Trombiková, Martina

Biblical intertextuality in German novels since 1990 : the use, function and importance : summary

SUMMARY

Biblical Intertextuality in German Novels since 1990
The Use, Function and Importance

In her monograph, Martina Trombiková deals with the strategies of biblical inter-textuality in the contemporary German literature, the analysis of which is aimed at the cognition of the rate of spiritual and profane contexts and the motivations for literary works. In terms of intertextuality, the principal characters of German novels (1990 – 2011) refer to characters from the Bible, such as Adam and Eve, Jesus and Judas, through their character properties and experiences. All the liter-ary texts feature a common phenomenon – they are set in the present time and their principal characters are represented by modern heroes who have only little to do with the biblical characters. Yet – based on the repeated intertextual refer-ences – one can speak about the relationship of these characters to the Bible. These references include biblical characters, their typical character properties as well as events and scenes connected with those characters, such as fishers of men, the Immaculate Conception, resurrection and last words of Jesus Christ on the Cross. These motifs can be found in new contexts of literary fictional worlds: a fisher of men sits in a greenhouse at an underground station, the Immaculate Conception in the 20th century becomes a TV sensation, the one who resurrects the dead is a murderer, and the last words of Jesus Christ come out of the mouth of a drunken teacher. In these fictional worlds, the Christian religion is not a natu-ral part of world perception.

The aim of this work is to answer the question how and why the contemporary German authors use the intertextual references to the Bible in their novels. What is the function and substance of the biblical intertextuality in the contemporary

German novels after 1990? Focus of this work is on the way how intertextual references are placed in the analysed novels, the changes as compared to the biblical pre-texts, and the new contexts within which the aforementioned intertextual references are integrated. In contrast to what is mentioned above, the work does not try to write the history of the way in which the biblical characters are depicted, as this can be found in other scientific works (Kuschel/Langenhorst/Motté).

The biblical intertextuality in German novels is not a new trend of the 1990s, and for this reason, this work also brings up the literary and historical development of the theme. The hitherto research (mostly that conducted by Ziolkowski and Motté) provides important contributions to the literary treatment of the biblical model, however, without a direct connection to the use of biblical intertextuality. It is this monograph that is supposed to fill the gap. The monograph is expected to compare the latest novels with the older ones in which also appear biblical characters or main characters that resemble the biblical ones, such as Miriam, Judas, Jesus, Pilatus and his wife. In contrast to the newest novels from the corpus of this work, the story of the older novels is set both in the historic period of biblical characters and in the present and future. The development of this theme is sketched based on selected texts from the "Christian literature" which can be assigned to the German wave of the originally French movement in the 1920s and 1930s, which was called *renouveau catholique* ["Catholic Revival"]. The analysed texts include: *Die Frau des Pilatus* (1955) by Gertrud von Le Fort, *Pilatus* (1959) by Werner Koch, *Jesus in Osaka* (1970) by Günter Herburger, *Der Fall Judas* (1975) by Walter Jens and *Mirjam* (1983) by Luisa Rinser.

The work is divided according to two ways of how the biblical model was treated in the literature: 1. Historicizing and paraphrasing treatment: The historical paraphrase adheres to its biblical model: The story and its place, or the characters´ names are identical with the biblical ones; at the same time, a space of new interpretations opens. 2. Transfigurative and updating treatment: In contrast to the first one, the second way of treatment is further away from the biblical model. The story is translocated to the contemporary time of the author, the characters´ names are changed. In the fictional transfiguration, not characters identical with the biblical ones, but modern heroes appear; however, the story is still based on the biblical model.

It is apparent from the comparison to older novels, in which way the biblical intertextuality is used in the newest novels after 1990. It is possible to speak both about common features and about changes in the use of biblical intertextuality. It is common for all these novels that the intertextual references are marked at more levels at the same time, and that the texts work with what they took-over from the biblical pre-text, which gives rise to a new point of view. In addition to the common elements, we must speak about the contrasts in the use of biblical intertextuality. The first changes in the development of the biblical intertextuality´s

