

THE ENGLISH NOVEL: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

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Lecture 37

Atonement: Intertextual Connections

Hello student, I am here, Professor Smita Jha to discuss *Atonement* with Intertextual Connections.

Well, it is pertinent to know about intertextuality because it is the creation of a text with reference to another text, work of art or music. Since 1960s, when Julia Kristeva created the term, many theorists have engaged in the defining and redefining of the phenomenon and they have offered a great diversity of explanations and also use their own terminology to describe it. According to Alan Graham, Intertextuality is not a transparent term and so, despite its confident utilization by many theorists and critics, cannot be evoked in an uncomplicated manner. Some of the points of dispute among the theorists are the role of the author in the shaping of the text, the power of the reader, the impossibility of interpretation of literary works, the instability of meaning, the independence of the work on its historical and social situatedness.

Even though the term was created relatively recently and is often associated with post-modernism, it is important to realize that the technique is much older. Various intertextual practices of alluding and quoting, of paraphrasing and translating, of continuation and adaptation, of parody and travesty flourished in periods long before postmodernism. For instance, in late classical Alexandria, in the Renaissance, in neoclassicism and in classical modernism. Moreover, the concept of intertextuality is by no means limited exclusively to literature. As Allen observes, architecture, music, art, film, production, The products of all these are always confronted with previously created works.

The origins of concept of intertextuality can be found in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist and a structuralist, and M. Bakhtin, a Russian literary theorist. They both study language, but with a different focus. Kristeva combined the theories of the two that resulted into the emergence of the term intertextuality in 1960s. Saussure describes

language as a complicated abstract system governed by general rules and his emphasis on the systematic features of language establishes their relational nature of meaning and thus of text. To support his theories, he starts with the basic unit of language, a linguistic sign, and tries to find the origins of its meaning. Bakhtin also examines language but finds a sure synchronic system that focuses on the language at any moment of time deficient. He claims that there is no real moment in time when a synchronic system of language could be constructed as language is always in a ceaseless flow of becoming.

According to Bakhtin, language is a flexible tool that reflects a specific social situation, between specific individuals and the synchronic approach is inadequate because it loses sight of social specificity of language and confines it to something as abstract as a lexicon or dictionary. Synchronic approach is used in order to find some generalizable rules. The structuralists believe in the stability of meaning, try to fix it, make it objective, and in order to be able to scientifically analyze language and literary text, they avoid any attention to the human subject who performs the utterance under consideration. Furthermore, they separate the language from its cultural and historical context. Post-structuralists, on the other hand, view the notion of stable meaning as illusory and as a tool of dominant ideologies to maintain their power. Because such notions are vital for the preservation of the monological discourse. In her work, *Word dialogue novel 1966* and *the bounded text 1967* Kristeva works with Bakhtin's theories but she rewrites them in accordance with post-structuralist views. Bakhtin insisted on the contact of subjects behind the dialogical contact between text.

Julia Kristeva crucially departs from his view and redirects this power to intertextuality, to the contact with the pre-existence text. Consequently, the author of a text wants a creator and a genuine dwindles in importance and his role is reduced to providing the site or a space for the interplay of the text. Creativity and productivity are transferred from the author to the text. She applies her theories of intertextuality to literary works. Unlike Bakhtin, who focuses solely on novels interested in all literary genres, she positions the language of not only literary, but of all text into a three-dimensional textual space consisting of the author, the reader and the past text, which form a horizontal and a vertical dimension of the language.

Another theorist inherently connected with the concept of intertextuality in this field is Ronald Barthes. One of the most important features of his theory is his dismissal of the structuralist approach that is attempting to stabilize the meaning of the linguistic sign and of the text. For Barthes, the text is experienced only in an activity, in a production. And the

production is never-ending process. He subverts the traditional notions of the text and the work. In traditional views, the text partakes of the spiritual glory of the work, of which it is the prosaic but necessary servant.

Intertextuality is popular in both modernism and postmodernism. However, the use of it differs in at least two aspects. The first one is the fact that modernism is trying to, through the use of intertextual practices, escape the established modes of representation and yearns for the liberation from the systems of established codes, systems and modes of representation. Postmodernism acknowledges its inability to escape them and deals with such limitations through parody and irony. Hutcheon argues that intertextual references in modernism are still surrounded by an air of nostalgia for past times, whilst in postmodernism they signal ironic distance. In Hutcheon's words, postmodern intertextuality is both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation. Now, it is in this light that we have to analyze McEwan's novel.

McEwan is a representative of postmodernism and the postmodern strategies and tendencies are easily recognizable in his writing. The use of intertextuality in *Atonement* is not a novelty in McEwan's work, as his previous novels exhibit different degrees of the phenomenon. However, *Atonement* does stand out in the context of his work because it is his first truly intertextual novel. Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* is a story about two lovers separated by the Second World War, although published 60 years after the fact in the year 2001. The story is a postmodern novel that features an unreliable narrator, the protagonist, Briony, and therefore the entirety of the novel is questionable.

