

REVIEWS

The Cambridge History of American Literature. Volume One:

1590-1820. Sacvan Bercovitch, ed. New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1994

(Jerzy Durczak)

Agata Preis-Smith: „*Inventions of Farewell*”: *American Elegiac Poetry from the Puritans to Modern Times*. Warszawa: University of Warsaw. Institute of English Studies, 1995: Ss 229 (Joanna Durczak)

Hartmut Eggert/Erhard Schütz/Peter Sprengel (Hrsg.): *Faszination des Organischen. Konjunkturen einer Kategorie der Moderne*. München: Indicium-Verlag, 1995 (Janusz Golec)

G. Häubllein/M. Müller/P. Rusch/T. Scherling/L. Wertenschlag: *Memo. Wortschatz- und Fertigkeitstraining zum Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache*. Berlin und München: Langenscheidt 1995 (Lucyna Krzyslak)

MISCELLANEOUS

Jan SŁOWIŃSKI: Transkrypcja fonetyczna w komputerowych edytorach tekstu

LITERATURE

LUBELSKIE MATERIAŁY NEOFILOLOGICZNE NR 19, 1995

Steven Carter
Department of English and Communications
California State University, Bakersfield

„Hail Nothing Full of Nothing”:
A Note on Hemingway and Tolstoy

Thanks in large part to Gertrude Stein's poetics of repetition, from the very beginning of his career Ernest Hemingway made it his business to learn the nuances of the supple and suggestive indefinite pronoun *it*. From „Up in Michigan”:

Liz liked Jim very much. She liked it the way he walked over from the shop and often went to the kitchen door to watch for him to start down the road. She liked it about his mustache. She liked it about how white his teeth were when he smiled. She liked it very much that he didn't look like a blacksmith. She liked it how much D.J. Smith and Mrs. Smith liked Jim.

As many commentators have noted, the reiterations in this oft-cited passage create powerful emotional and erotic momentum; the cumulative *its* build to a climax — „Liking that made her feel funny” — a lexical whole which is larger than the sum of the parts (81).

In „A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” Hemingway puts the indefinite pronoun to more sophisticated use:

It was not fear or dread. It was nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too. It was only that and light was all

it needed and a certain cleanness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it was all nada ... (383)

To explicate the curiously-worded phrase, „light was all it needed,“ we may compare how two writers, one in the original and one in translation, „signify“ *nada* by attempting to make something out of nothing in words. In „The Death of Ivan Ilych“ by Leo Tolstoy, the prose writer Hemingway most admired, the stricken protagonist mediates on the prospect of being translated into nothing:

It would come and stand before him and look at him, and he would be petrified and the light would die out of his eyes, and he would again begin asking himself if *It* alone was true ... And what was worst of all was that *It* drew his attention to itself not in order to make him take some action but only to make him look at *It* ...

He would go to his study, lie down, and again be alone with *It*, face to face with *It*. And nothing could be done with *It* except look at *It* and shudder. (1972-1973)

Not surprisingly, for both writers the indefinite *it* is only the signifier capable of representing *nada* on the one hand, death on the other. There are, of course, differences in the situations of each protagonist. In Tolstoy's long story, the sick Ivan undergoes a pilgrim's progress aimed at the specter of nothingness; in the minimalist realm of „A Clean, Well-Lighted Place“ the healthy waiter simply addresses *nada* as a fact of life. Ivan dies, of course, while Hemingway's meditative waiter goes home to sleep. And yet, for both writers there is more to the prospect of self-erasure than the invincible indefiniteness of *it*. As Hemingway's waiter suggests, the nature of *it* is complementary; *it* „needs“ something in order to be *and* not to be. That something is light.

One interpretation of the line, „light was all it needed,“ is that light is *necessary* to keep *nada* at bay. Another reading suggests that light is *sufficient* to keep *nada* at bay. A third reading, however — one which takes what the waiter says at face value — problematizes both of these: *nada needs light*. Light is necessary, not to keep *nada* at bay, but to convert it into manna for being, even as light in the natural world energizes the production of food through photosynthesis. According to this

reading of the line, *nada* is a source of compassion and charity on the part of the older waiter, for it is the presence of the absence of *nada* which moves him to keep the cafe open „for all those who need a light for the night“ (382).

As for Ivan, when he finally shifts the focus from himself to others („Yes, I am making them wretched“) the complementary nature of *it* also becomes apparent. Suddenly, Ivan falls

through the hole and the bottom there was a light ... He sought his former accustomed fear of death and did not find it ... There was no fear because there was no death ... In place of death there was light.
„So that's what it is!“ he suddenly exclaimed aloud.
„What joy!“ (1988-1989)

Ivan has now acquired a habit of mind similar to the one assigned to the older waiter by Hemingway when, in reply to his own rhetorical question, „What did he fear?“ the narrator of „A Clean, Well-Lighted Place“ states, „It was not fear or dread.“ Then, as he winds up his *nada* prayer while standing before the „shining steam pressure coffee machine“ of a bar where „the light is very bright,“ the older waiter „smiled“ (383). In a fashion strikingly parallel to Ivan's, therefore, therefore the dual nature of the waiter's affect is also designed to accommodate the complementary nature of *it*.

Neither of these fictions is intended to untie the Gordian knot of doubt, which, like the Russian Ivan and the unnamed Spanish waiter, readers must confront alone and on their own. Instead, the elucidations of *it* by Tolstoy and Hemingway re-tie the knot of doubt, as it were, by foregrounding *something* and *nothing* not as opposites but as complementary entities. Among other things, this helps us to understand why Hemingway balances the famous sentence „The light is very good and also, now, there are shadows of the leaves“ with the coordinate *and* instead of the binary *but* (382).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Edwin Barton for his advice concerning an earlier draft of this essay.

Works Cited

- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Scribners, 1938.
- Tolstoy, Leo. "The Death of Ivan Ilych." trans. Louis and Alymer Maude. In Maynard Mack et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*. 5th Continental ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1987

Maria Falska

**Quelques réflexions sur l'enfance et le passé
- deux sources de la personnalité du héros
dans les pièces noires de Jean Anouilh**

Il convient de préciser que notre étude n'a pas la prétention d'aborder le problème de la personnalité du héros dans les pièces noires de Jean Anouilh dans son ensemble, mais d'attirer l'attention sur certains de ses aspects. De même, nous n'avons pas l'intention de nous pencher sur les différentes catégories de personnages que les critiques distinguent dans l'oeuvre de J. Anouilh, mais de porter notre regard sur une catégorie bien déterminée. C. Borgal¹ observe que cette division se ramène à trois types de personnages qui sont: les riches, les pauvres, et les indifférents. Les riches „sont ceux que la nature a comblés, ceux pour qui tout est simple (...), ceux qui croient qu'ils peuvent souverainement décider de tout et ne savent pas ce que c'est qu'un obstacle”². Les indifférents qui „portent la livrée ou l'uniforme des maîtres d'hôtel, des logeuses, des valets de chambre, des gardes” - sont „ceux à qui tout indiffère, et qui ne voient pas les problèmes”³. Les pauvres (leur pauvreté n'est pas uniquement celle de leur position sociale ni leur situation financière) - sont des véritables héros qui se détachent nettement des autres, et qui, eux mêmes, prennent soin de souligner plusieurs fois qu'ils en sont distincts. Comme le drame de la personnalité est celui de la troisième catégorie de personnages, notre attention sera portée à celle-ci.

¹ C. Borgal, *L'Univers dramatique de Jean Anouilh*, [in:] *La Table ronde*, novembre 1965.

² op. cit., p.62.

³ op. cit., p.62.