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Intertextuality

In
Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and
Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea
and
Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels and
Esmé Dodderidge's The New Gulliver

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Abbreviations

J.E. : Jane Eyre

W.S.S. : Wide Sargasso Sea

G.T. : Gulliver's Travels

N.G. : The New Gulliver

Preface

The relationship between literary texts can be considered a new field of study in literary theory. Texts used to be studied and dealt with both separately and internally. Shaking the stability of this critical approach, the French semiotician Julia Kristeva introduced the term 'intertextuality' in the late sixties. Intertextuality is the weaving of one literary text into another, forming a kind of new articulation. The core idea of intertextuality is that all texts are intertexts; each text exists in a vast medium of texts with which it should engage in dialogue. Intertextuality is one of the bases and requirements of all communication since all texts and discourses are always built upon existing cultural codes and norms. Texts are therefore instrumental in the construction of other texts. Theorists of intertextuality problematize the status of 'authorship' believing that texts are constructed more by their intertextuality than by their authors. For them, texts provide contexts within which other texts can be created and interpreted.

Intertextuality does not mean the mere reference to, or elaboration on a prior text. Its function extends from quoting to rewriting through which the new vision and the new discourse are highlighted. The only way for a writer to negotiate with past literature and express his likes and dislikes is to insert himself into the series of texts which constitute this literature by rewriting them. This shows how the notion of 'intertextuality' acts as a flexible tool in the hands of authors to reconstruct their precursors' thoughts to challenge pre-conceived ideas and initiate new ones. Equally important is 'intertextuality' for the reader who is considered as the third dimension of the textual space alongside the writing subject and the exterior texts. According to theorists, all meanings drawn from a text are partial and provisional and come as a result of the cultural and social background of the reader. Therefore, the intertextual

process requires a new articulation on part of the writer as well as an active participation on part of the reader.

This thesis is divided into three chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one presents a theoretical study of the notion of intertextuality and shows how the term problematizes the idea of a text having boundaries. It draws upon theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, and Jonathan Culler through whose work the term emerged in its full-fledged force. The chapter also explains that intertextuality is much a broader term than 'influence' as it activates the comparative principle and offers the reader the pleasure of re-cognition. Furthermore, the chapter illustrates how functional intertextuality is, in opening up prior texts for a free interplay of relations -- a process through which writers can challenge deeply rooted discourses and establish new ones.

Chapter two studies the intertextual relationship between Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) and shows how Rhys provides the hidden account of the first Mrs. Rochester to reveal the other side of Brontë's story. As a postcolonial writer, Rhys establishes an intertextual encounter with a prior text from the British canon to deconstruct the stereotypes of people of colour occurred in Western portrayals. By deconstructing such Orientalist stereotypes, the reader can come to see how literary representations of the Other have misrepresented the colonized as devious, dangerous, and sub-human.

While chapter two explores how intertextuality is functional in a post-colonial perspective, chapter three studies intertextuality in a feminist context. The same idea of defending the Other through establishing an intertextual encounter with past literature is also stressed in chapter three. The chapter studies the intertextual relationship between Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726) and Esmé Dodderidge's The New Gulliver (1980). Chapter three shows how Dodderidge, depending on the persona of Gulliver, presents the idea of sex-role reversal to unveil the injustices of

the patriarchal discourse. The chapter also clarifies how intertextuality is employed in the feminist theory to change women's distorted image.

Finally, the conclusion clarifies how the notion of intertextuality can be used in different contexts to initiate new discourses. In the conclusion, it is clear that the two discourses emerging from the intertextual processes in question, work in parallelism as they both deal with the Other who live in complete alienation and silence on the margins of society. To defend the Other, the intertextual encounter works through post-colonial and feminist perspectives in chapters two and three respectively. If post-colonialism is used to signify a position against imperialism, so is feminism to establish a challenging stance in the face of patriarchy. The conclusion also shows how Rhys and Dodderidge use the notion of intertextuality to make connection with past literature and reveal the contradictions of prevalent discourses in order to change the reader's axiomatic attitude towards their naturalization.

Chapter One

The Notion of Intertextuality

Literary texts are complex cultural productions that relate to and renew each other. On this notion hinges the term, intertextuality, which indicates the relationship between literary texts especially. This term was first introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva and was received by immediate success in the late sixties. The term refers to the way in which any one literary text echoes or is linked to other texts either by direct quotations and allusions or simply by being a text. The notion of intertextuality is based on the idea that: “All cultural productions are ... works in progress, and all of them remain so after publication and even after the deaths of their authors” (Booker 4). Intertextuality is the general condition by which it is possible for a text to be a text: the whole network of relations, conventions, and expectations by which the text is defined. In Desire in Language, Julia Kristeva defines the text as “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (Kristeva 36). Proposing the term of intertextuality, Julia Kristeva draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, that is, the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances to indicate a text’s construction from texts. Nevertheless, this is not a matter of influence, but of “the multifarious and historically variable relations between works as heterogeneous textual productions” (Payne 258).

