



MODERN APOCRYPHA AS AN EXAMPLE OF CULTURAL MEMORY 'IN ACTION'

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PROLOGUE

The article is based on some methodological considerations included in the book under the work title *The Vitality of a Symbol. The Semiotics of Modern Apocrypha*. As connected with some fragments of the not yet finalized work, the paper is not only highly theoretical but brief as well. That is the reason why it contains only a few examples of the presented ideas. More literary examples of the modern apocrypha have been meticulously examined and discussed in some further parts of the above-mentioned book: these are the chapters to which the article is not related.

The main goal of the paper is to present and summarize some concepts and intuitions created by scholars working in the field of memory studies, and to apply the ideas to the analyses of the phenomenon of the modern apocryphal writings. *The Vitality of a Symbol* discusses also a semiotic perspective (e.g. the semiotic instrumentarium created by Yuri Lotman) in which the modern apocrypha present their cultural value and appear as a tool of inter-semiotic translation and cultural autocommunication.

The text is focused on the relations between the canon and the apocrypha understood in a 'traditional', narrow sense: as the religious canon and as unorthodox writings connected to the religious perspective of the Holy Scripture. One can of course find a lot of different understandings of the terms 'canon' and 'apocrypha', e.g. for Aleida Assmann or the Polish scholar, Danuta Szejnert, the first term includes also ancient Greek myths and classical literature. By extension, any literary variation on such a canon

(or any variation on a given literary pattern) can be seen as an apocrypha. The analyses of the general distinction between canonical and non-canonical forms could be very interesting but in the field of cultural studies the discussion on the religious canon and apocryphal writings is crucial: religion is one of the most important cultural systems (Geertz) and as such plays an essential role in shaping the whole cultural semiosphere and the collective identity of a given group. A lot of classical literary texts (which can be also seen as canonical in a wider sense) use some narrative patterns, symbols, motifs or figures taken from both the Old and the New Testament, so the focus on the Holy Scripture as a kind of an 'ideal pattern of the canon' seems to be justified.

1. TRADITIONAL AND MODERN APOCRYPHA

The term 'apocrypha' most commonly refers to a set of texts of unknown or false authorship. In the narrow sense the apocryphal writings are connected with the Jewish and Christian traditions: such texts use motifs, figures, narratives and symbols taken from both the Old and the New Testament and often serve as a tool of unorthodox or heretic evangelization. They can also be interpreted as an instrument of 'filling the gaps' in the biblical canon. However, most academics notice that the term 'apocrypha' cannot be fully and sharply defined. There are several reasons why we are still not able to properly characterize such texts (Starowieyski 2006: 7), the most important of which is that there are no adequate criteria to name a given text an 'apocrypha':

- 1) The term 'apocrypha' is most frequently associated with a text with many references to the Holy Scripture. Such a text reinterprets canonical content in an 'unorthodox way' (of course, the term 'orthodoxy' needs to be every time referred to a specific confession and its guarding institution, a particular Church). Obviously the use of biblical content is not a sufficient condition (being at the same time a necessary one) for labelling a given text an 'apocrypha'. There is a huge amount of texts in the history of the Western literature, art and philosophy that deal with canonical symbols, figures and narratives to which the term in question cannot be applied. Such a 'definition' of an apocrypha is too broad on the one hand and too narrow on the other. It is too broad on grounds of Yuri Lotman's semiotic theory of culture in which

religious symbols are the nucleus of every culture and as such play an important role in the social universe of meanings, due to which they can be – and, in fact, are – used in various contexts, also non-religious ones. Not every such a use can be termed an apocrypha.

At the same time, it is too narrow to include different ‘intertextual games’ or ‘mystifications’, such as e.g. transformations or intersemiotic translations of ancient Greek mythology or classical Western literature, which according to some scholars should be regarded as apocrypha.

- 2) Another criterion used for determining whether a given text is an apocrypha is its ‘mysterious character’. This criterion is based on the etymology of the Greek word *apocryphos* which means ‘hidden’. The term was first applied by Origen to some gnostic texts but, with an exception of the two texts from Nag Hammadi: *The Apocryphon of James* (also known as *The Secret Book of James*) and *The Apocryphon of John*, it does not appear in any apocryphal text itself (Starowieyski 2006: 6). The ‘mysterious character’ of a text is not a proper criterion of an apocrypha, it is not even one of the basic qualities of the apocrypha in general: this type of literature has been very popular from the very beginnings.
- 3) Pseudonymy is said to be another characteristic feature of the apocrypha. Although most of the authors of apocryphal texts have actually used the biblical names, the method itself is typical not only of that kind of writings but of other ancient and medieval genres as well. The Polish scholar, Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, who deals with apocryphal writings, observes that one can find pseudonymity even in the Holy Scripture (Rubinkiewicz 1987: 11–12). According to him this tendency stems from the vitality and durability of Jewish religious thought, the superiority of the Law over the Revelation and the gradual marginalization of the institution of prophecy (Rubinkiewicz 1987: 14). Another Polish scholar, Marek Starowieyski, notes that in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages there was no law that reserved one’s right to one’s name or if there was, it was not held in high esteem. For that reason the use of someone else’s name (which was mostly a name of a chosen authority or of a famous person) was not interpreted as a crime or fraud. The choice of a name was usually inspired by the ‘spiritual

or intellectual relation' of the actual author with the supposed one (Starowieyski 2006: 9).

