

## **Contemporary Literature**

**Prof. Aysha Viswamohan**

**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**IIT Madras**

Mod-01 Lec-10 Lecture-10

So, intertextuality and this is a concept related to drama theories, literary theories. I would like your responses to come first. What do you understand? What does the word appear to you like intertextuality? One definition could be references within the text or even to other text that is what you said. Now, elaborate on it, give me some examples, but not from six degrees of separation. You are correct, you are absolutely on the mark, but can you give me some examples now, not from our play. In Galileo's, in the life of Galileo's by Brecht, there are the Brecht takes many real life, not real life, certain aspects of the sign boards, the information sign boards on.

Placards. The information there about when, what happened. Example of intertextuality? Has not that, that is taken from the actual archives. Fine, so what you are, in other words as I understand you, Brecht quoting something from the life of Galileo from yeah, what? Are you aware of a term called historiography? I do not want to get into historiography, but you are closer to that than intertextuality. Give me example of intertextuality from a literary text.

Kumar will give four certain problems, but six degrees is intertextuality and six degrees are so interconnected, we cannot do away with it, but any example that you can think of. You gave me the definition, you say intertextuality references within text or references to other text, what would it mean? And what does it do? I will give you a small exercise also from six degrees, are you having your text today? Good, please be ready with your text. Just a brief introduction to what is intertextuality. So, the term was first introduced by, are you familiar with this name? She is a French theoretician, Julia Kristeva and her article called word dialogue and the novel. This is the article in which she coined the word intertextuality, word dialogue and the novel and she derives from the theories of the linguist, Ferdinand Saussure and literary critic, Michael Bakhtin.

Any idea, anything that you can tell me about these two theoreticians? The notion of intertextuality is derived from the theories of Bakhtin and Saussure. Now, Saussure is known for, he influenced Carte, not Carte, I am sorry Derrida. When he deconstruction.

So, Saussure is known for his theories of semiotics and science, science as in S I G N S and Bakhtin is of course, famous for his theories and the famous expressions. Dialogic, a text is dialogic, heteroglossic and polyphonic. A text, a work of art, a literary text according to Bakhtin is dialogic, polyphonic and heteroglossic.

What does it mean? Not mono, but di, hetero and poly. What does it tell you now? A work of art can be interpreted in several ways, so it speaks in several voices, get the idea. A work of art is not an end in itself. Who put forward the idea, the notion of death of the author? All these ideas are interconnected. You know the French critic Roland Barthes, he put forward the idea of death of the author.

Now what does it mean? Which author is dead? Who is dead? There is no right to say how something is interpreted. I mean it is up to the person who is reading it. Once something has been written, you cannot just say it is my intellectual property, you cannot force people to understand the text in say one set way. So, according to Roland Barthes, the world, the author dies once he finishes the product and once the product goes into the hands of the reader. Then the reader has the right to interpret the work of art, the text, the literature in whatever way he or she wants.

That means that the work of art is not an end in itself. It is open to and every reader now, therefore these ideas of dialogia and heteroglossia are important because every reader brings along with himself or herself several other you know notions and everything is brought or the way they read or the way they approach a text is influenced by their background, their knowledge and their prior reading. For example, we might as readers miss out on several inter-textual references in six degrees of a separation. Is it possible or not? It is quite possible because it is so dense with references. What Guare wants us to see and the way we see it may differ entirely because we may not be able to catch up with every reference that Guare is making.

The same can be said of Tarantino's cinema, packed with references, packed with illusions, it is a pastiche, it is a parody. Several references people have done written books on Tarantino's cinema, the way he keeps on I mean Pulp Fiction is a definitive text of postmodernist cinema. He borrows from all over the place. He plays with the structure and form of the film and that is possible in literature also. We were talking about the novel, the French Left-handed woman John Fowles where the author John Fowles gives us a choice of endings.

