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INTERTEXTUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

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Abstract:
The present paper aims to discuss the emergence and significance of the concept of intertextuality in contemporary criticism. It focuses on the critical underpinnings of the concept to demonstrate how it is based on the maxim that we can state ourselves only through pre-existing texts because we build up an understanding of our world by means of language and view the world through language. The concept shakes our confidence in empiricist and positivist epistemologies as the texts are woven from cultural and social texts. The paper also highlights the appropriation of this concept by many notable critics to examine contemporary fictional writing.

Keywords: Intertextuality, textuality, language, postmodernism, metafiction, parody.

Any text becomes a medley of texts to the extent that it "answers not an interpretation…but to an explosion, a dissemination" (Allen, 12). Intertextuality demonstrates that no text can be supposed to have a boundary that separates it entirely from either its context or other texts. It foregrounds the idea that every word is permeated with the trace of other words and can have no self-sufficient meaning. Tracing the origins of the term in contemporary literary theory, Mary Orr observes:

> In its 40-year history, intertextuality thus offers a term that perhaps best pinpoints a moment of last resort to name relations between texts, where "text" had not yet taken on its now ubiquitous sense of "text-messaging." In the France of May 1968, Kristeva's intertextuality served the purposes of overturning previous hierarchies of high-cultural understanding by translating and adapting Bakhtinian dialogism and the carnivalesque into an intellectual movement claiming a more democratic face for categories of texts (Ryan 633-34).

The writers who wrote after 1960s revised thoroughly the four pillars on which the novel rested----plot, character, setting and theme. The fiction which emerged out of this was placed under the rubric of postmodernism. Postmodern fiction especially emerged as a potent way of questioning the realistic assumptions underlying much of the fictional writing. Brian Nicol sums this up:

> Postmodern fiction, then, is rooted in the response of a range of writers and critics from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s to the way the modernist novel transformed the possibilities of fiction, most notably in their inability to conceive of realism without some degree of suspicion or disbelief. (22)

This idea of author's authenticity was earlier challenged by the structuralist and poststructuralists who gave importance to "the relationship between…signs and the ways they interact to produce different meaning formation" (Fowler, 121).

The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, had earlier revolutionized the concept of language. His major point about language is that it is a system with rules and regulations that govern how various elements of language interact. Language is a means through which we understand and view the world. It consists of signs and every sign is a combination of signifier and signified. Signifier designates the sound-

image while as signified designates the concept. The bond between them is arbitrary and there is no necessary connection between a word and the object it denotes. This view of language challenges the view of reality as somehow independent and existing outside language, reducing language to merely a name giving system. Literature is a formal structure whose main quality is the distinctive syntax and phonological shape. Roger Fowler makes a pointed observation in this regard:

> [To] treat literature as a discourse is to see the text as mediating relationship between language users: not only relationships of speech, but also of consciousness, ideology, role and class. The text ceases to be an object and becomes an action or process (80).

Literary historians tell us that new forms always derive from past traditions. In this sense, a new work is always the product of a pre-existing pattern (a genre) and a transformation of that pattern in new creative and historical circumstances. Every writer creates her/his own precursors and modifies our conception of the past and about the future through his work. The meaning of a work is thus often grounded in a self-conscious relationship to past forms and the transformation and implicit questioning of these often becomes both the basis of a work's structure and of its contemporary historical characters.

The language of the text is not a privileged language, rather it is framed through the integration of everyday historical forms of communication which include the "language of memoirs, journals, diaries, histories, conventional registers, legal records, journalism, documentary" (Waugh, 1984:5). Bakhtin, pointing to the special status of the novel in underlining the concept of intertextuality, argues that the language of the novel is always dialogic:

> Word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way (Bakhtin, 1981:279).

Although there is a fundamental difference between Saussure's concept of abstract objectivity of the linguistic sign and Bakhtin's idea of its ineluctable situatedness, both theorists have contributed to the trend of disrupting the realistic assumptions underlying much of modern criticism which privileges the autonomy of the text.

The idea underlying intertextuality, therefore, is that language is not somehow a neutral medium, transparently related to the world of objects. Any utterance or the use of a word in a given way is composed not in a vacuum in which the words as we initially encounter them are empty of significance. Rather, even before we utter the word in our own manner and with our own signification, it is already invested with many layers of meaning and our use of the word must accommodate those other meanings and compete with them. Our utterance will in its very nature be dialogic: it is born as one voice in a dialogue that is already constituted; it cannot speak monologically as the only voice, in some register isolated from all social, historical and ideological context.

The relation of language to the phenomenal world is regulated by conventions and in order to explain the relation between the "world of fiction and the world outside the fiction" (Waugh, 3) novelists resorted to a new mode of writing fictions known as metafiction. Patricia Waugh describes metafiction as "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose question about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 1984:3). Metafiction acts as a signifier to another fiction which in turn becomes its signified. Such fictions create alternative fictions which merely imply the old forms by encouraging the reader to draw his or her knowledge of literary conventions when trying to construct meaning for the new text. Metafiction draws attention towards the creation/description paradox which defines the ontological status of all fictions because the fact of the matter is that the fictional objects exist while they are formed. In other words, a literary fiction simultaneously construct a context as well as text.