- 4) There are several reasons for which the apocrypha were written: scholars list, among others, the popularization of the non-canonical narratives and 'revelations', the need for solidifying the oral tradition and preservation of the oral testimonies given by the witnesses of Jesus' life and teachings, preaching the new theology and exegesis of the Holy Bible, the explanation of the intricacies of the Scripture, and, last but not least, curiosity and a need for filling gaps in canonical stories.
- 5) Also the stylistics of the apocrypha is diversified: the authors have not only imitated both the narrative patterns and genres used in the Old and the New Testament but they have created a lot of their own stylistic means, genres and devices as well. That is the reason why traditional apocrypha can be seen as a composite set of texts which vary from one to another in the field of stylistics and artistic value.
- 6) It is also hard to precisely determine in which historical period most of the apocrypha were written. The bulk of apocryphal texts was created in the 2nd century A.D., but some of them had been written even before the canon of the Holy Bible was established or exactly during the process of setting up the final set of canonical texts (Starowieyski 2006: 11–12). One can find a lot of apocryphal writings also in the Middle Ages and in later epochs up till the present day. Thus the time of its inception cannot serve as a helpful criterion to define a given text as an apocrypha.
- 7) Different apocryphal texts were discovered at different times. Some 'mysterious manuscripts' came out in the first centuries of Christianity and that enhanced the chances for taking them for original documents, genuine testimonies or revelations. But, as Per Beskow points out, the desire for such a finding, the discovery of an obscure, secret book or a new revelation, has accompanied mankind for ages, which is the reason why such 'findings' appear all the time, in different periods, places and cultures (Beskow 2005: 15).

Despite all the above-mentioned difficulties in establishing the proper criteria for naming a given text an apocrypha, various vocabularies, encyclopaedias and academic tractates give some simplified definitions of the term, like the following one:

Biblical or related writings not forming part of the accepted canon of Scripture

(Oxford Dictionary)

(a): books included in the Septuagint and Vulgate but excluded from the Jewish and Protestant canons of the Old Testament,

(b): early Christian writings not included in the New Testament

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

It can be easily noticed that the use of biblical narrative schemes, figures, symbols and motifs and the non-canonical character of a text are the crucial features of an apocrypha included in every definition. The second of the above-mentioned attributes, non-canonicity, has been meticulously analysed by Starowieyski, who connects it with the etymology of the word 'apocrypha'. He notices that the term *apocryphos* certainly relates to something else than the 'mysterious character', because the apocryphal writings, which were always very popular, cannot be regarded as 'hidden' or 'secret'. Starowieyski considers the Greek term as an inaccurate, inexact translation of the Hebrew word *ganuz* which means not only 'hidden', but also 'excluded from use' (Starowieyski 2003: 21). The second understanding of the term is connected with an exclusion of a given text on the grounds of its (alleged) harmfulness. That harmfulness has a lot to do with the non-canonicity of a writing which is now set in an opposition to the traditional revelations.

The non-canonicity is a proper criterion for defining not only the traditional apocryphal writings but the so called 'modern apocrypha' as well. However, there are some important differences between those two types of texts.

First, traditional apocrypha try to 'convince' the reader to treat them as originals, 'pretending' that they are authentic revelations or testimonies, while modern apocrypha (usually novels based on biblical motifs) are only stylizations and intertextual or inter-semiotic variations on the canon and on some previous, traditional apocrypha and the classical literature. Thus modern apocrypha create only an 'illusion of a forgery' or a 'fake mystification', making use of a specific cultural code.

This difference leads to another one, which is connected with the role literariness plays in both types of texts. Traditional apocrypha copy various

canonical forms and genres, using the stylistic richness of the Holy Scripture: thus literariness is, in this case, only the side issue. On the other hand, modern apocrypha as primarily literary works of art make their own literary form the main value or at least a quality of the same value as the content. Emphasizing the role of the author as a creator, modern apocrypha differ from traditional apocryphal writings which are supposed to be testimonies of a 'real revelation', only forwarded by a witness or a messenger (who therefore is not the right author).