You reader has the choice to pick and choose the kind of ending you want and he gives us a couple of endings, not one definite and fixed reading. Now coming back to this notion, Saussure and Bakhtian theories of language and literature at work of art is open

to several interpretations. So that is the origin of intertextuality. Intertextuality is the shaping of text meaning by other texts. I would like you to again go through six degrees of separation and feel.

If intertextuality is the shaping of one text meaning by other text, how is six degrees shaped by reading or readings of other texts? It can refer to authors borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. So, meaning is not directly now transferred from the author to the reader where intertextuality is concerned, but instead meaning is filtered through a series of codes. It is mediated through multiple signs and codes and if we are able to get them, we are able to understand the text the way it is supposed to be read. I mean we are able to derive the ultimate pleasure from a text. That is the idea.

Literature is done, you know people write novels and plays for a variety of reasons, but the ultimate aim is to provide enjoyment, aesthetic pleasure and aesthetic pleasure can be derived if we are able to sense the meaning through a variety of codes which a writer employs in conveying certain kind of meanings. So, if the reader is able to understand those codes, if he is able to break those codes, all the signs and symbols he is supposed to understand and enjoy a text better than someone who really does not, who is not able to understand all those complexities which are implicit in a work of art. So, two sets of theoreticians, structuralist and poststructuralist. Now, when we talk about people like Julia Kristeva, they fall in the category of poststructuralist. Poststructuralist try to use in the concept of intertextuality to arrive at a set of fixed meaning for the text.

However, poststructuralist, they use the term intertextuality to disrupt the notion of a fixed meaning. The idea is that the text can be interpreted in several different ways and therefore, there is intertextuality and that is how they use it. Structuralist on the other hand, they use it to find a definite meaning. So, if we remember when we stopped, we finished our reading of six degrees of separation, I think Krishna said it is open ended. It is not able, we are not able to construct a definite ending for this play.

We do not know and that is the pleasure of reading, that constitutes the pleasure of reading because like it or not, the author refuses to give us an easy closure which is so postmodernist in its form. So, akin to the idea of intertextuality is also the idea of a pastiche. So, what is a pastiche? Mix of several what? Yes Aditi. Several styles and forms. Several styles and forms, give me an example of a pastiche, where you can also attempt.

Example of a pastiche, how does it do it? I can only think about the style of narration from because you mentioned pulp fiction. I mean the pace that varies, I mean say I am

thinking of like the long drawn out conversations in certain parts like for example, when John Travolta takes Uma Thurman to dinner and diner and how long and winding the conversations are and. You know the dance on the dance floor is a reference to what? Travolta's own image, we are talking about pulp fiction and it is a throwback on his Saturday night fever days. So, therefore, it is a pastiche. A better example would be Kill Bill.

Why? Kill Bill is a classic example of a pastiche film. Why? What does he do? Not just that. Exactly. Yeah, come out with it. How Japanese samurai, the ideas of the samurai.

Yeah, carry on. Honor duty blah blah. Yeah, honor duty and their exceptional skill and the swords, the idea of the sword being a very important. So, it is like a pastiche. No, it is there are different ideas first like she said of the bride, the idea of. Corrupted, I mean like something that is supposed to be pure, I mean the bride on a wedding day.

Bride on a wedding day. Now, see for example, if you remember, you just mentioned Japanese samurai concept of honor, right. It is there, the samurai sword. Ninjas, yes. In Kill Bill 1, we have an occasion to understand Japanese anime, if you remember. You remember that sequence? Japanese anime.

Then in Kill Bill 2, there is a reference to this entire mythology of western, the wild west if you remember. Then you also have concept of blaxploitation. What is blaxploitation? What is the genre of blaxploitation cinema? Is it just that or? Is it just that? Not necessarily, but a certain stereotype of course, but you know certain kind of lifestyle. So, maybe you may not find necessarily black people in Kill Bill, maybe not.

