

The Interplay of Texts: A Study of Intertextuality

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Abstract: This study aims to present a concise theoretical exploration of intertextuality, introducing a cognitive perspective on the concept. While literary scholars have extensively explored intertextuality through the lens of textual relationships, less emphasis has been placed on the active role of readers in forming these connections. This research traces the origins of intertextuality back to early textual discussions in antiquity, offering a brief theoretical overview. Intertextuality generally understood as a network of relationships between a text and other texts or discourses across cultural and intellectual contexts, challenges traditional ideas of influence, authorship, and text boundaries. The theory was conceptualized by Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Roland Barthes, with the term being introduced by Julia Kristeva.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Text, Intertext, Intertextual relations, Literature, Dialogism

Introduction

Literary scholars have always endeavoured to deal with varied aspects of life and society through literature creating a literary world and have observed that the uniqueness of a work not only stems from how ideas and thoughts are expressed in ways that cater to the specific situation and purpose, but also how they add a novelty to the work. An author's thought process is usually inspired by instances, circumstances and ideas that he came across/read encouraging him to script a text and in effect create a neoteric work. Artistic creations are no longer seen as independent products of original imagination. Instead, all works are understood as outcomes of previous research, influenced either directly or indirectly by earlier theories.

Worton and Still articulate in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* that texts should not be viewed as independent entities operating in isolation from other texts. This suggests that an author's work does not stem from an entirely original consciousness; instead, the author functions as a compiler of pre-existing possibilities within the language and cultural framework. Therefore, existing texts are not original creations but rather reconfigurations or reinterpretations of previously established ideas. Analyzing such connections allows one to have a deeper understanding of the text's meaning, which aids to develop new texts from the reservoir of prior texts that surround it. Simply put the relationship each text has to the texts surrounding it is what leads to the concept of Intertextuality. The phenomenon of intertextuality, in various forms, can be traced back to the earliest recorded human societies (Worton and Still 2). Philosophers throughout history, from classical figures such as Plato and Aristotle to contemporary scholars including Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and Harold Bloom, have addressed intertextuality or related concepts.

The concept of "Intertextuality," translated from the French term *L'intertextualité*, was introduced by Julia Kristeva, a French literary critic, feminist psychoanalyst, and novelist. This term is also derived from the Latin 'intertexto', which means 'to weave together.' Kristeva first used the term in her essays "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1966) and "The Bounded Text" (1967). In "The Bounded Text," she posits that intertextuality shapes the creation of meaning in every text, proposing that each text is essentially a reconfiguration of other texts, with various voices and references intersecting and interacting within it (Desire in Language 36). Kristeva's conceptualization of intertextuality was influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's prominent idea of 'dialogism,' which emphasizes the presence of multiple perspectives and voices within a text. This concept altered the methods of textual interpretation and analysis by highlighting how varying viewpoints can impact the understanding and perception of a text. For Bakhtin, Dialogism is not simply one aspect of language but a central element. Dialogism at the same time discusses the continuity and interaction among the voices of the characters/subjects like an ongoing dialogue that both binds and differentiates those voices. According to Bakhtin, no utterance exists in isolation; its meaning and logic are shaped by prior statements and their reception by others. All utterances are, therefore,

responses to earlier ones and are directed towards specific audiences. Consequently, Bakhtin argues that the texts created by authors are derived from existing texts rather than originating solely from the authors themselves.

In “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, Kristeva argues that each word or text represents an intersection of other words or texts, where at least one additional word or text can be discerned (Kristeva 66). As a result, every word encompasses other words, and every text includes other texts. Swiss linguist, semiotician, and philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of semiology, or the study of signs, also influenced Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality. For Kristeva, intertextuality refers to “the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another” (Desire in Language 15). Saussure’s theory of semiology gave rise to structuralism, which posits that all texts adhere to a particular pattern, system, or structure. Saussure concentrated not on language use (parole or speech) but on the underlying structure of language (langue), where every sign is composed of two components: the signifier and the signified. Thus, Kristeva’s contribution to literary theory originated from the integration of existing theories, as she developed her concept of intertextuality by synthesizing Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiology with Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism.

According to Kristeva, all texts are intertexts, and intertextuality refers to the way a text’s meaning is shaped by its relationship to other texts. In this light, “every text is an intertext” (Leitch 59) and an intertext is “a text between other texts” (Plett 5). David Lodge suggests in *The Art of Fiction* that all texts are interconnected with other texts, regardless of whether the authors are aware of it (98-99). Expanding on this, M. H. Abrams elaborates that intertextuality involves the various ways a literary text reflects or is connected to other texts, through explicit or implicit references and the incorporation of elements from earlier works into later ones (200). Harold Bloom further asserts that texts do not exist in isolation but are defined by their relationships with other texts, indicating that writers are always influenced by those who preceded them (Anxiety 96). Therefore, every writer engages with texts that preceded their own. They draw on past or contemporaneous works and engage with them through allusions, references, citations, and quotations. As a result, an author’s work will always have traces of other texts to which it refers either directly or indirectly. Further, Umberto Eco supports the concept of intertextuality, suggesting that critical focus should shift away from the author. He argues that works are not solely the product of their creators but are instead born out of other works. Texts communicate with one another independently of the author’s intentions (Wood 193).