Use of other texts within *Atonement* aid in the foreshadowing of the story as developing an understanding of the plot as well as considering parallels to other literature. McEwan works with intertextuality from the first until the very last page. At the very beginning, McEwan uses a quotation from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, which, like *Atonement*, deals with the importance of the difference between the real world and the fictional one. To foreshadow Briony's crime, with respect to Genette's terminology, the epigraph can be classified as a pretext. However, it consists of the quotation from another text and therefore it is also an example of Genette's reduced form of intertextuality.

The passage is part of the dialogue between the two main characters of the novel and is concerned with the exposure of Catherine Morland's preposterous assumption about Henry Tilney's father. Though four years older, Catherine Morland is as innocent as the 13-year-

old Brioni guided solely by the wisdom of the Gothic novel she so enthusiastically reads. Her life is dull and uneventful and cannot measure up to the adventurous lives of her favourite characters. She wants to experience the romance and perils the heroines usually encounter and hence she interprets the things around her in order to fit into her fantastic ideas. On the basis of Mr. Tilney's hostile behavior, the existence of a forbidden room and her own wild imagination, she becomes dead herself.

certain that Mr. Tilney's killed his late wife. However, before she can unearth Mr. Tilney as a cold-blooded murderer, her hypothesis is discovered by Henry Tilney, who is an avid reader himself and guesses her ridiculous thoughts. What have you been judging from? Consult your understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Similar to Catherine, Briony lives in a fairly isolated world and she spends most of her time alone, accompanied by books and had a strange mind.

She longs for mystery and secrets, but has none because her controlling and orderly nature clashes with behavior that might lead to them. Nothing in her life was sufficiently interesting or shameful to merit hiding. Even though she is not completely unaware of the life beyond the nursery, she is still partly blinded by the innocence of childhood and lacks the vital knowingness about the ways of the world. Furthermore, her fantasy operates in simple terms of good and evil. So when she is confronted with the distant and incomprehensible world of adults, she applies the deficient knowledge obtained in fairy tales and reaches false conclusion.

McEwan uses Brioni to skillfully present the difference between reality and imagination. the meaning and its variable interpretations. She perpetually mistakes her own imagination for reality, which leads to her accusing Robbie of the rape of Lola. Brioni, just like Catherine, is not lying. She truly believes that her version of the events is right.

Her actions are misguided by ignorance and not malice. When analyzing the intertextual layer of atonement, one simply cannot omit the two most important intertexts or hypotexts in Gannett's term that keep reverberating throughout the story that belong to the web of text. Atonement is weaved from D.H. Lawrence's *Ladies Chatterley's Lover* and L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*, which both share one of the main themes of atonement, that is, theme of social class.

Lady Chatterley's Lover takes place several years after the World War I, an atonement which revolves around the year 1935 to 1940. The novels stretch over several decades, conveniently separated by more or less similar time gaps, as if to tempt the reader to try to

compare how the acceptance of the inter-class relationships and the reality of social classes as a whole evolved during the time. Earl G. Ingersoll also notes that once atonement appeared, it becomes impossible to read the go-between as the same text and perhaps a reading of even *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has been ever so subtly changed here. by these two novels in the web.

With the knowledge that Brioni is the author of the novel, it is evident that she draws from a particular modernist discursive strategy in this lengthy part one of the novel to achieve a particular effect. She wants to be reminiscent of Virginia Woolf and have the opportunity to enter the minds of key figures, getting every perspective of their story on the script. As the scenes shift between focal characters' points of view, the pace is slowed down and it allows the story to slowly build towards Robbie's arrest at the end of Part 1. With the use of the fictional character Cyril Cannoli, McEwan allows the metafictional element to become known by having the editor tell Brioni not to lean so much on modernist techniques. McEwan implicitly tells the reader that this particular narrative style has been chosen in order to achieve a particular effect by having Brionne display each of focal characters' perspectives in her act of atonement.

In part two of the novel, McEwan had chosen to write in a style reminiscent of Hemingway. which Finney determines is because choppy and shorter simple sentences portray the battlefield well. Subordinate clauses do not illustrate life near the battlefield as well, and that is why the sentences mainly consist of main clauses. In her book, Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, a reader's guide, Julie Ellam also identifies the style in Part 2 as portraying the disorder of the situation.

The notice is that unlike Part 1, Part 2 doesn't have any chapter divisions, which she considers a way to enhance the eventual chaos of Robbie's thoughts. Thus, the particular style is applied to illustrate the current situation. the fragmentation of civilization in the midst of war and the breakdown of Robbie as he attempts to survive a wound in his stomach. In part three of the novel, the narrative style is contemporary, which Finney identifies as a way to use a voice that is self-conscious and self-aware of its own act of narration. By using characteristics from both postmodern, modern and realist modes of writing, McEwan has written a novel that belongs to the genre of traditional realist fiction.

Readers are presented with a scenario in which they are overtly confident about what really happened, just like in a Jane Austen novel where everything is explained in detail and no one is in doubt of what is happening. Jane Austen was particularly great at having

omniscient narrator explain character traits first and then afterwards having the characters carry out what had been explained, for example, pride and prejudice. D.S. Lawrence originally published *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1928 in Italy. Upon its publication, the novel shocked the reader with its daring and open approach to sexuality, which promptly led to a ban on the book on grounds of obscenity and pornography.