The term intertext has been used variously for a text drawing on other texts, for a text thus drawn upon, and for the relationship between both. The concept of intertextuality then denotes the interdependence of literary texts and views literature in terms of “a set of shifting relationships which are never stable but which are all temporally mobile

even if incorporated in and mediated through a relatively stable written text” (Hawthorn 9). This is because literature as a whole is perceived as “a self-referential system or structure” (Gray 152).

Intertextuality consists of two general features. First, there are the explicit references made in one text to other texts including anagram, allusion, adaptation, translation, parody, pastiche, imitation, and other kinds of transformation. Secondly, there are the latent semiotic relationships that exist always and everywhere within the language. Many modern critics argue that all texts are necessarily related by language and that there is no such thing as an absolute text. For Roland Barthes, in “Theory of the Text,” it is the fact of intertextuality that allows the text to come into being:

Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it for there is always language before and around the text. (1981, 39)

Thus writing is always an iteration which is also a reiteration, a re-writing which foregrounds the trace of the various texts it both knowingly and unknowingly places and displaces. This means that however forcefully the literary texts may differ in form or content or both, they are indissolubly tied up with each other through language. In his essay ‘The Death of the Author,’ Barthes declares that “It is language which speaks, not the author; to write is ... to reach the point where only language acts ‘performs,’ and not ‘me’” (1977, 143).

At this point it is important to draw upon the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin who believes that all uses of language are inevitably coloured by textual traces from the past. In particular, for Bakhtin all language has been used before and continues to carry the resonances of former use, so that any utterance involves a dialogic mixture of meanings and intentions. Only the Biblical Adam spoke a language untainted by the

speech of others, because he had no predecessors. Henceforth, as Bakhtin puts it:

Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works) is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness," varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (1986, 89)

Intertextuality subverts the concept of the text as self-sufficient confirming instead the idea that all literary production takes place in the presence of other texts; they are, in effect, palimpsests:

Intertextuality ... proves that all texts are related to all other texts. Indeed not only does it demonstrate the universality of the pattern of allusion, quotation, cross-reference, parody and parallelism which has always kept us scholars in business and in research grants; it also shows philosophically that authors do not write writing at all, but that writing writes authors. (Bradbury 159)

However, this should not tempt one to confuse intertextuality with influence since both concepts are at opposite poles. While influence is conservative and sees literary history as the continuity of fixed set of norms, intertextuality is progressive and regards later texts as positive advances over literature of the past. Besides, influence requires imitation and leads to passivity. This is not at all the case with intertextuality, which requires recreation and leads to creativity. The intertextual relation in which the author borrows or refers to some features from an earlier text is not a mere citation or repetition. In the process, the author transforms these features affirming some and denying the others in order to suit the characteristics of his own work and to assert his own right to speak.

In essays such as “Words, Dialogue, and Novel,” Kristeva broke with traditional notions of the author’s influences and the text’s sources, positing that all signifying systems are constituted by the manner in which they transform earlier signifying systems. “Any text,” she argues, “is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 66). Kristeva finds it more important to scrutinize how the structure of the text comes into being than to confine all attention to the structure itself. For her, this requires placing the text within the network of previous or synchronic texts of which it is a transformation. Indeed, Kristeva aims to suggest that no text is just itself, that all are dialogical even when they do not explicitly allude to any others. However, Kristeva’s most valuable contribution to the debate on intertextuality is the idea that an intertextual citation is never innocent or direct but always transformed, condensed, or edited in some way in order to suit the speaking subject’s value systems. To this idea one can add what the American deconstructionist Harold Bloom thinks of the poet’s attitude to his precursors. Bloom believes only in the ‘strong’ poet whose relation towards his precursors is highly oedipal: a mixture of love and rivalry. Bloom argues, “My concern is only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors even to death” (1973, 5). This means that writers do not have to take their precursors’ ideas as unquestionable and that they can correct these ideas by their own writings. Bloom argues that the ‘novice’ writer can always try to appropriate and reshape a precursor’s meaning in a way that serves to advance his/her own perspectives at the expense of those of the precursor. As Bloom observes, “The mighty dead return, but they return in our colors, and speak in our voices, at least in part, at least in moments that testify to our persistence and not to their own” (1973, 141). According to Bloom, “Strong poetry is strong by virtue of a kind of textual usurpation” (1976, 6). This goes hand in hand with Kristeva’s insistence on this “transposition” and this “new articulation” in the definition of

intertextuality. She affirms: “The term intertextuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign systems into another;” and asserts that “the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation” (Kristeva 59-60).

