

## THEORY OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST* AND *THE WHITE TIGER*

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with the “Theory of intertextuality in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The White Tiger*. It deals with some of the narrative principles which are required to take an account of how a theme or story is organized. In this article the complex phenomenon of the theory of intertextuality is focused on in detail. The focus has been on when and why the speaker or writer feels the need to relate the other text, how they are interrelated to signify new messages in response to new situations and new positions and finally how they intensify the meaning and affect the reader.

**KEYWORDS:** Anterior, Dilemma, Intercalated, Intertextual, Reference

### INTRODUCTION

Both the novels share a common feature. They have unconvincing framing devices. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* the entire novel is supposedly a conversation between the protagonist and an unnamed American, and the reader only hears the protagonist’s side of the conversation. In *The White Tiger* the entire novel is supposedly a series of letters dictated by Balram and addressed to Wen Jiabao, who is shortly to visit Bangalore where Balram now lives.

The framing device doesn’t really make sense. Balram can’t post these letters. He can’t even have them typed up. He confesses far too much criminality for them ever to be heard by anyone but him. So it goes. Likewise, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the reader either has to accept the device or close the book. I chose to accept it.

Todorov (1981), Prince (1982), Genette (1985) explains the following kinds of narration:

- Ulterior/Subsequent/Posterior: Narration coming after the narrated events.
- Anterior Narration: Narration preceding the events in time.
- Simultaneous Narration: Narration occurring at the same time as the events.
- Intercalated Narration: Narration situated between two moments of action as in epistolary novels.

Past events are recounted in the Ulterior narration and different texts show different temporal distance between the events and the activity of narration. Kenan puts it thus, *Commonsense tells that events may be narrated after they happen (Ulterior narration), as in Fielding’s Tom Jones, Dickens’s Great Expectations, and Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway*<sup>1</sup> and as in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. The distance between the narration and the events varies from text to text:

around fifteen years in *Great Expectations*, one day in *L' Etranger*<sup>2</sup> and almost seven years in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

The first person narrator, Changez recounts the events of his past seven years when in a restaurant he finds an American visitor getting frightened by his beard. The whole of the narration is Ulterior as Changez tells the events of his past life and experiences he spent in America.

Change at the time of the narration is twenty-five years old starts recount the events which occurred about seven years back, the moment he saw the Gothic buildings through a younger eye of a student. This he reclaims later when in the flashback talks to Juan-Bautista, *I went to college, I was eighteen* (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 151). Later on, the distance between the events and the activity of narration is entirely lost: *Juan-Bautista added considerable momentum to my inflective journey, a journey that continues to this day...*<sup>3</sup> (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 146). The relative clause eliminates the distance between events and the activity of narration.

In his novel *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga chooses the intercalated narration, which situated between two moments of action as the novel being in epistolary form.

Intertextuality is a central concern of Postmodernist study. The researcher explores the intertextual filaments of both the novel. Intertextuality is the shaping of a text's meaning by another text. Intertextual devices include: allusions, quotations, calque, plagiarism translations, pastiche and parody. An example of intertextuality is an author's borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. The oxford dictionary described it as a *relation between texts, especially literary ones*.<sup>4</sup> Derived from the Latin *intertexto*, meaning to intermingle while weaving, intertextuality is a term first introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late sixties. In the essay 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel,' Kristeva broke with traditional notions of the author's 'influences' and the text's 'sources'. A literary work, then, is not simply the product of a single author, but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself. *Any text, she argues, is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another*.<sup>5</sup>

Intertextuality is, thus, a way of accounting for the role of literary and extra-literary materials without recourse to traditional notions of authorship. It subverts the concept of the text as self-sufficient, hermetic totality, foregrounding, in its stead, the fact that all literary productions take place in the presence of other texts.