However, more worrisome than the graphic content was the fact that the affair depicted in the novel is happening between members of different classes. That is, Connie, an aristocratic lady, and Oliver, a working class man. Such relations were very unusual at the time and were condemned by the public. This is verbalized several times throughout the novel, especially when the romance is revealed.

The novel can be seen as a mixture of a criticism aimed at consumerism and greed, war, behaviour of men and women and the classes which Lawrence systematically analyses. He pays great attention to the animosity between people of different social standing. Clifford remarked about the traversal miners are rather harsh. In your sense of the word, they are not men. They are animals you don't understand and never could.

Quotation from Lawrence. For him, they are simply tools, part of one great mechanical and according to him functional whole. When Corny protests against his opinion, he remarks, an individual may emerge from the masses. But the emergence doesn't alter the mass. He is particularly revolted by the fact that they poised their masses with a little education.

Even though Mellor shares the vitality of the traversal people, he just like Clifford despises them. According to him, the biggest vice controlling all classes, but the lower one especially, is the obsession with the dependence on money. He recents the never-ending hunt after wealth and the endless spending that comes with it because he is sure that it spoils the relationship between the sexes. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterjee's Lover* is incorporated into *Atonement* via Robbie who, quote, seeking to excuse his sexually explicit, note, sent by mistake to Cecilia thanks of appealing to a passing impatience with convention that he associates with a memory of reading the oral edition of *lady chatterley's lover* it is

legitimate to claim that due to his knowledge of the work he is aware of the resemblance between him and Cecilia and Connie and Mellor Cecilia and Robbie are like Connie and Oliver members of different social classes however The line between them is partially blurred by Robbie's university's education and his close relationship with the Talley's family. The theme of childhood, one of the recurring themes in McEwan's work, is central to both

novels as they concentrate on the sensibility of a child on the brink of puberty in a culture that has insulated children from the facts of life. Even though he is still a child who believes in magic curses, Leo, just like Brioni, is eager to exchange the immunities of childhood for the responsibilities of the grown-up world. During his stay at Branham Hall, he makes his first big excursions into the unknown territory of the adulthood and delighted, thinks about them as a death but with a resurrection in prospect.

As the novels are narrated by older Brioni and older Leo, they unavoidably deal with the theme of memories, the recollection of the past and evoke the question of the unreliability of such narratives. Leo opens the novel with the assertion that the past is a foreign country. They do things differently there, altering the reader to the fact that what follows is based on memories and thus should not be perceived as fully credible. Cholesky puts it alongside the process of remembering there is always the unavoidable and natural process of forgetting which makes our memory even more inconsistent and unstable. Moreover, our memories are always subjective and what is more, they are always selective which Leo acknowledges when he states that he remembered the incident.

Catastrophe well enough but not the stages that led up to it. Correspondingly, Brioni faces the same limitations of her mind when she realizes that it was not the long ago morning she was recalling so much as her subsequent accounts of it. She can only attempt to get close to the reality. The truthfulness of their storytelling is also tainted by their wasted interest in certifying their innocence. Brioni's writing ambitions and the author she chooses as her models are another interesting source of intertextuality and are a brilliant illustration of the flexibility of intertextuality and of her boundless opportunities it comprises.

It doubles the playful effect by referring not only to real author but also to Brioni's fictional text at the same time. The variability of her writing is also a fitting example of Gannett's architecturality because Brioni's style changes according to her model, zona or authors. She always adheres to the pre-existence rules of the zona or literary movements she imitates, be it fairy tale with the clash between good and evil or modernist fiction with the stream of consciousness. The first piece of writing that marks Brioni's authorial growth is her short drama *The Trials of Arabella*.

Her play also introduces another writer that is reread in *Atonement* and Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa*. As far as Lola is concerned, it is equally impossible not to see the sly allusion McEwan makes it to Novikov even if only through the naming of his young

rape victim after Novikov's nymphet Lolita. Apart from D.H. Lawrence, another modernist who is indisputably present in the novel is Virginia Woolf.

The author is directly referred to part three, but the echoes of her work are most notable in part one. As she mentioned in the third part in the encountering resurrection letter from the editor of Horizon, Cyril Connolly Briony's style in her first draft of *Two Figures* by the Fountain is heavily influenced by the wolf's writing. As Anna Grimola observed, intertextual references are deployed almost immediately as consistently in *atone*ment as imagery in Shakespeare's plays. Many critics agree that the novel as a whole is McEwan's most extended deliberation on the form of the novel and the inherited tradition of modern fiction and criticism.

Thus, McEwan works with all types of intertextuality, architecturality, hypertextuality, metatextuality and paratextuality. He uses some of the allusions and quotations to alert the reader of the things that are about to happen and they help him to build the tension. Some of the references are obvious and are even mentioned by the characters and some of them through the equal importance are hidden and can be discovered only by an attentive and well-read reader. With this, I wrap up the discussion. Let us meet in another discussion on *atone*ment with the same intertextuality connections.

Thank you.