Another important difference between the two types of texts is connected with the attitude towards the canon. Traditional apocrypha as 'supposed revelations' do not respect the totality, immutability and the closure of the canon: they 'aspire' to the biblical canon or attempt to be a part of a 'new canon'. Modern apocrypha on the other hand do respect the closure of the canon, even though they often popularize ideas which are contrary to the canonical ones or emphasize various 'religious absurdities' found in the Holy Scripture. Thus modern apocrypha do not try to tamper with the canon nor announce any 'new revelations', but instead they relate to the canonical content only intertextually, using it as a cultural code.

Now then, how could we define or describe the phenomenon of modern apocrypha? Of course they form a set of texts which use some narrative patterns, motifs, figures and symbols from both the Old and the New Testament in an unorthodox way (to repeat, the term 'orthodoxy' is here related to various Christian confessions/Churches). Besides, modern apocrypha are texts which make use of the 'illusion of forgery' and play with some cultural conventions. They are just 'stylizations' which do not try to suggest their authenticity and their historical or supernatural provenance. They are texts which illustrate the distance between modern Western culture and its religious roots, its source myths. Modern apocrypha, unlike the traditional ones, respect the Holy Bible as a canon, respect its closure and completeness. It has a lot to do with the non-sacral character of these texts. They are no 'sacred writings' nor revealed truths. Religious motifs often serve here as a medium for presenting various non-religious topics and problems related to philosophy, ethics, politics, social issues etc.

2. BETWEEN THE CANON, ITS EXEGESIS AND ARCHIVE: THE TOOLS OF CULTURAL MEMORY

Simplifying the thought of Yuri Lotman, the founder of the so-called Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics, we can define a culture as memory, „the memory of society that is not genetically transmitted” (Lotman, Uspenskij 1984: 3). According to Lotman’s theory, communication between different semiospheres (which means: cultures) and between various subsystems in the culture itself play the main role in the processes of growing and establishing a cultural system. Thus both models of communication: the classical one (based on the I – S/he scheme) and the model of autocommunication (based on the I – I scheme) are important mechanisms of preserving a given culture from disintegrating and falling apart into historically and semiotically distanced layers.

Lotman claims that both models occur in every culture, but only one of them is dominant:

For culture to exist as a mechanism organizing the collective personality with a common memory and a collective consciousness, there must be present a pair of semiotic systems with the consequent possibility of text translation. The ‘I-s/he’ and ‘I-I’ communicative systems form just such a pair (by the way we should mention that a seemingly universal law for human cultures is that one of the members of any culture-forming semiotic pair must be natural language, or include natural language). Actual cultures, like artistic texts, are constructed on the principle of pendulum-like swings between these systems. But there will be a predominant tendency for the culture to be oriented either towards autocommunication or towards the acquisition of truth from without in the form of messages. This tendency will show up particularly clearly in the mythologized image which each culture creates as its own ideal selfportrait. This self-model has an influence on the culture’s texts but cannot be identified with them, being sometimes a generalization of structural principles concealed behind the textual contradictions, and sometimes the direct opposite of them. (Lotman 1990: 34–35)

In the classical model, in the ‘I-s/he’ channel, the ‘I’ is the subject of communication, the possessor of information, while the ‘s/he’ is the object, the addressee/recipient. In that system information is transferred in space, the framing elements are variable (the addresser could be replaced by the addressee), while the code and the message remain the same.

In the 'I-I' channel, on the other hand, information is transferred in time. The bearer of the information remains the same but the message is reformulated and acquires new meaning during the communication process. The original message is recoded into elements of its structure and thereby acquires features of a new message.

The autocommunication model is a tool of collective memory, a cultural mechanism, which helps a given culture to stay a narrative continuum. But where can we find the nucleus of a culture? Which semiotic elements need to be transmitted through time to enable a culture to keep its integrity?

Lotman claims that it is a symbol that is the nucleus of culture and the most important medium of cultural memory:

Since symbols are important mechanisms of cultural memory, they can transfer texts, plot outlines and other semiotic formations from one level of a culture's memory to another. The stable sets of symbols which recur diachronically throughout culture serve very largely as unifying mechanisms: by activating a culture's memory of itself they prevent the culture from disintegrating into isolated chronological layers. The national and area boundaries of cultures are largely determined by a long-standing basic set of dominant symbols in cultural life. (Lotman 1990: 104)

A similar idea can be found in the works of Jan Assmann, who claims that „the cultural memory is based on fixed points in the past. Even in the cultural memory, the past is not preserved as such but is cast in symbols, as they are represented in oral myths or in writings [...]” (J. Assmann 2008: 113). According to Assmann, most of the unifying and memory-preserving symbols are connected with mythological and religious narratives.