use include the gradual quantitative reduction of biblical intertextuality, and the weakened marking of biblical intertextuality in the para-texts and external system of communication. In its historic paraphrase, the novels directly refer to biblical characters (such as *Die Frau des Pilatus* or *Pilatus. Erinnerungen*). While in the older fictional transfiguration, for instance *Jesus in Osaka*, the titles of the text still refer to the biblical models as in the case of a historic paraphrase, this applies to the newer texts of fictional transfigurations only partially. If their titles contain names referring to the biblical pre-text, they appear in a changed form (for instance *Adam und Evelyn*). In the newest texts with transfigurative elements, these are rather connotations than direct references to the Bible (such as in the case of the novels *Muttersohn*, *Consummatus* and *Johnny Shines oder Die Wiedererweckung der Toten*). In the texts *Pong* and *Pong Redivivus,* we observe the complete lack of biblical intertextuality both in the title, and in the paratexts. On one side, the use of biblical intertextuality is on the decrease in the titles of novels, on the other side, the use of biblical intertextuality and its marking is on the increase in the mottos of novels (for instance in the texts *Adam und Evelyn* and *Johnny Shines*). The results show that the biblical intertextuality, and thus the direct connection between the novels and the Bible, is not obvious at the first glance. The biblical intertextuality in the external system of communication is less recognizable, too. It is ever less represented and ever more disseminated within the characters´ profile, and the story. The intertextual references are more and more brief. In the historicizing paraphrase, the literary texts (*Die Frau des Pilatus, Pilatus. Erinnerungen* and *Mirjam*) included constellations of characters, countryside, historic era or longer story sequences referring to the biblical pre-text. In the fictional transfiguration (*Jesus in Osaka*, *Adam und Evelyn* and *Muttersohn*), the biblical intertextuality is reduced to particular biblical characters, or even to some of their properties. Through this, the reader´s chance to recognize them is ever lower. In the texts with transfigurative elements (*Johnny Shines*, *Pong* and *Consummatus*), only very few intertextual references or allusions appear, which are not immediately recognizable at the first glance because they no longer relate only to the typical properties and attributes of biblical characters.

The gradual transformation in the function of biblical intertextuality in the characters´ profile, and thus the transformation in the role of the characters, represents another stage in the development of the use of biblical intertextuality. Although the biblical intertextuality is still part of the characters´ profile, the intertextual references to the biblical characters are no longer supposed to identify the novel characters with the biblical ones (for instance in the texts *Jesus in Osaka*, *Adam und Evelyn* and *Muttersohn*). They are new independent characters who only share particular properties with the biblical characters. The intertextual references in the characters' profile no longer relate to one place in the Bible, but either to more places or sections of the Bible (such as gospels) in which

a particular property is described more times. They also no longer relate to one biblical character but to more of them (for instance in the case of the characters in the text *Johnny Shines*). Through the integration of more biblical characters in one novel character, inexact parallels are made, which contributes to the higher complexity of novel characters.

The third transformation can be observed at the level of the story. The determinant story elements, which run in parallel with the biblical story, are gradually reduced. This change can be observed mainly in the newest literary texts with transfigurative elements. These do not work with the story of the biblical pre-text to as large extent as the novels with fictional transfiguration do (for instance *Adam und Evelyn*). For this reason, Martina Trombiková differs two strategies: The first one is the strategy to come up to the readers´ expectation of the treated and updated biblical story in the newest fictional transfigurations (for instance in the novels *Muttersohn* and *Adam und Evelyn*). The second strategy is the strategy of betrayal of the readers´ expectations of the treated and updated biblical story, or surpassing of these expectations in the positive sense of the word. Even in the second strategy, it is intertextually referred to the biblical characters, however, determinant story sequences, which would run in parallel with the biblical story, are missing there. In author´s opinion, the innovative approach to the treatment of the biblical model based on the use of biblical intertextuality consists in the fact that the narrated story differs from the biblical one but simultaneously it intertextually refers to biblical characters. This concerns the texts by Patrick Roth and Sibylle Lewitscharoff.

Another transformation includes the gradual quantitative growth in biblical intertextuality and its marking in the internal system of communication. The characters from literary texts do not only resemble the biblical ones, but they are even familiarized with the Bible. On the one side, the quotations from the Bible served – in the older texts of historical paraphrase and fictional transfiguration – either as illustrations of the depicted events (for instance in the text *Die Frau des Pilatus*), or as an identifying mark for the novel characters that resemble those from the Bible (for instance in the novel *Jesus in Osaka*), or as an impulse for the tackling with a different theme than with the biblical one (for instance in the novel *Jesus in Osaka*). On the other side, these quotations served for the tackling with the biblical pre-text, especially as an expression of the Bible criticism, especially in relation to the Christian belief (for instance in the novel *Pilatus. Erinnerungen*), or as a correction of the passed-down biblical imagination (for instance in the novel *Mirjam*). The knowledge of the Bible becomes apparent even in the newest texts, and it moves through the internal system of communication to the forefront (except for the novel *Adam und Evelyn*, whose main characters live in the GDR and do not know the Bible much). Either the resemblance between a character from the novel and that from the Bible is explicitly thematised in the fictional world

(for instance in the novel *Muttersohn*), or the words from the Bible quoted by the characters point out the influence of the Bible on the given character in the novel (for instance in the texts *Johnny Shines* and *Consummatus*). The Bible more times appears in the novel as a physical object (for instance in the texts *Adam und Evelyn* and *Pong*). Then the novel characters or the narrator copes with the Bible there. Either they discuss about the biblical story (for instance in the novel *Adam und Evelyn*), or its content is unilaterally, i.e. without a partner in the discussion, criticized (for instance in the text *Pong*). Thus, one can speak about a distance of the novel characters from the biblical pre-text. This means, that the characters from the novel no longer occupy the biblical stories; they are outside the biblical world, however, they know about it very well.