Right at the beginning. But she is not a stereotypical. She is not a conventional black person. But the constant lifestyle is there, you know the fist fight, the knife fight, you know that kind of you know people fighting all over the place that you know. So, what I mean by past is that in Kill Bill series of films, Tarantino collapses several kinds of genres in a film and then it becomes. Therefore, it can qualify for a good example of a pastiche.

So, blending of multiple genres. So, that. So, intertextuality again becomes. Now, if I ask you to qualify or categorize six degrees, what is its genre? Is it a tragedy in the same style as the Crucible or the Oedipus? No. Is it a thought provoking like brushed? No.

Yes. It does employ imagination. So, it cannot be a tragedy or a comedy in that sense. In a strict sense, if I ask you to classify it, what is what genre? I will call it a comedy.

Many people would call it a comedy. Akshaya has doubts, doubt written all over her face.

Seriously. Yes. It is a tragedy comedy. So, what I am trying to tell you is that it is very difficult to pigeonhole six degrees of separation and therefore, a pastiche is that work of art which is very difficult to classify or categorize. You do not know because you go and read the reviews of six degrees. It is very difficult.

Everybody just differs on everything. You do not know what is it about. Is it about racism? Is it about homosexuality? Is it about class difference? Is it about the snobbery of the upper classes? Is it about the plight of the poor whites and the poor blacks in America? Is it about the art circle, the exclusive art circle of New York? What is it about? You do not know. How does it end? Does he die? Who was he? Who was Paul? Does he actually die or is he out there duping other people? We do not know. What we do know is that in some sort of way, he just barges like the recurring word or expression in six degrees is burst of color.

Remember? They use it several times. Flan uses it. Ouisa uses it like a burst of color, Van Gogh burst of color. He just arrives on the scene, bursts on the scene and changes everything. So, their lies are not what they used to be anymore and they feel that in some certain way they have been touched by Paul's presence. Therefore, they do not want him to be reduced as a mere anecdote or as a mere incident in their lives.

So, we do not want him to become just an a dinner table conversation topic. He meant much more to us. At the same time, they know that he has committed a crime although inadvertently. He is instrumental in driving Rick to suicide. So, he has to be punished for that, but it is not a tragic in the truest sense.

It is not a real comedy also in the truest because it is thought provoking. It is not just there to generate a few laughs. It is not a preachy play. So, therefore, it is very difficult to categorize.

It is a pastiche. So, intertextuality also in Julia Kristeva's work is a collage of ideas, a mosaic of quotations. Can you give me some examples? Six degrees of separation, a collage of ideas, a mosaic of quotations. You can consult your books of course. It is not an exam. Theoreticians also talk about two kinds of intertextuality.

One is vertical and one is horizontal. Now, according to theoreticians, horizontal intertextuality means books referring to other books, books making references to other books. Vertical intertextuality means books referring to other works of art or some

socio-political situations. Now, other works of art could be music, cinema, painting, anything that constitutes art. So, vertical and horizontal. Let us talk about some examples of intertextuality in six degrees of separation.

Can you give me some examples and how and why Guare uses them? First, I would like to have categories instead of you know, I remember I gave you this to ponder over the weekend. So, just tell me, give me certain categories of references. Sociocultural, I will also give you know slash pop culture. Do you have literary references? Give me some very prominent examples. Pop, socio-cultural, can I just take it here? Pop, art.

Now, if you have your text, I mean one very good example of art and intertextuality is Kandinsky, the presence of Kandinsky itself and that too double sided, painted on both sides, one abstract and another more wild and vivid. So, suggesting both sides of personality, two sides to, if you remember Doctor Fine, Doctor Fine says it at one point, there are two sides to everything. So, throughout the play, we are made to understand that there are two sides. There cannot be one monologic understanding of any situation, any person. So, therefore, you know that stress on dialogic, on the presence of heteroglossia, many voices, the acceptance of polyphony.

