

Intertextuality in literature, Film, and other popular Media:
Intermediality and signs relations
(Summary of a paper presented by Stephen Awung in a linguistics seminar)

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1.Introduction

Definition of term.

Intertextuality is a word coined by Julia Kristeva, a French linguist who has written much on this topic. This word has a broader meaning in today’s context than the theories she expounds in her seminal work on intertextuality ”word, dialogue and novel”. Her notion of Intertextuality refers to the literal and effective presence in a text of another text. A text

according to her is a permutation of texts, an Intertextuality in the space of a given text, in which several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another(Allen 2000:35). Kristeva writes:

horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context) coincide, bringing to light an important factor: each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. In Bakhtin's work, these two axes, which he calls dialogue and ambivalence, are not clearly distinguished. Yet, what appears as a lack of rigour is in fact an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotation; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double.(Kristeva 1980:66)

In this paper, I will discuss and analyze some types and theories of intertextuality, while paying much attention to examples. These examples would be based on the definitions discussed in this paper, because I discovered in my research that there are conflicting views among scholars on this topic concerning various terms. For instance, while some authors consider pictures as texts, others do not(Allen 2000:37).

Types of Intertextuality.

I would like to analyse two major types of Intertextuality, which are ekphrasis and iconotext.

Ekphrasis was defined by Tom Mitchel, Grant Scott and James Hefferman as "the verbal representation of visual representation" while David Carrier sees it as a "verbal re-creations of visual artwork"(Wagner 1996:10).By this definition, both authors mean that ekphrasis comes into being when a writer describes a visual object such as painting or sculpture with a verbal media such as in a novel, poem, or other writings. This can be seen in any literature that tries to describe or portray painting and sculpture, as mentioned below:

- the description of Achilles's shield in Homer's Iliad
- Minerva and Avachne in Ovid Metamorphosis
- Shakespeare's The rape of Lucrece
- Lawrence Ferlinghetti's When I look at pictures

These examples were taken from the article by Wagner and may be difficult for some audience to fathom it probably because they have not read any of these books. The underlying point here, however, is that the afore mentioned examples are pieces of literature that describe visual art works. This can also be seen in the poetic description of works of arts ,mostly painting in a literary mode, and is the subject of James Hofferma's recent perception survey of a body of literature (from Homer to Ashbery) that corroborates the struggle between WORD and IMAGE. According to WJT Mitchell all ekphrasis is notional, and seeks to create a specific image that is to be found only in the text as its "resident alien". Ekphrasis stages a paradoxical performance, promising to give voice to the allegedly silent image even while attempting to overcome the power of the image by transforming and inscribing it(Wagner 1996:12).For instance, paintings does not have voice but when one describes painting in writing, he is intentionally or unintentionally, directly or indirectly giving voice to this painting.

Iconotext

This brings us to the second category of intertextuality called iconotext. It is the use of (by way of reference or allusion, in an explicit or implicit way) an image in a text or vice versa. Micheal Nerlich defines it as a work of art made up of visual and verbal signs, such as Evelyne Sinnasamy's novel with photographs, *la femme se decouvre*, in which text and images form a whole (or union that can not be dissolved). But Alain Montandon sees it as a Work of arts in which writing and the plastic element present themselves in an inseparable totality. Iconotext can also exist in such works in which one medium is only implied e.g. the reference to a painting in a fictional text (Wagner 1996:15-16) Examples can be found in most newspapers, where articles sometimes carry pictures. It can also be seen in novels like *Hackers* (Bischoff 1983:32) in which pictures are used in various parts of the novel to give image to the writing. It should be noted that the said novel has been reproduced as film, but we will come to that later when I shall be discussing film as an example of intertextuality.

2. Some theories of Intertextuality

I will discuss the theories of intertextuality by Plato, Aristotle, and Roman theorists, while giving some examples based on my understanding.

a. Theory of imitation.

