

Integrality of Intertextuality in Ian Mcewan's *Nutshell*

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Abstract

This research aspires to ponder the usage and applicability of intertextuality in Ian McEwan's *Nutshell*. Being a re-telling of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Nutshell* is a tightly packed drama of deceit, lust and murder. The plot mainly talks about the heartless butchers as well as betrayers who make an innocent poet, a lovable father, a passionate man lifeless. And it is being enumerated by the narrator who is indeed a foetus. He is none other than the very own son of the poor murderess as well as the cruel murderer. In this view, *Nutshell* is also considered to be a classic tale of man-slaughter and trickery. Due to the plot construction of the novel, the characters in *Nutshell* are said to be the resemblance of some of the prominent characters in *Hamlet* especially the narrator. He is here to replace Shakespearean Hamlet. In such a way, McEwan makes use of the technique 'intertextuality' in this work of art. Through this concept, he also proves an integral part of 'intertextuality' in contemporary writings.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Transformation, Murder, Betrayal, Incapability

Introduction

The term 'intertextuality' popularized especially by Julia Kristeva is used to signify the multiple ways in which anyone literary text is made up of other texts, utilizing its open or convert citations and allusions, its repetitions and transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier texts, or simply its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistic and literary conventions and procedures that are "always-already" in place and constitute the discourses into which we are born. In Kristeva's formulation accordingly, any text is, in fact, an "intertext"- the site of an intersection of numberless other texts, and existing only through its relations to other texts (Abrams 398).

The term 'intertextuality' is said to be a derivation of the Latin word *intertexto* which was introduced by Julia Kristeva, a French Semiotician in the late sixties as said before. It is simply a literary device that creates an inter-relationship between two or more texts. Intertextual figures include allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche and parody. Kristeva argues that any text is the absorption and transformation of one another.

Interpretation of Intertextuality

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Trudy has betrayed her husband, John Caincross. She is still in her marital home – a dilapidated, priceless London townhouse – but John is not at home. Instead, she is with her brother-in-law, the profoundly banal Claude. Both of them have an illegitimate affair. To maintain their clandestine relationship, they both conspire to kill John and to conquer the properties of John. But there is a witness to their plot: the inquisitive, nine-month-old resident of Trudy’s womb. “My mother is involved in a plot, and therefore I am too, even if my role might be to foil it. Or if I, reluctant fool, come to term too late, then to avenge it” (N 3). The foetus is a silent witness that is unknown to the world.

By resurrecting, the significant roles of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* such as prince Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius, and dealing with many other related materials, *Nutshell* promises more than mere intertextual playfulness. McEwan uses this kind of a technique to make the text so very powerful. The intertextual cites, which McEwan derived from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* are as follows. Here, the embryo feels bitter for his failure in the attempt of saving his father’s life. His impotency troubles him severely, in fact, it is very contradictory that is the same dilemma which Hamlet has undergone. “So, getting closer, my idea was to be” (N 2). “I see no scheme, no plausible route to any conceivable happiness. I wish never to be born” (N 76).

To be or not to be, that is the question
whether ’t is nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end then? To die, to sleep,
No more”. (Hamlet Act 3, Scene1)

The unborn baby condemns his mother Trudy ponderously for her unlawful ‘love-making’ with his uncle. Likewise, Hamlet is upset with his mother because she marries his father’s brother, Claudius just, months after his father’s death. Throughout the play, Hamlet is struck on the idea that how his mother would be able to do such a thing. He constantly stresses how incestuous the relationship is, and how disgusting the idea is of her marrying her dead husband’s brother. “I hate her and her remorse. How did she step from John to Claude, down to the nasty sty to roll in filth with her idiot lover, lie in shit and ecstasy, plan a house-theft inflict monstrous pain and humiliating death on a kindly man?” (N 117).

Nay but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed
stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty! (Hamlet Act 3 scene 4)

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as well as McEwan's 'unnamed Hamlet' both of them, cannot tolerate their uncle's incestuous oppression upon their 'mothers'. For instance, Claudius in *Hamlet* used to address Gertrude as his mouse. Hamlet openly criticizes such activity in *Hamlet*. The same like Hamlet, Trudy's son also outrages uncontrollably while Claude calls his mother as his mouse. It seems to be a sign or code for their so-called love-making according to him. "Yes, I was there when he tempted her again to bed, called her his mouse, pinched her nipples hard, filled her cheeks with his lying breath and cliché-bloated tongue" (N 157).

Not this by no means, that I bid you do-
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
Pinche wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
And let him for pair of reechy kisses, ... (Hamlet Act 3, Scene 4)

In *The Guardian*, Tim Adams reviews that: "Biology was always Hamlet's destiny – 'The time is out of joint. Oh, cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right' – but never has it seemed quite so graphically chromosomal." Adams found the book to be "both alive with wild and whirling wordplay and capable of all sorts of antic dispositions" but warned that "As with all novels based on self-consciously clever conceits, the danger is always self-consciously clever conceit".

Summation

For all their variation, certain characteristics unify McEwan's books and make him one of the few literary novelists whose fans wait with great impatience for another dose. One of these is their ingenious plotting. McEwan is above all else a wonderful storyteller, a builder of suspense. On the whole McEwan's witty narration and handling of the concept 'intertextuality' helps him to attain the rhetorical heights and moments of great emotional power. With this, the interconnection between McEwan's *Nutshell* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* represents the exact ideology of 'intertextuality' here through this research.

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