However, I mean at one point, I am just tempted to talk about that dialog where Ouisa says that it is very quiet when kids are away. It comes at the beginning, low noise question. I mean is it so good? Of course, it is very orderly, but then what has that brought you? You are not an alienation with your own children. So, that means there is a need for lots of noises, lots of voices in order to become more wholesome, more connected. You can live in isolation, in quietude or peace, but in that process, you are just disconnecting yourself from everyone around you.

Dadaism, yes, you have cats, you have cats are in the ride, you have young, you have reference to references to Freud. Yes, you are saying something. Popular culture. Greater garbo, greater garbo who was a known recluse. She just disconnected herself from rest of the society, lived in her own ivory tower, mysterious, enigmatic, nobody never knew what she was in real life, but now let us go to that point where he talks about Sydney point here.

Good, page 23. Now, see page 23, I will just rattle off his list of movies. Some of his 42 films are No Way Out, Cry the Beloved Country, Blackbird Jungle, The Defiant Ones, Raisin in the Sun, Lilies of the Field, In the Heat of the Night, To Serve with Love, Shoot to Kill and of course, Guess Who is Coming to Dinner. Now, do you find some parallels? Guess Who is Coming to Dinner? Do you think there is some intertextuality happening here and then what does he do immediately after this? He makes dinner for

them and what is the theme and idea of *Guess Who is Coming to Dinner*? Not just preaching, but also accepting wholeheartedly with open and wide arms, people who are not like you, people from other race, from other community that is important and what is happening here. So, this is a very direct reference, it is a very direct intertextual reference to the movie because here it is a very nice, very clever spin on the movie, on the theme of the movie because there Sydney Poitier's character is a very straight forward, nice educated well adjusted kind of black who would be accepted by anyone. But then here, Guare is making a very cunning reference to accept him to this person who is anything but that character from *Guess Who is Coming to Dinner*.

He is most unlike the character which Sydney Poitier played in *Guess Who is Coming to Dinner*, but then accepting this person is also making a connection. It also tantamounts making a connection with your people. Anything else that you feel that was is worth mentioning here, some intertextual reference? 16th century Florence, all the restaurants, genius at every corner, yeah, yeah, why, how is it important here? Right, good, Renaissance period, 16th century Florence, yeah, he is a genius in every corner, when imagination was at its peak. So, many different ideas were cropping all the time, cropping up all the time. So, now, therefore, and then you look at this young man who is just bubbling with imagination, who makes such a passionate plea for imagination and then, *Catcher in the Rye*, what is so, what is so intertextual about *Catcher in the Rye* and why do you think that Guare chose only *Catcher in the Rye* and not *Tom Sawyer* or *Huck Finn*? Yes, because Holden Caulfield is a very good example of the chaos side of Kandinsky.

He is, he is a classic adolescence who is a misfit, a non-conformist teenage and that is what Paul is because he is not, he is not your average Sydney Poitier kind of a good guy. He is more in the category of Holden Caulfield. Do you think there is any, any very, it is a take on how English is, functions, both English hand luster shoes and pot of jam, they are like symbols of the upper class, aristocratic class and perhaps that is, that is what he wants to be. You know, that is, I mean, when I was reading the play, I also felt that sustained chapel and slapping the hand of God. Would it mean anything in the context, in the intertextual context of the play? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

You can achieve some, the near impossible by just reaching out. So, that could be, you do not even need a chain of six people between you and the person with whom you want to make a contact. Just reach out and touch it, touch the impossible. The KGB, you have assassination of president, attempted assassination of president Reagan, also the Soweto Royds, Royds in South Africa, Gorbachev. Yes, all these events are extremely important when the play was written.

Yes, John Lennon's assassination. Yes, Agatha Christie. Incidentally, Guare is both Agatha Christie and Chekhov happened to be personal favorites of John Guare. So, that would be, you know, just acknowledging the masters, acknowledging people whom he admires so much. I was also thinking of the quality of mercy, is not strange. Now, this is, and there is an irony on that. At one place, and the quality of mercy exists throughout in a very ironical fashion.