According to Roman theorists, imitation presupposes reference to a pre-existent reality which is concrete as well as textual. Apart from the above mentioned authorities, Quintilian remarks that imitation is not repetition...., it is a highlighting in which by reading and writing, the translator declares his/herself, while also engaging in a process of self-alienation. Joel Weinheimer argues that an imitation has no independent or autonomous essence (....) it is neither a copy nor an original.

Now in the case of platonic imitation, the poet always copies an earlier act of creation, which is itself already a copy.

Plato's theories of poetry highlight intertextual relation. Certainly, the work of art, to Plato is not autonomous but crossed. For example, by various references to social knowledge like military tactics; divination, statecraft etc (Still/Worton 1990:2-3).

Plato's theory can be supported by most of the poems written as a result of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington DC. We all know what happened, including the poets. I would not like to limit Plato's theory to poetry, it can also be seen in other literatures like films. For instance, the film "The rise and fall of Idi Amin" which portrays the brutal and dictatorial regime of Idi Amin in post independent Uganda (Idi Amin was a totalitarian Ugandan leader, who was widely known for his brutality against his opponents. He was deposed from power in a military coup). There are many films about the first and second world wars, and the golf war. In all these cases, we know what happened and we still watch and appreciate the film version of the events. I think these examples help to explain Plato's theory of imitation.

According to Still/Worton, Aristotle's theory of imitation is rather different from Plato's, for Aristotle dramatic creation is the reduction, and hence intensification, of a mass of texts

known to the poet, and probably to the audience as well. But this difference is not accepted to me, it's like saying the same thing in different words. He holds that we learn (with great pleasure) through imitating, other than our instinct to enjoy works of imitation is inborn instinct.

Both Cicero and Quintilian emphasize that imitation is not only a means of forging one's discourse but it is a consciously intertextual practice (Still/Worton 1990:7). This is so, because by imitating a text, one tends to mix one's ideas with the ideas contained in the imitated text—thus leading to a product of hybridity.

All the theories discussed above are similar in my point of view. They all underline the fact that imitation has to do with texts known to the authors. It's logical that one can not imitate something one does not know about. A good example of an imitated work is the play, *The gods are not to blame* by Ola Rutimi, which was copied from a Greek tragedy called *Oedipus* and transplanted in an African context.

b. Quotation

Imitation leads us to the theory of quotation, which I think is a common practice in academic work because I find it in most of the articles and books that I read, and I have quoted a lot in this paper, too. According to Kristeva, reading is aggressive participation and also that the reader escapably strives to incorporate the quotation into the unified textuality which makes the text a semiotic unit. The reader thus seeks to read the borrowing not only for its semantic context but also its topological or metaphoric function and significance (Still/Worton 1990:11)

It should be noted that one can find quotations in books and articles without a quotation sign, and if one has no knowledge about these quotations, one could read such work without knowing that it is borrowed from other people's material. For instance, in the film "Star Trek" Shakespeare was quoted on many occasions. A case in point is "Sein oder nicht sein (to be or not to be)" as in *Hamlet* (Star Trek vi and Shakespeare). Online in <http://www.saarnet.de/saarnet.de/startrek/movie1-6.htm>, just to name but this.

3. Examples of intertextuality in Literature: African scenarios

Let us now discuss examples of intertextuality in African literature by differentiating between African men's and African women's literatures. This is because there exist an interesting parallel in both literatures. This technique of intertextuality in African literature is called writing back.

a. Men's Literature

A number of European who spent time in Africa as missionaries, tradesmen, adventurers and colonial officials and even some who never set foot on the Africa continent wrote novels set in Africa. Their statements about African culture and people are deeply rooted in the colonial mentality which is, according to Janmohammed "dominated by a manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and

inferiority” (Arndt 1998:35).

In accordance with this notion, colonialist authors reproduce the stereotyped image of Africa as a “place of barbarism” and the myth of the “burden of the white man” who is to bring light into the heart of darkness. With their texts, colonialist authors legitimized the widespread fallacy that Africa lacked culture, history or literature.

