announcing a relevant critical trope, it may be appropriate to pastiche in an intertextual fashion an early Anglo-American poet here: "In better dress to trim thee was my mind, / But nought save home-spun Cloth, i'th' house I find ..." (Bradstreet [c. 1666] 1977: 43)<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand – to immediately supplement the above – Andrzej Kopcewicz in a very profound sense entertained the fundamental appreciation of the literary text as text and, as a colleague has put it so aptly, he was able to "intuit the arabesque curve and the strange, migratory behaviour of the literary sign with a rare penetration. His affinities were for the great masters of the *grammē*: Joyce, Barthelme, Pynchon, Melville, and Riffaterre" (Kuhn 2009: 303).

The volume opens with an early theoretical essay and proceeds *mutis mutandis* by their original chronology with the author's analytical discussions of the interrelatedness, overlappings, entanglements, and reciprocities of individual texts by Paul Auster and Herman Melville – Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas Pynchon – Donald Barthelme and James Joyce – James Joyce, Flann

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<sup>1</sup> "In this array, 'mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam / In Criticks hands, beware thou dost not come (Bradstreet 1977: 43).

O'Brien, and Gilbert Sorrentino. Though different in length, there obtains with each of these pieces a self-apparent appropriateness; to dip into the front matter of Sorrentino's intertextual chowder (1979) – each one keeps its essential “selfness”. The quasi-chapters they constitute lend themselves therefore very well to being read in any order, selectively, and in isolation. Given a literal perspective by incongruity, the Joycean premise of the book, however, is that a commodius vicus of recirculation (type by tope, letter from litter, word at ward) may bring the reader in any case (back) to the beginning. And even if, in a rough-guide manner, it should turn out that in “the buginning is the woid” (Joyce [1939] 1964: 378), we have on hand *Finnegans wake*'s transcriptive and transatlantic postmodern rehearsal to remind us that “[r]epetition is reality” (Barthelme 1975: 87).

Janusz Semrau

Poznań, February 2-28, 2009

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## The intertextual paradigm<sup>1</sup>

Arguing from the premise that the whole of literature has a simultaneous existence, that it composes and comprises a simultaneous order, T. S. Eliot builds in his essay "Tradition and the individual talent" a synoptic view of literary tradition. He posits that "what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it"; consequently, "the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered" – since "the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Eliot [1919] 1975a: 38). Such a view of literature as a self-regulating organism, a polyphony of voices contrapuntally speaking across the temporalized space of history claims for all works of art a synchronic dimension and calls into question both the notion of originality and the hierarchy of sources. In fact, Eliot cautions the readers of poetry against the "prejudice" of praising the poet for the so-called uniqueness of his work, and urges them to abandon the search for what is believed to be distinctively individual in a work, what is supposed to constitute "the peculiar essence of the man", allegedly distinguishing him from his predecessors. The point is that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (Eliot 1975a: 38).

What is of interest here, particularly to a student of intertextuality, is not so much the fact of the poet's immediate or remote predecessor speaking through his own text, but the reversal of that order – the contention that the later poet's voice can be heard in the text of his predecessor. This is precisely how the Fisher King of *The waste land* (Eliot 1922) merges with his medieval prototype and how he can be recognized in the figure of Jake Barnes in Hemingway's *The sun also rises* (1926), for example. A line from a Webster, a Middleton, or a Verlaine in a poem by T. S. Eliot will acquire not only a new contextual meaning – it will also bring that meaning to its original context. All this, along with the famous dictum about the extinction of the poet's personality, places Eliot's literary theories in close proximity to the basic assumptions of some of the current intertextual investigations.

If we assume that a creative act, be it of inscribing or of deciphering, is a function of prior reading, if we assume that all writing and reading are supplementary processes, and that the supplements – whether those of selection or serendipity, or those that ghost-like haunt a new text asking to be fleshed out – are also functions of yet prior reading(s), then we must assume that all creative acts are inherently intertextual phenomena. With this recognition, we must also assume that all authors are first of all readers. Eliot acknowledges this by defining the

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1 This is a revised version of Kopcewicz (1992). Used by permission of the publisher.