All literary works have meaning embedded in them which is dug out by the reader and thus a text lacks an intrinsic meaning. These literary works are, as Graham Allen points out, "build from systems,

codes traditions…of other forms and of culture which are crucial in extracting meaning of a text" (Allen, 2000:1).

All texts contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse. Texts are the microcosm of the larger cultural and social textuality from which they are etched out and thus a text cannot be seen emerging from a determined and fixed context. This indeterminacy of the context, its unidentifiable boundaries and the absence of a neat separation between text and context is central to the idea of intertextuality.

Postmodernism embraces an extreme notion of intertextuality where the play of meaning is infinite. The limits of interpretation are set only by the boundaries of the imagination and thus a reader plunges into a web of textual relations where it is not the author but the reader who is given central position as every reader brings with him or her different expectations, interests, viewpoints and prior reading experiences. Roland Barthes is of the view that "it is language which speaks not the author" and that while realizing the full meaning in a text it is necessary to cut the umbilical cord between an author and a text. Barthes says that even the word 'text' means 'a tissue, a woven fabric'

> Any text is a new tissue of past citations [which]…pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text…, the intertext is a general field…of unconscious or automatic quotations given without quotation-marks (1982:142).

The author is no longer considered as having a pivotal role in producing a text and its meaning, rather the author has been decentred in the interpretive process. He is not considered as an originator but as an "orchestrator who blends and rearranges material to frame an idiosyncratic view of the world" (Fowler, 2006:121).

A sense of complex interrelationships which exists between past convention and present narrative form is one essential aspect of the mode of self-awareness and self-criticism that has been apparent in a good deal of fictional writing. There are numerous novels which address themselves to a highly 'knowing' reader who is required to be conscious of the anxieties involved in creating novels which are expected to be thoroughly original. When a writer reads certain text it gets reflected in his own work of art through quotations or references. When a reader reads that work he also incorporates his ideas which he has gained by reading other texts. Thus the meaning of a text moves from narrow to broader sense as every reader brings with him his prior reading experiences. For Micheal Riffatere, an intertextual reader is one who finds relation between text and intertext. Every reading act enhances the portals of knowledge. Umberto Eco says: Often books speak of other books. Often a harmless book is like a seed that will blossom into a dangerous book, or it is the other way around: it is the sweet fruit of bitter stem (286).

In an intertextual world, a text enters another text taking into account the notions of boundary which must be remembered by the reader so as to appreciate the implications as well as the pleasures of crossing over. An important device through which this crossing-over takes place is character. Character can be easily exchanged between texts as the whole corpus of literature acts as a limbo through which authors can draw their characters. The speech of a character is polyphonic in nature as it serves two functions simultaneously: it presents the intentions of both the character who is speaking and that of the author. It exemplifies, "the intertextual or the dialogic nature of the languages by always serving two speakers, two intentions, two ideological positions but always with single utterance" (Allen, 27).

Bakhtin stresses that the 'image of the language' is an important aspect of the novel as the novels are concerned with the plurality of languages, discourses and voices. He considers language as social and political process rather than an abstract and unified system as implied by 'langue'. For Bakhtin language is not fixed or stable, rather it is in a state of flux. Meaning is never singular and uncontested but plural and contested. The plurality of the novel arises due to the play of signifiers as they connote other signifiers and the 'trace' of signifying chains which disrupt and considerably defer the meaning of every signifier. Every text is dependent on a language within which are inscribed vast histories of meaning. The plurality of a text

is neither 'inside' nor 'outside' because a text itself is not autonomous. As the novels are polyphonic in nature they are different from myth which has transparency of language. Polyphony means the combination of different parts or voices and in a polyphonic novel we find not an objective, authorial voice presenting the relations and dialogue between characters but a world in which all characters, and even the narrator himself, are possessed of their own discursive consciousness. Such novels present a world where no individual discourse can stand objectively above any other discourse. These novels fight against any view of the world which would valorize one official point of view, one ideological position, and thus one discourse. A polyphonic novel presents a world-view which is literally dialogic. In a dialogic novel double-voiced discourse holds an important place because through this aspect we come closer to intertextuality because all, "utterances depend on or call to other-utterances; no utterance itself is singular; all utterances are short through with other, competing and conflicting voices."(Allen, 27).

Dialogism, therefore, can be more widely seen in novels as compared to other literary genres. In novels, dialogism is an integral part of the mode in which the discourse conceives its objects and its means of expressing it. A text does not exist as a hermetic whole, rather it is shaped and transformed by other textual structures. As John Frow rightly points out:

> the concept of intertextuality requires that we understand the concept of text not as self-contained structure but as differential and historical…Texts are therefore not structure of presence but traces and tracing of otherness (45).