All in all, one can speak about a gradual intensification of biblical intertextuality in the sense of a critical debate about the biblical pre-text. Within the debate, the point of view is moved from the biblical context to the out-of-biblical one (for instance in the novel *Adam und Evelyn*, in which the search for freedom in 1989 is thematised, whereby the search is compared to the biblical expulsion from Paradise). The biblical material is confronted with the profane context, which gives rise to friction (for instance in the text *Johnny Shines*, in which the theme of the Last Supper blends into the crime, or in the text *Pong* where appears an aura of the main character as of the one who was selected based on his divine and superhuman profile). The tension between the old (biblical) and the new context bears witness to the high intertextual intensity.

This is also testified by more frequent changes as compared to the biblical pre-text. Changes in the intertextual references appear (for example, when Adam gives names to animals instead of women, or when Evelyn offers different kinds of fruits instead of the apple, or when Percy restores to health only the psychically ill instead of all those ill etc.). This is one of the reasons while the biblical intertextuality in literary texts becomes less clear. As the novel characters gradually remote from the biblical ones, to which they intertextually refer, so the themes of novels are moving away from the biblical issues.

Despite the fact (or perhaps because of it), the author of this work asks herself which special meaning the *biblical* intertextuality has in the analysed novels. In general, it can be said that the special meaning of the *biblical* intertextuality in literary texts consists in the possibility to give rise to a *religious* dimension. This means that – based on the reading – a reader can reflect the religious themes or the issues of belief. However, if we presuppose that the biblical intertextuality mentioned in the texts automatically makes to reader think about religious questions or questions of the belief, we are wrong. The biblical intertextuality itself does not encourage the reader to reflect the religious themes. It is the newest texts analysed within this work that bear witness to that. If a religious dimension based on reading these texts emerges, this does not relate merely to the fact that

the biblical intertextuality is mentioned. If it emerges then this happens thanks to the whole text with all its levels. The author of this work comes to the conclusion that in terms of the newest literary texts, it is possible to speak about the emergence of a religious dimension mainly in the texts by Martin Walser and Sibylle Lewitscharoff. Especially the novel characters´ reflection of the God and belief instigate the religious question of the individual subjective belief, for example in the novel *Muttersohn*, or the issue related to force majeure in the text *Pong*, or the questions related to the "other world" in the novel *Consummatus*. These novels deal with general philosophical questions about the understanding of the world, which, however, overlap to the religious level at the same time. It is not the "religious" literature that is supposed to lead the readers to the pious uplift of spirits. The texts do not encourage the readers to convert to Christianity and they do not mediate religious contents. The religious themes are rather made questionable, or they are is depicted as one of the possibilities to understand the world.

In contrast to the novels which make it possible to approach to the religious issues, the corpus of this work also includes a novel about which one can say that it does not make it possible to approach to the religious issues, despite it uses the biblical intertextuality alongside other levels of the text. It is the novel *Adam und Evelyn* by Ingo Schulze which is an exception among the analyzed novels. This literary text relates to the biblical pre-text like to a comparative quantity to show that the central issue of the novel is immemorial and still topical. Because the story is set in the period of GDR, the religion is neither a matter-of-course for the characters, nor something with which they would cope.

It is also the text *Johny Shines* by Patrick Roth that occupies a special position among the analysed novels. In the case of this text, it is not possible to say unambiguously whether the approach to the religious reflections is made possible in it, or not. The themes, mentioned in the text, are on the line between the ethical and the religious issue. The mediation of ethics is common for both directions. The difference lies in where a higher instance, which decides about what is correct and what is bad, should be searched for – if by the human, as it is in the ethics, or by the God, as it is in the religion. This question cannot be answered based on the interpretation of the text and for this reason both variants must be taken into consideration.

The monograph by Martina Trombiková documents that despite the use of biblical intertextuality, the newest German literary texts do not encourage the readers to question the biblical stories and corresponding explanations and to reflect if a human shall believe in God or not. The reading of these novels does not have to lead to the direct coping with the Christian belief. The reader can read these texts even without a religious background. This confirms the hypothesis of the author of this work: It is not a rule for the contemporary German authors to primarily use a biblical pre-text in their texts to pose with the religious issues – as

can be seen in the texts by Ingo Schulze and Patrick Roth. The religious themes can occur there, however, they are not among the central themes of the novels. The spectrum of reflections of biblical motives in the contemporary German literature shows the semantic relations as well as – even to a larger extent - the alienation: the shift of biblical contexts to profane levels, and the independency of the literary treatment of biblical elements in contemporary novels.

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