Assmann distinguishes two basic mechanisms or tools of cultural memory: a ritual (mostly for the non-literate cultures) and the canon, which he puts in the centre of every literate culture, and especially of every so called Culture of the Book (like Judaism, Christianity and Islam). The canon carries all the basic symbols and source narratives through time, and its completeness and closure preserve them from what we can call a 'semiotic death'. That is why the canon can be seen as the highest achievement of the 'textual coherency' which with time replaces the 'ritual coherency' (J. Assmann 2011: 74–78).

Assmann notes that the Greek term *kanôn* was originally connected with an idea of perfection and the concept of a criterion, a clue, a pointer, a measure, a model or a paradigm (J. Assman 2011: 90–91). In the area of social life, the idea of the canon referred to the four figures/strategies connected with accuracy: a witness, a messenger, a scribe and a contract. The four figures/strategies were associated with a Word and with a Text, which means that they were strongly linked with the idea of ‘textual coherency’ and its mature form, the canon.

Furthermore Assmann analyses the historical transformation of the role canon plays in culture: as a result of the process of its ‘theologization’ it gains new meanings and goals, being connected not only with the idea of perfectness but with a concept of holiness as well. And since the canon is related to the sphere of *sacrum*, it becomes inviolable. In this context the four strategies become symbols of the completeness and the closure of the canon: nothing can be neither added to nor deleted from the established set of the holy writings (J. Assmann 2011: 100).

Although the canon as a set of the holy writings and revelations cannot be changed, it can be (and needs to be) interpreted. The canonical content, which has not only religious but also cultural value, must be constantly read and discussed so that it can be kept in the centre of the cultural net of meanings and used as an axiological basis for the whole cultural formation. Not only an exegesis is necessary: the community needs a proper interpreter, a ‘professional reader’ who explains and clarifies all the canonical narratives and symbols. According to Assmann, the complete sense of the canon can be revealed only in the triadic relation between the text, the interpreter and the audience/the receiver.

What is important, even the interpretation of the revelation has been constantly reinterpreted during history: it had to be renewed in changing cultural, spatial and historical environment. The orthodoxy itself is variable. Every sacred text which is a basis for the cultural identity of a given group needs to be read in a specific context. As Paul Ricoeur notes, the process of re-interpretation of the canon of The Holy Bible has already begun in the New Testament, which has not rescinded or revoked the Old Testament, but rather reinterpreted and ‘fulfilled’ it. (Ricoeur, LaCocque 2003: 10)

According to Ricoeur, studying canonical texts is a mainstay for the ‘community of reading and interpretation’ but to be such a basis for the identity

of a given group, the canon needs to be closed and invariable (Ricoeur, LaCocque 2003: 7, 14). The main goal of studying the canon is to build the awareness of the foundations and beginnings of the community and to establish its law, morality, tradition, social norms and cultural habits. Thus, for a given community, reading the canon is also reading itself, its own identity.

Jan Assmann writes:

Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time. A human self is a 'diachronic identity' built 'of the stuff of time' (Luckman). This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory. For time, identity and memory we may distinguish among three levels:

Level	Time	Identity	Memory
inner (neuromental)	inner, subjective time	inner self	individual memory
social	social time	social self, per- son as carrier of social roles	communicative memory
cultural	historical, my- thical, cultural time	cultural identity	cultural memory

(J. Assmann 2008: 109)

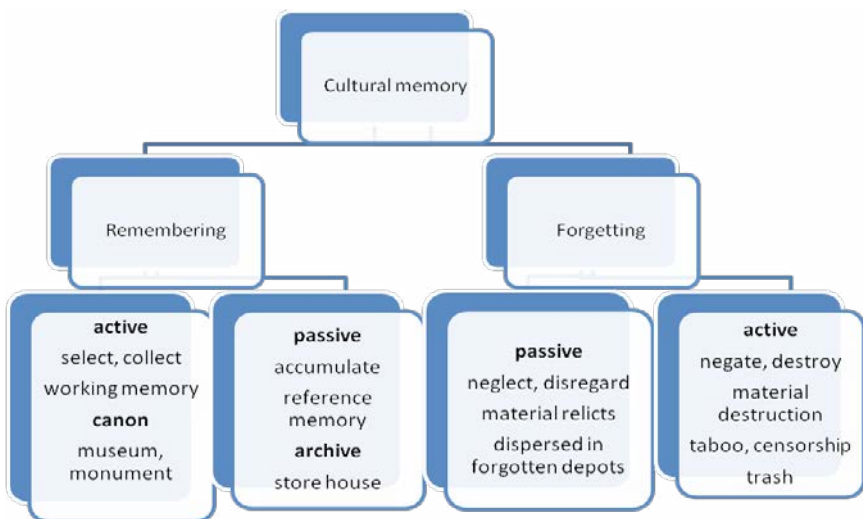
The most interesting aspect of this typology is the distinction between the social (which in Assmann's terms means also communicative) and cultural memory. The first one is not connected to any institution but instead it is cultivated in everyday interactions and limited to only three interacting generations (J. Assmann 2008: 111). The cultural memory, however, is „a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that [...] are stable and situation-transcendent: They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another” (J. Assmann 2008: 110–111).

