

# INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVEL

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## ABSTRACT

Many critical theories have evolved as a result of the pluralistic nature of the contemporary world. There is a diversion away from the monolithic theories to more synchronic ones. One of such theories that have been at the heart of this strain is intertextuality. The relevance of Intertextuality to the analysis of contemporary African Drama has been widely discussed. However, there is a dearth of studies on the place of the theory in the production and criticism of contemporary African fiction. This paper seeks to partake in the filling of this critical gap. Therefore, in the paper, an attempt is made to do a critical examination of the relevance of intertextuality to the evaluation of the contemporary African novel. It is discovered that intertextuality appears relevant to the production and criticism of the contemporary African novel. However, we hasten to declare, from the outset, that a single paper would be inadequate to explicate the practice of intertextuality in African prose fiction; we therefore limit ourselves to a representative sample of related contemporary African prose texts.

*Keywords: intertextuality, African, novel, theory, contemporary.*

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## 1. INTERTEXTUALITY: ORIGIN AND BASIC TENETS

The concept of ‘influence’ was jettisoned in favour of intertextuality because of some inherent flaws in it. In the main, influence was considered to be author-centered and evaluative. It was therefore an important tool for subjective literary historians. Thus, because of its excessive emphasis on authorship, the concept of influence gave way to intertextuality. However, the shift from influence to intertextuality does not totally bracket off the author-centered criticism; rather, it aims at broadening it to take into account the multifarious relations that can exist among authors.

By the mid-to-late 1960s, the theory of intertextuality emerged. The basic tenets of the theory were first elaborated in Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye sees literature as an entity containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationships. He also maintains that intertextuality “subsumes the

work of ‘major’ authors with that of ‘minor’ figures in a multiple positional typology based on relation and difference” (quoted from Clayton and Rothstein, 1991: 17).

Another key proponent of the theory of intertextuality is Julia Kristeva. In fact, the nomenclature “intertextuality” is her coinage. She initially used the term in her dialogue with the texts of Mikhail Bakhtin. Moreover, Kristeva gives several illuminating definitions of intertextuality, among which are the following:

Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (quoted from Clayton and Rothstein, 1991: 20).

In the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991: 29).

It is therefore the contention of Kristeva that intertextuality is an instance whereby a text depicts a reading of the anterior literary corpus, thereby making text absorption of and a reply to another text. The intertextuality theorist believes that the only reader is the writer reading another text, a figure that becomes no more than a text re-reading itself as it re-writes itself.

It should be stressed that the metaphor of creation has traditionally dominated discussions of literary authorship, with a strong implication of the mysterious, possibly transcendental nature of such activities. According to Leitch (1983: 123):

When it finds its way into a current text, a chip or piece of an older monument appears as source, influence, allusion, imitation, archetype or parody.

Although the foregoing description of intertextuality (by Leitch) appears obsolete, it is still relevant to an understanding of the origins and tenets of the theory. Like Leitch, Terry Eagleton (1983: 192) observes that all literary works are to some extent “rewritten”, although this may be an unconscious practice of the societies that read them. Eagleton therefore concludes that there is no reading of a work that is not a re-writing. This is based on the concept of transmission. Intertextuality may therefore be seen as the enlargement of a familiar idea or as an entirely new concept to replace the outmoded notion of influence. As an enlargement of the previous concept of influence, intertextuality is more general in scope than influence. It has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts. Apart from the traditional author-centered theories, there are now new theories, which emphasize the decline of the author in the concept of intertextuality. Deconstructive criticism, which believes that the ‘author’ is no more than one text among others, is an example. The author’s life will not provide the reader/audience with a firm foundation for the meaning of the work since the text is only available to the reader. Roland

Barthes, for instance, advances a theory of intertextuality that depends on the reader as the organizing center of interpretation.

Again, for the Deconstructionist, intertextuality refers to both the relationship among literary texts and the dialogue between them and other writings. This is akin to the view of Martin Coyle, et al who maintain that:

Each text takes its meaning from other texts, not merely prior texts, but other concomitant texts and expressions of culture and language. The blank and marble pages, the squiggly lines, the scrambled chapters, the skipped pages of *Tristram Shandy* are intertextual events because they respond not only to extant literary texts, but to contemporary and medieval ideas of logic, or order of rationality (1990: 613).

In the same vein, one of the crucial tasks of the postmodernist critic is to foreground what might be called the “intertextual elements” in literary works. According to Peter Barry (1995: 91), intertextuality, in postmodernism, purports to examine “a major degree of reference between one text and another”. However, in the scrutiny of the reference, the postmodernist critic privileges the abandonment of the divine pretensions of authorship.