Many allusions and references can be traced in the novel *The White Tiger* which make the novel multi-layered and endows it with different levels of meaning. The title that Balram gives to the story of his life *The autobiography of a Half Baked Indian*<sup>6</sup> (*The White Tiger* 10) brings with the allusion of another autobiography written by the famous writer Nirad Chaudhuri which he published in 1951. Chaudhuri's book relates the life-story of the author, the mental intellectual development of the self-confessed anglophile writer. The *autobiography of an Unknown Indian* depicts the changing historical situation, at the time when the British were leaving India, while the *autobiography of a Half Baked Indian* narrates the moral decline squalor that set in the country after independence. One can discern that the mining scams that were exposed during the period of the writing of the novel provide the inspiration and the resource material for the novel. The infamous 'coal' scam can be directly read into the novel and forms the timbre of the novel. The dealings of Ashok, the miner from Dhanbad with the different politicians and the insatiable appetite for money and power by both the sides show reflections of the rampant corruption that the newspapers carried specially when the novel was being written. After

murdering his master Ashok Balram asserts *All the skin-whitening creams sold in the markets of India won't clean my hands again.* (*The White Tiger* 318) Here Balram's statement reminds the reader William Shakespeare's lines from *Macbeth*:

*Will all great Neptune's Ocean wash this blood*

*Clean from my hands?*<sup>7</sup>

Aravind Adiga has himself acknowledged the influence of Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* on his work. Written in 1952, *The Invisible Man* addresses many social and intellectual issues. The stories of the two novels have their own parallels. In *The Invisible Man* the narrator begins with the claim that he is an 'invisible man'. His invisibility, he says, is not a physical condition—he is not literally invisible—but is rather the result of the refusal of others to see him. He says, because of his invisibility, he has been hiding from the world, living underground, and stealing electricity from the Monopolated Light & Power Company. He burns 1,369 light bulbs simultaneously and listens to Louis Armstrong 'What Did I Do to Be So' on a phonograph. He tells the reader that he has gone underground in order to write the story of his life and invisibility. The similarities between the two narratives are obviously discernible. Balram and his lot are also invisible as there is nobody in the world who is concerned about them. Balram, the insignificant man from the land of 'darkness', also sits under a huge chandelier in his 150 square feet office in Bangalore to write out the story of his life and to reveal to the Chinese Premier the sordid reality of the so called democracy. By writing these letters to the Chinese Premier he is asserting his identity and his place in the society.

The hero, Balram, is a murderer and reminds one of the novels of Dostoevsky. He is a sort of anti Raskolnikov from the novel *Crime and Punishment*. This novel also focuses on the mental anguish and the moral dilemmas of a poor student Rodion Raskolnikov, who plans and murders an unscrupulous pawnbroker for cash. Balram too murders his immoral and unethical master to lead a decent life. Raskolnikov tries to justify the deed in various ways; the good deeds he can perform to counterbalance the act while ridding the world of a worthless person; to test his hypothesis that some people are naturally capable of doing such acts.etc. He compares himself with Napoleon Bonaparte, believing that murder is permissible for a higher purpose. Balram too compares himself to Alexander, Abraham Lincoln, Mao, and Hitler, who *led successful revolutions to free the slaves and kill their masters.* (*The White Tiger* 304) Raskolnikov's story and Balram's story are the same; only Balram does not like Raskolnikov let 'foolish' guilt overburden him. Although Balram is responsible for not only the murder of his master but also Balram's entire family, his heart doesn't bleed nor does his soul cry out. He is cynical, immoral and unrepentant.

The narrative mode in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* echoes the narrative voice of Jean-Baptiste Clamence in Albert Camus' *The Fall*. Like Jean-Baptiste Clamence's narration in *The Fall*, Changez's narration displays a show of exaggerated frankness, not shying away from observations that question his moral integrity.

The narrative framing of the story is supported by features that suggest the immediacy of oral storytelling, for instance the direct address to the implied audience, repetitions, allusion to the further development of the story or (possibly) dramatic embellishments. At the same time, the exclusion of the fictional addressee creates a sense of theatrical artificiality. All of this contributes to the overall effect that *the novel appears as a kind of mirror for the reader*,<sup>8</sup> a medium reflecting the reader's fears, stereotypes and presuppositions. As Mohsin Hamid acknowledges, *the ending* (of the novel) *is determined by the way a reader reads it and by the preconceptions and prejudices and fears that a reader has.*<sup>9</sup>

Jim's property in the Hamptons reminds Changez of *The Great Gatsby*. With the reference to Jay Gatsby, however, the suspicion is reinforced that Jim's efforts toward reinvention from his poverty-stricken beginning is only the chasing of an illusion that one can transcend their past.

Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality highlights the importance of and the formative influences that other texts have in shaping a particular work. It is not other works of literature, but other texts such as films, advertisements, and media whose presence can be noticed in the novel. According to Rajewsky's definition of intermediate as those configurations that have to do with a crossing of borders between media<sup>10</sup>, intermediate references in a specific medium point to aspects of another medium. Furthermore, Rajewsky suggests that:

*The media product uses its own media-specific means, either to refer to a specific, individual work produced, in another medium (i.e., what in the German tradition is called Einzelreferenz, 'individual reference'), or to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre) or to another medium qua system (Systemreferenz, 'system reference').<sup>11</sup>*

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, individual references are solely used for specific movies such as *Top Gun*, *Star Wars*, *Grease*, *The Terminator*, and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, whereas system reference point to the systems of cinema, theatre and even architecture.

*I was, in my own eyes, a veritable James Bond – only younger, darker and possibly better paid* (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 63-64). Here, the intermediate reference works similar to a metaphor; by referring to the *James Bond* series of movies, the mental image of the character James Bond and associations with the *persona*, such as the chic and invincible Macho, are evoked and transferred to Changez, the protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Here, the intermediate individual reference can simultaneously be seen as an intermediate system reference. Through the movie *James Bond*, not only the specific associations with the movie. but also the associations with the system behind the movies are evoked. And it links to the American center of the movie industry, *Hollywood*, and the connected *duplicity* and *fakeness* is automatically established. The intermediate system references to movies or more generally speaking, to the system of cinema are also introduced. The textual evidence for this can be found in the following quote: *Princeton, inspired in me the feeling that my life was a film in which I was the star and everything was possible* (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 3).

Cinema is the new God of the modern Indian society than how can Adiga lag behind as far as the matter of intermediate references is concerned. As he asks *what traditional Indian village is complete without its blue-movie theatre, sir?* (*The White Tiger* 23) and certainly, being the rhetorical question the answer is no. Reference to cinema can be found from the very beginning of the novel *I no longer watch Hindi Films* (*The White Tiger* 8) to the last pages *It's one of the reasons I have stopped going to Hindi films* (*The White Tiger* 313) and it seems that the novel is framed by these two remarks. The novel contains many references to Balaram's love for cinema; *A cinema across the river showed such films every night; two-and-a-half-hour fantasias with names like He Was a True Man, or We Opened Her Diary, or The Uncle Did It* (*The White Tiger* 23), *everyone goes to Mumbai in the films after they kill someone* (*The White Tiger* 297) and so on. In the novel, intertextual elements can be discerned in many of its situations and episodes. Ram Persad, the senior driver of Mr. Ashok, is shown praying religiously to more than *twenty idols* and chant *Om Om* while performing his pujas every morning. (*The White Tiger* 77) One morning at pre-dawn, Balram, finds him chopping onion and gets suspicious. He had also noticed that Ram Persad was not eating any of the nice lunch that his masters provided for a few days. Finding this to

be dubious, he followed him and discovered that he was a Muslim who was fasting as it was the month of Ramadan and also found him offering Namaz. This arrangement was a well-kept secret between the Nepali watchman and Ram Persad who had assumed a Hindu name and identity to get the job.

*Now, this Mohammad Mohammad was a poor, honest, hardworking Muslim, but he wanted a job at the home of an evil, prejudiced landlord who didn't like Muslims—so, just to get a job and feed his starving family, he claimed to be a Hindu! And took the name of Ram Persad. (The White Tiger 109)*

The situation and the entire episode find a clear parallel in the iconic movie *Chachi 420* where a Muslim character Shiraz takes up a job of a cook with as Pandit Shivraj Sharma with a similarly powerful master Durgaprasad. In a near parallel Durgaprasad's secretary, Banwarilal, find out the truth in a similar fashion. One can read the movie *Chachi 420* as an intertext for the novel.

Another intertext that can be discerned in the formation of the novel is another popular Hindi movie, which was released around the same time as the novel. The discussions that the drivers and the chauffeurs have when their masters are away shopping and the gossip that they share is again a part of the famous film *Page 3* by Madhur Bhandarkar. The chauffeurs while waiting for the masters, who are either at a party or at a discotheque or shopping, spend the time discussing the personal lives of their masters, reading sleazy magazines and other such activities. The two movies weave their way into the text of the novel enriching it.

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