Assmann makes the following list of differences between those two types of memory:

	Communicative Memory	Cultural Memory
Content	history in the frame of autobiographical memory, recent past	mythical history, events in absolute past ('in illo tempore')
Forms	informal traditions and genres of everyday communication	high degree of formation, ceremonial communication
Media	living, embodied memory, communication in vernacular language	mediated in texts, icon[s -?], dances, rituals, and performances of various kinds; 'classical' or otherwise formalized language(s)
Time structure	80-100 years, a moving horizon of 3-4 interacting generations	absolute past, mythical primordial time, '3000 years'
Participation structure	diffuse	Specialized carriers of memory, hierarchically structured

(J. Assmann, 2008: 117).

Aleida Assmann supplements Jan Assmann's ideas with the distinction between active and passive memory and active and passive forgetting. Active remembering preserves *past as present* and is connected with the working memory, active communication and constant use and actualization of the objects of memory, while passive remembering preserves *past as past* and involves collecting and storage of things, texts, narratives or symbols given to remember. Active forgetting is based on such mechanisms as trashing and destroying, which are intentional acts, while passive forgetting is the result of (often unintentional) losing, hiding or abandoning (A. Assmann 2008: 97-98).



(A. Assmann 2008: 99)

The distinction between the two types of remembering and forgetting leads to another difference, namely the contrast between the canon and the archive.

The canon is a tool of the active memory which is connected with religion, art and history. As has been said, it gains its special meaning in the process of ‘sanctification’. As A. Assmann writes: „to endow texts, persons, artefacts, and monuments with a sanctified status is to set them off from the rest as charged with the highest meaning and value” (A. Assmann 2008: 100). That is the reason why the canon needs to be equipped with three important qualities: selection, value and duration. The first one is (1) a mechanism of establishing the most reliable, important, and crucial revelations and testimonies, which are said to be (2) especially valuable from the religious and then also social point of view and as such need to be constantly ‘used’ and ‘communicated’ so that they could be (3) immune from historical and social changes. „The canonized text is a stable reference that is used over centuries and millennia in continuous acts of reverence, interpretation, and liturgical practice” (A. Assmann 2008: 100). And even though Aleida Assmann in most of her writings interprets the term ‘canon’ not only as a set of holy/

religious texts but also as a collection of so-called *Bildungstexte*¹, named by Jan Assmann a 'classical literature', she still emphasizes the role it plays in the process of active cultural remembering and creating the collective identity.

The archive, on the other hand, is, metaphorically speaking, a kind of a storehouse where objects, texts, or symbols stay in a state of readiness or willingness to be used again. Those objects or texts have lost their previous 'place in life' (*Sitz im Leben*). They have been put in a new context of expectation for being useful again and fully vital or (in the case of texts and symbols) communicated and re-interpreted: „The archive [...] can be described as a space that is located on the border between forgetting and remembering; its materials are preserved in a state of latency, in a space of intermediary storage (*Zwischenspeicher*). Thus, the institution of the archive is a part of cultural memory in the passive dimension of preservation. It stores materials in the intermediary state of 'no longer' and 'not yet', deprived of their old existence and waiting for a new one” (A. Assmann 2008: 103).

The problem of the relation between passive and active remembering and the relation between remembering and forgetting is crucial not only for any analyses of cultural memory, but also for the description of the role the memory plays in the process of creating and preserving cultural identity.

3. MODERN APOCRYPHA AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE ACTIVE REMEMBERING

A. Assmann emphasizes the role of forgetting because, „In order to remember some things, other things must be forgotten. Our memory is highly selective” (A. Assmann 2008: 97). As has already been said, one of the main qualities of the canon is its selective character, which leads a community to the recognition of the highest religious and cultural value of the Holy Scripture. Being highly selective at the beginning and closed, invariable during the history, the canon as a tool of cultural memory fits the paradigm of remembering some chosen symbols, narratives, laws, traditions (which are said to be the most important and meaningful), and forgetting others.

¹ „When the religious canon was translated into the arts in secular modernity, it became a canon of classics. This canon is not as fixed and closed as the religious canon [...]” (A. Assmann 2008: 101).