The concept of intertextuality emphasizes the intricate web of textual relationships, suggesting that no text exists in isolation. Theorists assert that reading a text is inherently an act of interpretation, wherein meaning is drawn from the text. However, as Allen observes in *Intertextuality*, a text is not created solely from its inherent meaning but is shaped by the systems, codes, and traditions established by earlier literary works (1). Texts do not have independent meaning; instead, reading them places readers within a complex web of textual relationships (Allen 1). Meaning emerges from this interaction between texts, involving readers in a broader intertextual network. Intertextuality, therefore, underscores the relational, interconnected, and interdependent nature of texts (Allen 5). Given that all texts are linked through cultural codes and systems, Kundu characterizes each text as an “intertext,” a reflective space resonating with the influences of previous statements (2).

A significant concept in literary criticism, Intertextuality is deeply associated with postmodernism, despite its earlier origins. Although intertextuality has been present throughout literary history, it became particularly prominent with the advent of postmodernism. Postmodernism developed as a response to modernism, a movement characterized by a sense of loss, including the decline of faith and cultural unity (Waugh 410). Haberer describes modernism as defined by the erosion of stable values and a growing skepticism towards objective truth and overarching ideologies (54). In contrast, postmodernism embraces fragmentation, fostering a spirit of negation and unmasking, as Ihab Hasan suggests, while rejecting coherence, stability, and fixed meanings in texts (Waugh 407). With its anti-elitist and subversive stance, postmodernism challenges traditional authority and encourages creative freedom from dominant discourses. As a result, texts are perceived as open to multiple interpretations, leading to the rejection of grand narratives (Butler 15). Lyotard, in *La Condition Postmodern*, contends that the legitimization of master narratives is facing a crisis and decline in contemporary society (Butler 13).

By reinterpreting earlier works from new perspectives, intertextuality connects the past and present in the postmodern era. This approach is illustrated through various techniques, including parody, pastiche, allusion, reference, quotation, and retelling, each of which modifies or reproduces earlier texts. As exemplified by Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, a parody acknowledges and critiques canonical works by imitating their manner and addressing their issues, often to satirical effect. In contrast, pastiche is a form of tribute that employs elements from a source text to produce an original work, as evidenced by Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. The allusion discreetly alludes to other works or concepts, such as the “Achilles’ heel” from classical mythology. Literary translation entails the adaptation of texts into

various languages, as evidenced by the Quran or Homer's epics. Retellings, such as Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* offer fresh perspectives on classic stories, highlighting the connections between themes and narratives. *The Silence of the Girls* and *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood demonstrate how traditional tales may be creatively reinterpreted (Malik 13). The postmodern era is marked by innovative revisions of earlier texts, the blending of high and low culture, and the fusion of genres. Although intertextuality is an essential instrument for connecting and reshaping earlier works in contemporary literature, its intricacy can be difficult to understand without a comprehensive understanding of a variety of texts.

Kristeva notes that in the realm of intertextuality, the author's role as a creative genius diminishes, shifting to a role that facilitates textual interaction, with creativity moving from the author to the text itself (212). In her essay "Kristeva, Intertextuality, & Re-imagining 'The Mad Woman in the Attic'", Kristy Butler explains that Kristeva conceptualizes intertextuality as a dynamic process, rather than simply viewing it as stories that build upon one another. This process uncovers various meanings within texts and at the level of signifiers, offering new perspectives and avoiding hierarchical structures. By questioning the notion of a single truth, intertextuality enables a range of voices to emerge (130).

Conclusion

Theories of intertextuality have transformed our understanding of literary influence by illustrating that primary texts are not isolated entities. Instead, they are shaped by a complex network of cultural contexts and intertextual connections. These theories offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the interpretation and adaptation of texts across various cultures, taking into account the distinct linguistic and cultural traditions involved. Intertextuality has redefined traditional concepts such as authorship, causality, and text boundaries. It has revealed the intricate connections between literary influence and socio-political structures, such as power dynamics and colonial legacies, and how these factors impact identity formation. By integrating these aspects, intertextuality has enabled the development of more nuanced and pluralistic models of literary influence, emphasizing the dynamic and context-sensitive interactions between texts and their cultural environments, and reflecting the complex ways in which texts influence and are influenced by broader socio-cultural narratives.

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