It’s hardly surprising that this European blackmail of the “dark continent” elicited protest from Africans. Achebe, a famous African creative scholar goes on to say that he later discovered that “...once that kind of enlightenment comes to you, you realised that some one has to write a different story”. In 1930, Sol Plaatje heralded the age of these “different stories” of African authors with his novel *MHUDI*. Since then, more and more African writers have been creating an intertextual dialogue by putting the right perspective on African culture in opposition to the view of colonialist literary text. The aim is to correct the distorted literary depiction of African and questioning the colonial mentality of Europeans and Africans as well. African writers created a more differentiated and realistic picture of Africa and African men. In their writings, the latter appear as complex individuals who possess dignity, history and cultural identity and are not primitive, dangerous and barbarous.

Salman Rushdie described with the words “the empire writes back with vengeance” (Arndt 1998:35). This critically intended intertextual dialogue received a name “writing back”. This is visible in Nkenjo Njumbam’s novel *The white man of God*, (Njumbam is an Anglophone Cameroonian novelist) where he highlights a conflict or clash between the Western and African religion, making it clear that the African did not hear of religion from the white man.

b. Women’s Literature

In the pre colonial period, women were totally marginalized by men in most African societies. In some communities, women were considered as individuals whose main roles were to bear children, raise them and take care of the house hold just like the situation of women in Europe till the 18th century when these women changed their fate through literary and political intertextuality (Hill 1982:175). The woman’s fate was determined by father or husband. Women were generally portrayed negatively as dangerous and malicious. Authors discriminatory view women as inferior to men.

This notion was later challenged by African women writers who portrayed women in a more differentiated and realistic way than their male colleagues. In their works, they destroy the myth that women are inferior to men, faceless beings, who have made no contribution to history. They correct the image of women in their writings. They enter into whether or not they intend to an intertextual dialogue with the literary texts of men, which demonstrates unmistakable parallels to African male writer’s revision of colonialist view of Africa (Arndt 1998:35).

4. Examples of Intertextuality

Intertextuality in Film.

According to Bazin, a French film theorist, there is no doubt at all that films were, in principle, works of authors who at certain time and with certain technical and aesthetic means had managed to create certain distinctive cinematic artwork (Paech 2000:1). Most of

Shakespeare's books such as Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, Merchant of Venice among others have been reproduced as films, as well as . . . Gulliver's Travel by Jonathan Swift, and Chinua Achebe's Things fall apart. Christian Metz, a German semiologist, purported that films are not only an artwork, but, rather, a textual system that constitutes its own original, singular totality, in which the author, if involved at all, is only a constituent of this system. Today, it seems to be more appropriate to speak of film as one medium among others which interacts as multimedia, or is connected to one another intermedially. The same film can be seen on cinema, on TV, on video, and DVD. According to Metz, Film, picture, color, sound, motion, adaptation from literature-whether technological or mechanical medium makes film a sort of technical Gesamtkunstwerk(Paech 2000:5).

Intertextuality in newspapers.

Most news papers or magazines contain pictures, or cartoons. The degree of the intertextuality is different. Some are more verbal than visual and vice versa, e.g in most editions of the Rheinischer Merkur news paper(see Rheinischer Merkur newspaper).

Intertextuality on Computer screens

Texts on the computer monitors are said to be completely hyper textual links, i.e. connections of combination that arrange texts as part of a simultaneous virtual network to constantly changing current textual formation which allow the processing of pictures, graphics, even moving pictures and film on the same textual level(Paech 2000:5). www.cnn.com could be a good example of this explanation because the system affords us opportunity to read texts, watch motion pictures, listen to audio reports, and even chat online.

CONCLUSION

I support the view that most texts, if not all are intertextual based on the theories of quotation and imitation. It is very natural and inevitable in the world of arts. That is why, there are clear approaches in this work to portray intertextuality by means of analyzing arguments from various authorities, and by citing examples from sources that can easily be consulted. We are living in a world of Intertextuality or hybridity.

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