It is crucial for every collective memory to care for those basic canonical symbols and elements of tradition. It helps to protect the collective identity from falling apart and from disintegration. Because the 'capacity' of both individual and collective memory is limited, some elements of the cultural universe of signs need to be marginalized and archived, while some others, the most important meanings and 'cultural texts', must be constantly used and communicated to stay 'semiotically alive' and 'socially valid'. Various new symbols, signs and narratives displace the old ones, which have been recognized as 'archaic', useless or superfluous. Those semiotic elements, which are crucial for a given culture, have to be rehashed, read and communicated, even if the use of them is not based only on re-interpretation, commentary or imitation but on a critical reading or heresy as well.

Jan Assmann discusses the role the 'use' of a text or a symbol plays in protecting those semiotic units from cultural oblivion. According to him, a text which is no longer passed down loses its power and vitality and becomes a 'semiotic waste'. That is why the ritual seems to be a more trusted, solid and durable tool of collective memory than a text: it is based on continual repetition and participation, while the 'dead letter of a text' exists in its material shape also outside the circulation of meanings: it can last and be forgotten at the same time. When a text is no longer used, read and interpreted, it becomes rather 'a grave of a sense' instead of being a repository of meanings. But it can be 'risen from the dead' by the work of a reader and interpreter, thanks to the art of hermeneutics and to the power of commentary (J. Assmann 2011: 70 – 111).

That is precisely what the authors of modern apocrypha do. They interpret and use the canon (i.e. also some basic symbols and meanings included in it). Aleida Assmann claims that the Holy Bible, which is the canon of the Western culture, can be described as the 'paradigmatic cultural text'. According to her, a 'cultural text' is a text of the highest cultural value, which is not only a medium for the cultural memory but also an object of it. It serves as a tool of remembrance and as a set of texts given to remember. A cultural text differs from 'just a literary text' in a few aspects (A. Assmann 2013: 35–38):

- 1) Relation to the collective identity. A literary text is aimed at an individual reader who contemplates the content alone. In this case, the reading of a text is a private or even intimate activity. A cultural text,

on the other hand, is aimed at a reader understood as a member of the community, a reader who shares the cultural experience with other members of the group. Thus a cultural text presupposes some cultural competencies of a reader and support them in the same time, being a medium for the basic cultural meanings.

- 2) The mode of the reception. While a literary text is usually read from a 'cognitive distance' and is treated as only one of many various visions of the world, a cultural text needs to be read with a special attitude, with trust and commitment. A literary text does not hide its fictional character, while a cultural text is said to be 'the only and ultimate Truth' and that is the reason why it must be studied with respect, devotion, adoration and thrill. The aim of the literature is to bring pleasure and cogitation to the reader. The aim of a cultural text is to root the reader in the community and to root the community in (often mythical) history.
- 3) Innovation and immutability. A literary text must be innovative, it should create (or at least: express) the aura of the epoch, the *Zeitgeist*. It needs to cause or follow a cultural change. A cultural text, on the other hand, needs to be immune to the various cultural changes: it does not need to be correlated with any cultural or social 'trends'.
- 4) Durability. A literary text is placed in 'the open space of a history' and as such is influenced by different turns, changes, and ideas, while a cultural text stays in 'the closed space of tradition', so it is lasting, durable, permanent. In other words, a cultural text is canonized so that it could create and support a collective identity and be a medium of cultural memory.

According to A. Assmann, a cultural text, the canon, is the highest form of a 'mature tradition': a tradition already experienced and well known, but still renewed, transformed and re-interpreted (but, what is crucial here, any interpretations or transformations cannot change the essence of the tradition, which stays the same). So the cultural texts are immune to any historical changes, but at the same time they need to be used. An exegesis is not only a 'privilege' but a necessity as well. A canonical text saves the traditional contents in an original shape but it does not 'petrify' them: they are given to remember.

Getting back to the Lotman's theory of culture: if culture can be described as memory, and every important medium of memory needs to be constantly involved in the acts of communication, than communication can be seen as a twin-mechanism of memory, supporting cultural remembering in the work of constructing and retaining the collective identity. Furthermore, Lotman claims that one can distinguish a few sub-mechanisms of the autocommunication model such as: a creative translation of a text (from one semiotic system or natural language into another, or from the so-called periphery into the centre of the semiosphere), the transformation of a religious symbol and the use of a canonical text as a code for a new message. All those mechanisms which use and re-interpret some source symbols, myths and texts help a given culture to perpetuate its basic ideas in the centre of the cultural universe of meanings. Thus, the processes of autocommunication prevent a given culture from disintegrating into historically separated semiotic elements and enable a culture (a semiosphere in Lotmanian terms) to keep its semiotic and narrative consistency.