Quality of mercy, the, you know, the New Yorkers with a heart, that is what the headline screams, remember. And then, you go back to the quality of mercy is not a strain. In the beginning, you have those people who are ready to welcome a rich man's son because he is wounded and he has been mugged and they give him shelter, they dress his wounds. So, the headlines say New Yorkers, who says New Yorkers do not have a heart. At the same time, they are also, you know, when they go after him, they are quite ruthless.

Yes. So, who says that quality of mercy is not a strain? That is a, yes. I am not, I am asking the question. I mean, quality of mercy, I mean, it is mentioned here in a very ironical way, in a very ironical text, inter-textual way. Anything else that strikes you as very, very, when they are having the conversation, the final conversation over the phone, he says, I just read Andy Warhol's diaries. Yes, and Andy Warhol, great pop culture artist and he is known for that painting the soup can and also those beautiful Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe collages paintings.

But what else, the famous quotation, what was it? Famous quote by Andy Warhol. 15 minutes of fame. Do you think there is some kind of a connection? Paul, how? Yes, he wants just that, you know, one night connection with the very rich people, just that he does not want anything more than that. But he wants to experience that kind of life, which he knows that, that otherwise he would never have the opportunity to explore or to live. Rainbow room is an extremely upscale kind of a restaurant, extremely expensive.

The only way someone like Paul can have access to rainbow room is by robbing someone, some gullible person and Rick and Elizabeth just happen to come in his way. So, therefore, that Andy Warhol's reference is important, I think because of this entire idea of 15 minutes of fame. Also, when he is plastered all over the newspapers, this person, he becomes famous although, infamous, but that is what Andy Warhol says that it really does not matter whether it is fame or notoriety. As long as people know about you, it is ok.

So, Paul also is following Andy Warhol. So, therefore, the reference to Andy Warhol was also a known homosexual. Yes, Rehan. Yes, and all that, this is the, they became this reference to the who are explicitly called the star fuckers.



Yes. And alludes to this entire culture of name dropping. Name dropping. With celebrities. Yes. So, this entire culture where people are falling over each other to become associated with celebrities to come into limelight. Also, deep down you have the deep dark desire to star in cats as humans. However, brief you know, you know just as extras, but you are there on the screen.

People know you, people are going to watch you that alone, you know gives them a kick. So, again a reference to fifteen minutes of fame. So, now you see how the and again as I was talking to you earlier on Walter Benjamin's famous quote in this age of mechanical reproduction, my only copy of my dissertation is lost. So, that is another spin on Walter Benjamin's famous essay, the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Intertextuality to conclude has been used by several writers down the line for several purposes.

For example, John Steinbeck in his *East of Eden*, he says the entire story of the biblical genesis in America. And then you have James Joyce *Ulysses* which is a you know a take on Homer's *Odysseus* set in modern Dublin of course. You have a novel like a thousand acres. Are you familiar with this, with that novel which is the retelling of the story of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, but told from the point of view of the so called wicked daughters. Remember, *King Lear* had three daughters, one is a model virtuous daughter and two very wicked selfish daughters.

So, the story is told from the point of view of those daughters set in contemporary America. And then of course, you have the *Wide Sargasso Sea* which is a retelling of the *Jane Eyre* story from the point of view of Bertha, the mad wife, Mr. Rochester's mad wife who was never allowed to step out, who was always kept hidden in the attic.

So, that she does not interfere with Mr. Rochester's day to day life and you know Mr. Rochester can also marry in peace, but that does not happen in *Jane Eyre*. So, the *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys is a retelling of the *Jane Eyre* story, but from the wife's point of view. Any questions, any comments? So, several I mean when you read *Six Degrees of Separation* again, you will find that what Julia Kristeva says a collage of ideas and a mosaic of quotations everything is there, it is all present here. So, read the play when you know the next time you read it, read it from that perspective. Thank you.