poet's mind as "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" (Eliot 1975a: 41).<sup>2</sup> Equating "letter" with "litter", James Joyce compares all literature to a rubbish heap (mound) of the past, present and future texts, out of which his own work is also composed, and to which it inevitably returns: "[W]riting thithaways end to end and turning, turning and end to end hithaways writing and with lines of litters slittering up and louds of latters slettering down ... why, pray, sign anything as long as every word, letter, penstroke, paperspace is a perfect signature of its own?" (Joyce [1939] 1964: 114-115). According to Donald Barthelme ([1967] 1971: 97), language is a "trash phenomenon" – it is in fact "all there is". Also, a literary artifact is merely a "rehearsal" of other literary artifacts and of other literary events (Barthelme 1975: 93). Mikhail Bakhtin (1982) teaches that texts enter into a "dialogue" with other texts. A "dialogical" text recognizes its own difference, but as "dialogue" can only be effected through an intertextual intercourse, or trans-action, the generic boundaries become immediately problematic. An exemplary contemporary text, whether modernist or postmodernist, is particularly conscious of its dialogical nature since it tends to absorb, accommodate, transform, and otherwise turn to its own use a plethora of discourses, language registers, genres, styles, citations, structures and themes – through which it fades into other texts. The example of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is only too well known. In *The sot-weed factor*, John Barth (1960) enters into an ironic dialogue with the text of the American colonial history in the hope of "replenishing" the exhausted form of the novel. In *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), in itself an ironic compound of borrowed texts, its author Flann O'Brien postulates a "limbo" of fictional characters:

The entire corpus of existing literature should be regarded as a limbo from which discerning authors should draw their characters as required, creating only when they failed to find a suitable existing puppet. The modern novel should be largely a work of reference. Most authors spend their time saying what has been said before – usually said much better. A wealth of references to existing works would acquaint the reader instantaneously with the nature of each character, would obviate irksome explanations, and would effectively preclude mountebanks, upstarts, thimblerriggers and persons of inferior education from an understanding of contemporary literature.

(O'Brien [1939] 1967: 25)

Articulated at the beginning of the twentieth century, this proposition was probably meant as a joke. However, O'Brien himself did draw upon well-known sources for his fictional characters. One of them is Finn Mac Cool, the legendary

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2 "If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of 'sublimity' misses the mark" (Eliot 1975a: 41).

hero of Ireland, who happens to be also the eponymous hero of Joyce's most famous novel *Finnegans wake* (1939). In O'Brien's fifth and last novel, *The Dalkey archive* (1964), we meet James Joyce in propria persona, in turn. The author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans wake* makes also a brief appearance in Gilbert Sorrentino's *Mulligan stew* (1979), a more recent intertextual novelistic construct, dedicated to Brian O'Nolan – real name of author Flann O'Brien – from whose *At Swim-Two-Birds* the American postmodernist drew the major characters for his work. Of course, not to know that behind *Mulligan stew* looms a shadow of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, of *The great Gatsby*, and a welter of other texts, will not make for a defective reading. It is nevertheless rather obvious that (against "persons of inferior education") intertextual reading does imply an elitist reader of sorts.

The sense of a work of art belonging to and deriving from a community of letters ('litters') is often expressed by the artists seeing themselves as scavengers and plagiarists. William Faulkner claims that the author is really of no importance – "If I had not existed, someone would have written me, Hemingway, Dostoevsky, all of us" – and goes on to suggest that a writer is completely "amoral" in that "he will borrow, beg, or steal from anybody and everybody to get the work done" (Cowley 1958: 122-123). We all remember T. S. Eliot's claim that only the best poets know how to steal, or Ezra Pound's: "Great poets seldom make bricks without straw. They pile up all the excellences they can beg, borrow, or steal from their predecessors and contemporaries, and then set their own inimitable light atop of the mountain" (Pound 1910: 251).

The notions of originality, of authenticity, of repetition, of texts as stolen goods, of the artist as thief, copyist, plagiarist, are particularly vividly brought into play in *Finnegans wake*. Its script (read: Shem) is accused of all possible intertextual 'crimes'. "Who can say how many pseudostylistic shamiana, how few or how many ... piously forged palimpsests slipped in the first place ... from his pelagiarist pen" (Joyce 1964: 181-182) – it is the pen of a plagiarist and a pelagian scribe, a copyist of texts already copied, the pen of Joyce himself. This is the notorious "poorjoist" and the "prosodite" (the prostitute of prose and prosody), the "notesnacker", the author of the "refurloined notepaper" (the twice purloined letter), "a polyhedron of scripture" (Joyce 1964: 113, 107). This is also the last word in "stolentelling" in which "[e]very dimmed letter ... is a copy" (Joyce 1964: 424). In Barthelme's *Snow White* the heroine, herself a poet, yearns for "some words in the world that were not the words I always hear", to which she hears: "Fish slime", "Injunctions!", "Murder and create!" (Barthelme 1971: 6).