The infinite elasticity in intertextuality emerges from the fact that texts refer to other texts. Through intertextuality a postmodern literary work achieves the richness of detail and polyphonic perspectives which can be seen in realistic novels. A polyphonic novel tries to come out from the shackles of a definite ideology as it devalues originality, autonomy, uniqueness and singularity. It heightens the portals of skepticism and questioning.

The textual analysis of the structure of the text places a text in an intertextual narrative where there are no final closures. Roland Barthes places a text in a flexible system where the signifiers offer 'always already written /read'. The meaning of the text gets virtually deferred as the meaning does not come from the author but from the language viewed intertextually. While analyzing a text structurally it is dissected into many segments so as to demonstrate how those segments relate to the rules of combination and association which form the langue of the narrative. The signifier which is cut and isolated from the, "linear flow of the narrative, is untimely regrouped at a higher level of analysis, in which the text's component parts are related to the rules of narrative langue" (Allen, 83).

Intertextuality plays a dual role as it calls for the importance of a prior text insisting that the individuality of a text is a façade and the text has a meaning because of the things that have been previously written. It leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification. Intertextualiy is not just tracing the source and influences, rather it casts its net wider to include unidentified discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that makes possible the signifying practices of the later text. The relationship between the quoted discourse and the quoting discourse can have varying ramifications.

Roland Barthes interpreted intertext as "the impossibility of living outside the infinite text" (Barthes, 1973:36) thereby making intertextuality the very condition of textuality. Textuality breaks the boundaries between the texts as there is a relationship between the texts not because of cause and effect but of quotations which are without quotation marks. Quotation is a medium that connects the text to history, for it quotes the discourse that circulates around it. Barthes divided a text into two groups: the *lisible* (readerly) text and the *scriptible* (writerly) text. The readerly text figures representations and is associated with the realistic novel of the 19th century. Such texts are called classic texts which lead the reader towards a single meaning. It undercuts the force of intertextuality and focuses only on the cultural myth and ideologies which Barthes explains through the term *doxa*, which suggests that the stable and singular

meaning is possible. The *doxa* is a stereotypical meaning, a section from the intertextual environment of the social text, constituted by established discourses, by the already written and already read. It assumes that a signified can be found for the text's signifier and that a single unified view of the world can be delivered to the reader by an author. About the writerly text, Barthes says that such texts are ideal and utopian as they lack a unified single view and thus oppose the linear, sequential flow of the readerly texts. Intertextuality alone is not responsible:

> for producing *jouissance*, the loss of unity and identity experienced by the reader when confronted by the plural, polysemous, non-unified text. Intertextuality is an important term for describing the radically plural text, and is a crucial technique in the work of those writers who eschew notions of the unified work, yet it is also potentially what creates a sense of repetition, cultural saturation, a dominance of cultural stereotypes and thus of *doxa* over that which would resist and disturb the beliefs and forms and codes of that culture, the *para-doxa* (Allen, 91-2).

The concept of intertextuality discussed above explains the extensive use of parody in literature in postmodern times. Due to the artists' recognition that nothing can be articulated with innocence and all artistic expressions are necessarily implicated in an intricate web of social, cultural, linguistic and political relationships, postmodern art tends to employ parody much more vigorously than any preceding age. one of the most successful strategies to create a contradictory stance on any statement is the use of parody. The use of parody in literature is old but the term has all long been taken to mean a ridiculing imitation of a previous work of art. In her *Theory of Parody* (1985), Linda Hutcheon has argued that the concept of parody needs to be freed from the constraint of the traditional definition. Parody, according to her, is a much more profound literary concept than is ordinarily understood. She states, "the kind of parody I wish to focus is an integrated structural modeling process of revisiting, replaying, inventing and trans-contextualizing previous work of art" (1985: 11). She regards parody as an apt postmodern form because of its potential to critique the traditional humanist ideas about art and its relation to reality. For her, the parodied text is not a target but a weapon, an idea that underscores the scope of parody as much broader than merely ridiculing some other work. It is a form of auto-referentiality fraught with ideological implications. While Hutcheon states that, "parody, often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality, is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders," she departs from the prevailing interpretation that postmodern parody is ultimately value-free and devoid of any critical potential. It is noteworthy that Frederic Jameson takes this view of postmodern parody, rejecting its critical stance towards reality and regarding it as a mere pastiche. Jameson identifies pastiche as a defining formal feature of postmodern aesthetics, which he defines as "blank parody" owing to his belief that postmodern art is bereft of a critical edge towards contemporary reality. Linda Hutcheon, however, defines parody as:

> one of the techniques of self-referentiality by which art reveals its awareness of the context-dependent nature of meaning, of the importance to signification of circumstances surrounding any utterance (1985:85).

Parody means aesthetically foregrounding the historical consciousness of a novel whereby it can interrogate itself against the significant precedents. This kind of self-consciousness requires careful understanding because it is a traditional strategy, employed in new circumstances, in which forms from the past persist and structurally dominate later writing. Parody, therefore, is an artistic expression of the idea that no text has meaning in isolation, all texts have porous boundaries and meaning is ultimately diffused in the large and unbounded field of enunciation.

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