Therefore, it is clear that Kristeva does not merely point to the way texts echo each other but to the way that discourses or sign systems are transposed into one another so that meanings in one kind of discourse are overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse. This, in fact, is quite connected with what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “dialogic” relationship. According to Bakhtin, the discourse of fiction explicitly or implicitly quotes other discourses within it. In attempting to imagine the experience of reading and writing within this new form of text, one would do well to pay heed to what Bakhtin wrote about the dialogic novel, which he claims “is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other” (1984, 18). This sheds light on the discourse that can be initiated through intertextuality and leads one to think of a text as a dialogue with other texts. Bakhtin’s notion of the importance of mixtures of different discourse types in the novel is centrally based on a strong recognition that “the point is not the mere presence of several linguistic styles ... the point is the dialogical angle at which they are juxtaposed and counter-posed in the work” (1984, 150-51). This boundary crossing is what Kristeva considers as the crucial function of intertextuality. To confirm this function, one should draw upon Jonathan Culler who asserts:

For a discussion to be significant, it must stand in a relationship ... to a body of discourse, an enterprise, which is already in place and which creates the possibility of new work. (1981, 111)

Culler further explains that by “a prior body of discourse,” he means all the “other projects and thoughts which it implicitly or explicitly takes up, prolongs, cites, refutes, or transforms” (1981, 112).

With this much importance placed on discourse, which in itself can be seen as an extension of the already powerful intertextuality, a stringent definition of this last major concept of structuralism is needed. Roland Barthes merely sees it as an extension of speech, a “combination thanks to which the speaking subject can use the code of the language with a view to expressing his personal thought” (1967, 15). Other definitions of discourse are more precise: “a discourse is a set of textual arrangements which organizes and coordinates the actions, positions, and identities of the people who produce it” (Thwaites 135), or “discourse is the property of language which mediates the interpersonal relationships which must be carried by any act of communication” (Fowler 52). Discourse, thus, does nothing less than enable us to function as parts of our society; an absence of discourse would mean the absence of language itself.

The definition of discourse seems to have much in common with the process referred to by Claude Lévi-Strauss as *bricolage*, where the *bricoleur* is a sort of junk man who randomly collects odd bits and scraps without any particular plan, and then uses those diverse materials as the need arises. The concept of *bricolage* has gained considerable prominence in recent critical discourse. The *bricoleur* works with signs and constructs new arrangements by adopting existing signified as signifiers. Lévi-Strauss observes that “the first aspect of *bricolage* is ... to construct a system of paradigms with the fragments of syntagmatic chains,” leading in turn to new syntagms (1966, 150). Jacques Derrida suggests that, due to the “necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*” (Derrida 285). Confirming Kristeva’s belief of the inescapability of intertextuality, Spivak views that “the reason for *bricolage* is that there can be nothing else” (1976, xix). Identical to that of

intertextuality, the practice of bricolage can also be seen as operating through “several key transformations: addition, deletion, substitution and transposition” (Nöth 341).

Therefore, it is only as part of prior discourse, as Barthes observes, that any text derives meaning and significance. For him, it is the intertextuality of fiction, its relation to other texts, which makes it readable. However, intertextuality should not be limited to the point where it is a relationship between a given text and its precursor denying its cultural context. This is not at all illuminating in the study of intertextuality because as Culler puts it:

Intertextuality ... becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relationship to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. (1981, 114).

Like Culler, Thais Morgan suggests that intertextuality shifts attention from the triad constituted by author/ work/ tradition to another constituted by text/ discourse/ culture:

By shifting our attention from the triangle of author/ work/ tradition to that of text/ discourse/ culture, intertextuality replaces the evolutionary model of literary history with a structural or synchronic model of literature as sign system. (Morgan 239)

Renata R. Mautner Wasserman further asserts:

Intertextuality ... arises when literary texts connect with other literary texts, with nonliterary texts, and with broadly conceived cultural contexts. It comprises a historical component in the relation between new cultural productions and earlier ones and includes a notion of activity, by any

consumer ... on the texts with which new ones are
intertextual. (460)

Similarly, Bakhtin's insistence upon contextualizing text in its cultural and social discourse marks an important contribution to the dual function of intertextuality. This is because Bakhtin believes that the meaning of text is dependent on its social context and that the word, or rather utterance itself, is bound up with social implications:

Bakhtin and Kristeva share ... an insistence that texts cannot be separated from the larger cultural or social textuality out of which they are constructed. All texts, therefore, contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse. (Allen 36)

This dual function of intertextuality is crucial in the activity of interpretation assigned to the reader who is, thus, given the chance to read on two levels, namely, the literary and cultural levels, at the same time. In that context, Catherine Belsey confirms:

The intertextual relations of the text are never purely literary. Fiction draws not only on other fiction but on the knowledges of its period, discourses in circulation which are themselves sites of power and the contest for power. (407)

The active role of the reader in the intertextual encounter is worth attention since it is clear that the process involves layers of complexity. Intertextuality tends to free the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical restrictions, opening it up to an infinite play of relationships. Intertextuality also carries with it the idea that the individual text is read in a manner determined by the cross-references to other texts which have served as modals or contrasts. In doing so, it invites the reader to become a very effective party in the intertextual encounter: "All literary works ... are 'rewritten,' if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them" (Eagleton 12). It throws up problems for the reader and induces him or her to make a selective realization of the text,