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If there is no virginity in language since all the words have been already used, adulterated, and exhausted, then what looks like a new textual combination is in fact always also a repetition. Absolute newness and originality, a yearning for

prelapsarian innocence, may indeed be a romantic phantom, a fallacy of the origin(s). Yet, the admission of stealing and plagiarism need not spell the confusion of impotence and exhaustion of creative energies; it may offer a perverse axiological metaphor for a strategy of writing – intertextuality as an ongoing process of textual self-consciousness, a self-reflexive impulse of a text in dialogue with other texts. A text, Raymond Federman offers (1976: 565-566), is in fact always a pre-text, a text waiting to be completed by the reading process: “It is a MONTAGE/COLLAGe of thoughts, reflections, meditations, quotations, pieces of my own (previous) discourse (critical, poetic, fictional, published and unpublished) ... For PLAGIARISM read also PLAYGIARISM”. “Playgiarism” is a happy Federman pun implying play in thievery; a text lifted (Joyce’s stolen fruit or a forged cheque), displaced and redeemed thereby in an intertextual word-play; indeed, in an intertextual game. It is in this kind of context that Barthelme’s “rehearsal” can be read as a metaphor for intertextual transactions. Etymologically, ‘rehearsal’ derives from ‘hearse’, meaning a funeral procession, burying; but it can also refer to harrowing, reharrowing, raking over (OED) – burying litter (letters in a text) and thus cultivating it for a new crop. This brings to mind Joycean “superfetation” – the “burrowing of one world in another” which, we are advised, is one of the keys to the exuberant dynamism of *Finnegans wake* (Campbell and Robinson 1961: 28-29).

Looking for a definition of intertextuality, one inevitably comes back to the seminal concept formulated in 1969 by Julia Kristeva, who in her semiotic approach to the word, the dialogue, and the novel claims that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 1980: 66). A text, then, is a combination of intertexts – enmeshed in parodying, complementing, reaffirming, or transforming, so that our subsequent reading of those intertexts is always modified by this particular transaction or inter-change. Intertextuality is a two-way, reciprocal process, inasmuch as the intertext is modified by its transformation in the text under scrutiny. The text under scrutiny cannot remain unaffected by its absorption of the intertext. Simply put, a text is always a potential inter-text. As the intertextual traces are often concealed, half-concealed, or distorted, it is obviously the reader’s role to identify and decipher them. For Michael Riffaterre, there must obtain lexical and structural correspondences between a text and its intertext, their lexis and syntagmas, for the intertextuality to materialize. “Intertextuality”, writes Riffaterre (1985: 41), is the reader’s perception that “a literary text’s significance is a function of a complementary or contradictory homolog, the intertext. The intertext may be another literary work or a text-like segment of the sociolect (a fragment of descriptive system, for instance) that shares not only a lexicon, but also a structure with the text”. Riffaterre focuses mainly upon small intertextual units, or subtexts.

How should we read (or mis-read) intertextually? *Finnegans wake* contains the following statement: “In the beginning is the void, in the muddle is the

sounddance and thereinofer you're in the unbewised again, vund vulsyvolsy" (Joyce 1964: 378). Any student of Joyce will easily recognize the interplay of two powerful intertexts here: Giambattista Vico's *The new philosophy*, and *The Bible* (John 1:1). The three syntagmas meaning the beginning, the middle, and "thereinofter" with "vulsyvolsy" ("Ricorso"), "waltzing" the sentence back to its beginning in the "woid", are a gram of Vico's cyclical history – the matrix informing the theme and structure of Joyce's book. "In the buginning is the woid ..." is of course a travesty of "In the beginning was the word"; it parodies the divine nature of the origin, of the creation of language and all communication. The "woid" – the word (voice) lapsed in the void is the fallen word, and hence God identified with Word in the intertext ("and Word was with God and the Word was God") – becomes fallen Divinity, or God of the Gnostics (another possible intertext). Divinity resounds in the "bug" of the "buginning", not only through its reference to the biblical "beginning", but also through its association with HCE, the hero of Joyce's novel, whose name – Earwicker – derives from "earwig", an insect, a beetle, a 'bug' believed to creep into people's ears, its verbal form also suggesting secret communication (OED). (In passing, it is worth recalling here that according to the medieval tradition, Mary conceived through the ear.) In the text of *Finnegans wake*, Earwicker is both the first man Adam, the fallen man, and also the All-Father, the divine principle/agent whose voice in the thunderclap spelling God's wrath is also the voice of the lapsed divinity – a garbled signifier audibly manifesting its inarticulateness as it falls into the void, i.e., the "woid" – incoherent but nonetheless frightening in its roaring stutter, echoed in the stutter that riddles HCE's utterances. Joyce's "bug" can also be read as a homophone of 'Bóg' – 'God' in Polish – which reasserts its sacral aspect, and through the phonetic association with the river Bug (also a homophone of 'Bóg') androgynizes itself as it enters into the intricate river symbolism of the text, the feminine sphere of the word belonging to ALP (the Goddess, the mother, the wife, the sister, the lover, etc.). In fact, the voice of HCE can be often heard precisely in the voice of his wife ALP.<sup>3</sup> The androgynous deity – it can also be read as the gnostic spirit trapped in the endlessly circulating contaminated materiality of the fallen language – looms here as a shadow of yet another intertext entering the intertextual game. Thus, the sentence under scrutiny, parodying its intertext ("In the beginning ..."), establishes itself as a subtext, a matrix, a simulacrum parodying the whole text, the "cyclewheeling history" (Joyce 1964: 186) of *Finnegans wake* – its de-