According to the Assmanns, the canon is the most perfect medium of memory. This idea can be easily connected with Lotman's theory, because the most important semiotic elements of the canon are symbols, and, according to the Russian scholar, a symbol (especially the religious one) is the nucleus of culture. The symbol is a crucial tool of cultural memory and a mechanism of inner cultural communication as it 'travels through time' and conveys texts, meanings and elements of cultural narratives across different chronological and spatial levels of a given culture. The power of transferring the most important contents from one cultural layer into another makes the symbol an essential instrument of a unification of a semiosphere. It prevents it from falling apart into separated semiotic areas and from disintegrating into non-communicated historical layers: 'The national and area boundaries of cultures are largely determined by a long-standing basic set of dominant symbols in cultural life' (Lotman 1990: 104). Lotman lists a few basic features of a symbol, and the most important among them is duality. On the one hand symbol stands for 'ancient', 'mythical', 'eternal' or 'archaic' roots of culture and in this context remains invariable and immutable. It differs from the semiotic surroundings. This quality is obviously connected with the role a symbol plays in the processes of the conservation of collective memory. On the other hand a symbol correlates easily with every new semiotic/

textual context, not only transforming it but also being transformed by it. Therefore the immutability of a symbol is realized in its different 'variants': „the changes which the 'eternal' meaning of the symbol undergoes in the given culture highlight the changeability of the context” (Lotman 1990: 104).

This duality of a symbol, and, we can dare to say: also of the canon, is realized perfectly in the area of modern apocrypha. On the one hand, the nucleus or the essence of the canonical text is present in every such an unorthodox usage, even if the apocryphal text itself tries to negate the original ideas. On the other hand, in the new textual surroundings the canonical symbols, figures and narrative patterns gain new meanings and show their ability of 'intertextual cooperation'. One could say that an apocryphal writing cannot be seen as a tool of preserving the basic cultural symbols, because it transforms, criticizes, neglects or misrepresents the canonical ideas. But even being an unorthodox transformation of a canon, every apocryphal text brings the source symbols to the awareness of a reader, puts them once again in the centre of the cultural universe of meanings.

The canonical symbols, even in the Western culture, which manifests the distance to its own religious roots, are still vital and that is the reason why they are still 'in use'. On the other hand, their vitality depends on the usage. This is a kind of a reciprocal relation.

Renate Lachmann describes the essence of intertextuality, describing it as a memory mechanism:

When literature is considered in the light of memory, it appears as the mnemonic art par excellence. Literature is culture's memory, not as simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions that include the knowledge stored by a culture, and virtually all texts a culture has produced and by which a culture is constituted. Writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space. Involvement with the extant texts of a culture, which every new text reflects (whether as convergence or divergence, assimilation or repulsion), stands in a reciprocal relation to the conception of memory that this culture implies. The authors of texts draw on other texts, both ancient and recent, belonging to their own or another culture and refer to them in various ways. They allude to them, they quote and paraphrase them, they incorporate them. [...] Intertextuality demonstrates the process by which a culture, where 'culture' is a book culture, continually rewrites and retranscribes itself, constantly

redefining itself through its signs. Every concrete text, as a sketched-out memory space, connotes the macrospace of memory that either represents a culture or appear as that culture. (Lachmann 2008: 301)

If intertextuality is a 'memory of the text', and a text is a medium of cultural remembering, then an intertextual relation which modern apocrypha make with a unique text of the Holy Bible (a 'paradigmatic cultural text') can be seen as an example of a 'culturally privileged' and socially highly valued mnemotechnics.

J. Assmann distinguishes between three different modes of intertextual reference to the canon: commentary, imitation and critique. All of them are present in modern apocrypha, not only as 'pure' types but also as mixed forms. Thus modern apocryphal writings use symbols, figures and narrative patterns of the canon (imitation) often to criticize the so-called absurdities of faith, or to discuss them (commentary).

Renate Lachmann points out other forms of intertextuality, which are, we could say, perfectly fitted to the phenomenon of the apocrypha: continuation/renewed writing (Lachmann 2009: 310). The first mode is connected with the 'pleasure of iteration' and reflects the need for a contact with the tradition. It is usually based on the use of motifs, signs, figures and symbols taken from the original text. In the area of apocryphal writing this strategy is of course associated with the use of various canonical contents. The need for a kind of a 'repetition' can be easily noticed in the famous work by Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, in which the author 'tells the story again', trying to evangelize the reader in a new, unorthodox way. He uses the exact plots and figures from the New Testament but reinterprets them, making them more 'understandable' and 'familiar' to the modern reader. He starts with the idea of Jesus of Nazareth as 'only a man' to finish with the concept of Christ as the Son of God or, rather, a 'man of God'. Kazantzakis presupposes that it is easier for the modern reader to deal with the idea of humanity than to understand the mystery of the highly abstract Absolute.