3 Neither would this reading be lost on Joyce himself. A meticulous reader of world maps, he knew enough of the Slavic languages not to fail to see the shadow of divinity in the name of the Polish river Bug. The pan-Slavic form "Bog" (God) appears on page 449 and, besides, Joyce lists such Slavic rivers as the Vistula (199), the Niemen (202), the Wieprz (204), the Prut (209), the Dniester (210); all of them in the vicinity of the river Bug. Cf. McHugh (1980).

sire to name the ineffable, to unveil the word in the “woid”, to de-void the Word. As a fall presupposes a rise, there is yet another reading of the same sentence, using possibly Vico’s *The new science* as an interpretant (an interpreting intertext). In other words, Joyce’s text filtered through Vico’s notion of genesis and the birth of human speech can be read as imitation of God’s voice in the thunder. Accordingly, it can be perceived not as a parody of its biblical intertext, but as reshaping itself towards its articulation – a manifestation of an emerging order, or at least a yearning for some such order. We see here ‘word’ collapsed into ‘void’, striving to redeem itself in its biblical intertext, and also the Gnostic soul arising from materiality in its longing for the perfection of the prelapsarian condition. This reading strips Earwicker of his divinity in that his characteristic stutter may well signify imperfect humanity now. Yet, his desacralization is only superficial since throughout the text of *Finnegans wake* stuttering is also always identified with the voice of God, the voice of a stuttering God. He will forever remain both human and divine. The fall and the rise – the basic elements of life and death, death and resurrection informing Joyce’s cosmos – remain not in a juxtapository but in a supplementary relationship to each other: the rise is inscribed in the fall. We can say that Joyce’s text contains both the parody of its origin and a denial of such parody (or a desire of self-fulfilment in the parodied intertext). Hence, the ultimate meaning is always deferred and, paradoxically, captured at the very juncture of difference. The validity of such a reading finds its substantiation in the dialectics of the novel subsumed in the trope-like notion of the unity of the contraries: “Direct opposites, since they are evolved by a common power, are polarized for reunion by the coalescence of their antipathies. As opposites, nevertheless, their respective destinies will remain distinctly diverse” (Campbell and Robinsn 1961: 89). Apparently, Joyce borrowed this conceptualization from Giordano Bruno, which indicates yet another intertext that can be usefully brought into play here.

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Since it derives from the science of sign, intertextuality is often appreciated in terms of literary semiotics and tends to be considered as part of comparative studies. Unlike comparative studies, however, disregarding sources, origins, and influences, it cuts across boundaries, closures, and generic fields. In order to generate its own semiosis, a text may answer any random call of an intertext from far beyond any horizon of expectations or presuppositions. Replacing the source-hunting with its own ‘text-hunting’, intertextuality is also in danger of a happy paranoid intellectualization. In other words, intertextuality calls for a system of constraints, rules, a model or – to use Charles Sanders Peirce’s term – some “ground” on which to play its game. It is in this respect that Riffaterre’s studies deserve scrutiny. Riffaterre replaces the reading along the text/intertext linear axis

(a common intertextual practice) with an intertextual model based on the triadic sign (sign, object, and interpretant) proposed by C. S. Peirce for semiotics. In its skeleton outline, Peirce's model assumes that a sign stands to somebody (the reader) for something (sign's object) in some respect or capacity, creating in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, the interpretant.<sup>4</sup> In Riffaterre's semiotic triangle, Peirce's sign is the text (a subtext or a segment of the text) that is perceived as the homolog of an intertext (object). "It stands to the reader for the intertext in this respect that the meaning it conveys depends on the text's mode of actualization of the intertext (completing, negating, reversing, etc. the representations composing the intertext)" (Riffaterre 1985: 44). The object of the literary sign (text) is the first intertext, whereas the interpretant is the second intertext, one that the text brings to bear on its relationship with the first text (object). The interpretant is "equivalent to, or more developed than, the text. It therefore also stands for the object but from another perspective indicated by, and derived from, a feature of the literary sign (i.e., a lexical or syntagmatic component of the text). This derivation is encoded in the text, enabling the reader permanently to retrieve the interpretation that generated it" (Riffaterre 1985: 44). In other words, Riffaterre builds a semiotic system of literary interpretation that posits a three-way relationship: among the text, the primary intertext, and the secondary intertext (interpretant). The function of the latter is to mediate between the text and the intertext; it translates, interprets, or defines the intertextual transformations. (My second reading of Joyce's "In the beginning ..." through a feature from Vico's *The new science* may be taken as an approximation of the working of Riffaterre's triadic model.) Riffaterre also postulates that all three units should be variants of the same structural matrix. They should share not only the same lexis but also the same syntagmatic organization, which will result in a circular, oscillatory reading. This is extending a circular hermeneutics in that it contains the semiosis that Peircean interpretant generates within the field of intertextual self-reflexivity. Riffaterre concerns himself with small textual segments-subtexts, and his model provides for exemplary intertextual reading, as illustrated by his interpretations of a Kurt Vonnegut's subtext and a line from Achillini.<sup>5</sup> It also arrests a natural intertextual tendency – particularly that of deconstructive class – towards unbridled polysemy.

4 The most commonly cited Peirce's definition of the sign reads as follows: "A sign or *representamen* is something which stands for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of that representamen" (Peirce 1932: 228).

5 For a critique of Riffaterre's and Peirce's triad see Morgan (1985).

Intertextual reading seems to be predicated upon circularity in that the texts are interchangeable, depending upon the perspective of perception. A reading based upon the Peircean triadic model in which the interpretant is not treated instrumentally, but as a sign that in its own right produces in turn a subsequent triad, may issue forth a spirally unfolding paradigm that would accommodate texts larger than intratextual subtexts – separate texts – and channel their inevitable transformation(s). It would constitute a compromise between closed intertextuality and the waywardness of deconstructive semiosis. However, in order for such a paradigm to materialize, intertextuality should perhaps open itself up to more than mere discursive textual investigations. Except for example Gérard Genette's study *Palimpsests* (original in French in 1982), intertextuality is mainly discourse-oriented. Consequently, we are sometimes admonished against confusing it with thematics, source-influence relationships, imitations, etc. If we assume that what meets the eye in a literary text is only a surface manifestation of the multiplicity of unseen but equally tangible signifieds shaping themselves into a total teleology, that a code is inseparable from text or texture from structure, a paradigm generated by a thematic matrix would activate into an intertextual play elements intrinsic to the unified poetics of form and content, of discourse and structure.

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Jorge Luis Borges claimed that he could recognize the voice of Franz Kafka (of *The castle*) in the texts of his precursors from diverse literatures and periods: Zeno, Han Yu, Kierkegaard, Leon Bloy, Lord Dunsany. Since Borges's claim implies intertextuality, his conclusions deserve to be quoted in full:

If I am not mistaken, the heterogeneous selections I have enumerated resemble Kafka's work: if I am not mistaken, not all of them resemble each other, and this fact is the significant one. Kafka's idiosyncrasy, in greater or lesser degree, is present in each of these writings, but if Kafka had never written, we would not perceive it; that is to say, it would not exist. The poem "Fears and Scruples" by Browning is like a prophecy of Kafka's stories, but our reading of Kafka refines and changes our reading of the poem perceptibly. ... The fact is, that each writer *creates* his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. In this correlation the identity or plurality of men matters not at all. The first Kafka of *Betrachtung* is less a precursor of the Kafka of the shadowy myths and atrocious institutions than is Browning or Lord Dunsany.

(Borges 1964: 108)

Note 1 cites T. S. Eliot's "Points of view" as the source of Borges' notion of literary tradition implied here. The fact that Kafka writes his precursors in as much as his precursors write Kafka is a veritable intertextual notion, as is the fact that all those writers may not know one another. What is of interest here, however, is the fact that Borges is using Kafka's text to read texts apparently not re-