The counter-writing is linked to a kind of a 'reversal' of the original meanings. It is an attempt to create some new ideas and world-views more current than the 'archaic' content of the original text. However, the original text is still present in the new one and – which is crucial – can be 'seen' as a basic layer of the textual palimpsest. We can find a lot of examples of

this strategy in modern apocrypha: texts like *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* by José Saramago or *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* by Philip Pullman are critiques of ‘absurdities of faith’. They are ‘manifests of rationalism and atheism’ but at the same time they highlight the original meanings and draw the reader’s attention to the canon by using it for the expression of non-canonical (or even: counter-canonical) contents.

Transformation is associated with a ‘play with the original text’, which is usually ‘recycled’, defragmented and mixed with other semiotic elements in a new context. The strategy has a syncretic, sometimes esoteric and often ironic, carnivalesque or ludic character (Lachmann 2009: 311) and is ubiquitous in modern apocrypha, irrespective of the fact whether they are apologetic or critical of the canon.

What, then, is the role modern apocrypha play in the processes of cultural remembering? Summing up the previously quoted remarks and applying theories and ideas conceived by Yuri Lotman and the Assmanns to the analysis of the apocrypha, we can say that apocryphal writings serve as a tool of cultural autocommunication. They put the basic narratives and symbols from the original in a new historical, cultural and social context, due to which they transfer information in time, in the area of the same semiosphere (culture), by the ‘I – I’ channel. Being a tool of autocommunication, they also support the mechanisms of cultural memory: as all the above-mentioned scholars note, there is no memory without communication. Also culture itself can be understood as memory, which means that it is a net of constantly communicated and interpreted meanings.

J. Assmann emphasizes the role of communication in the processes of memorization. Only in use, only when it is communicated, a symbol (which is, according to Lotman, a nucleus of a culture) or a canonical text (which is the most important collection of symbols) can stay ‘semiotically alive’ and ‘culturally valid’. That is the reason why modern apocrypha can be seen as a tool of memory: they ‘use’ canonical symbols and prevent them from ‘semiotic death’. Even an unorthodox or heretical use, transformation or re-interpretation of the canon keep the basic traditional contents in the awareness of the community and put the traditional meanings and values in the centre of a semiosphere. Modern apocrypha save the source symbols and narratives from ‘archivization’ and oblivion. Even if they criticize or parody the canonical contents, they make them a crucial tool of the expression of

counter-canonical ideas. Thus, modern apocrypha can be understood as an example of active cultural remembering, a working memory which preserves *past as present*, basing on the active communication, and actualizing the most important objects of memory. As Lotman writes:

‘Tradition’ is always a *system of texts* preserved in the memory of the given culture or subculture or personality. It is always realized as a *partial occurrence which is regarded as a precedent, norm or rule*. ‘Tradition’ therefore can be more broadly interpreted than ‘contemporaneity’. A text which is filtered through the code of tradition is a text filtered through other texts which serve as its interpreter. But since a literary text cannot in principle be interpreted in one way only, in the case of literature a certain set of interpretations is filtered through another set, and this results in a new competition of possible interpretations and a new semantic augmentation. Moreover, texts which form part of ‘tradition’ are not for their part inert ones: when they come into the context of ‘contemporaneity’ they ‘come to life’ revealing their previously concealed meaning-potential. So the picture we have before us is that of organic interaction, of a dialogue, in the course of which each of the participants transforms the other and are themselves transformed under the action of the other; the picture is not one of passive transmission, but of the lively generation of new messages. (Lotman 1990: 70–71)

So, according to Lotman, literature plays a crucial role in the cultural processes of caring for collective memory and identity. An apocrypha is ‘an interpreter’ not only of the canon but also of its various historical interpretations. Furthermore, putting the traditional religious symbols in a new context, modern apocrypha enable them to show their semiotic potential and to present some new meanings which were previously hidden. All the new transformations, interpretations, stylizations, examples of re-writing and counter-writing, enrich the cultural universe of meanings and bind together various historical and semantical layers of the semiosphere, making it a narrative continuum. It is obvious that almost every literary text plays such a role in culture (after all, intertextuality is a form of memory and communication), but apocryphal writings are a unique type of literature because they deal not only with ‘some previous texts’ but also with a cultural text, the canon, which is distinctly important for the coherence of the cultural system.

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to analyze the role modern apocrypha play in the processes of collective remembering.

From the perspective of cultural studies the modern apocrypha can be seen not only as literary or religious texts but also as an important element of cultural autocommunication. And if we understand autocommunication as a crucial mechanism of cultural memory, we can describe intertextuality (which is a form of cultural autocommunication) as an autoimmune technique of preventing the basic cultural meanings from the oblivion.

The canon is a basic tool of collective memory in the so called 'literate cultures' or 'Cultures of the Book'. That is the reason why the apocrypha, which deal with canonical contents, build the unique set of texts playing an essential role in protecting the source myth and tradition from the 'semiotic death'.

Keywords: apocrypha, cultural memory, remembering, forgetting, canon, archive