Perhaps, M. H. Abrams’s definition of intertextuality provides the aptest framework for this discourse. According to him, intertextuality is a creative means used to:

Signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to, other texts, whether by open or covert citations and allusions, or by the assimilation of the feature of an earlier text by a later text, or simply by participation in a common stock of literary codes and conventions (1981: 200).

## 2. INTERTEXTUALITY AND AFRICAN LITERATURE: THEORETICAL ISSUES

The theory of intertextuality, despite its Euro-western origin, is not entirely alien to African oral literary practice. In fact, African oral literature, among many other features, is marked by its status of non-authorship. That is, more often than not, oral literary genres in Africa are taken as having no individual authors as is the case of written literature. Rather, oral literature is conceived as a communal artifact. It is communally owned and transmitted from generation to generation. In the words of Ruth Finnegan (1970: 36), “such literature was, for instance, supposed to be the work of communal consciousness and group authorship rather than ... of an individual inspired artist.”

Contemporary African writers are participating in the global literary trend of intertextuality for several reasons, chiefly among which are the following. In the first instance, there is cultural homogeneity among the peoples of the world; this calls for writers to model their works on some precursor works. Again, human

existence revolves in the same vicious circle of tumult consequent upon bad leadership and other social and ontological ills. Therefore, there are configurations and connections between works and writers within the different literary genres (Biodun Jeyifo, 1988: 277). Literature does not evolve within a vacuum. It depends on the socio-political realities of its enabling milieu and the precursor texts (oral/written) for its impetus. Thus, for the proponents of intertextuality literature evolves from literature. African writers also depend on earlier texts for their themes and styles. This is quite pertinent in this era of multiculturalism and globalization.

Commenting on the relevance of intertextuality to African literature, Dan Izevbaye (1982: 1) asserts that it is a veritable weapon in the hands of literary historians and critics to “establish a relationship among a variety of writers and literatures, and help enhance... understanding of literature as a human activity with similar aesthetic and social functions in different cultures”. Therefore, intertextuality is a useful tool for literary historians in discharging their duty as recorders of critical happenings in literary epochs. Since “each literature or text has the capacity to influence and extend the meaning of the other (Charles Bodunde, 1994: 72), it is relevant for literary historians to investigate and document how texts have reciprocally influenced and extended their meanings. This is with a view to discovering the thematic and stylistic preoccupations that are common to world writers in general.

Intertextuality is also an effective postcolonial weapon used to reject the claim of universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature. The theory is employed by critics and historians to examine the issues of cultural difference and diversity in literature. The historical circumstances of slavery, colonialism and imperialism have made the African people experience cultural hybridity or cultural polyvalency. That is, they mostly belong simultaneously to more than one culture. Firstly, there is the culture of the colonizer (Euro-Western culture), which the people imbibed through a colonial school system, religion, mass media and the like. Secondly, there is the other culture, that of the colonized - the Africans’ own culture, which they acquire through local or oral traditions.

The novel is an imported genre in Africa. It is a twentieth-century phenomenon, a late arrival on the African literary scene. It undeniably trailed behind the two other literary genres (drama and poetry) in evolution. Therefore, to make it feel at home in an alien land, contemporary African novelists rely on both the European model of fiction writing and the autochthonous model of oral narratives: hence the glittering amalgam of traditional epics, folk traditions, legends, myths, folktales and history of the people in the contemporary African novel. Two of the strategies of appropriation in postcolonial writings are cultural ‘revelation’ and cultural ‘silence’. While the writer ‘reveals’ his indigenous/autochthonous culture by foregrounding African oral traditions, he advertently ‘silences’ the European methods of prose writing by allowing the traditional methods of oral literature subsume Western techniques.

Consequently, one of the most important developments of the novel genre in contemporary African literature is how a variety of novelists have re-appropriated it to their own use. Intertextuality is one of such indigenizing strategies of the novel. This is a way of upholding the syncretic view of postcolonial culture that privileges the harmonization of alterities (Western culture and autochthonous culture). According to J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada, “the Nigerian novel is a synthesis of foreign and local elements in terms of characterization, structure, theme and ideology” (2000: 68). Therefore, in postcolonial literature, the reading of a text does not lead to the construction of a ‘model’ or a ‘structure’, or poetic law, but reveals “fragments, views from other texts, codes which disappear and mysteriously re-appear” (Lekan Oyegoke, 1992: 158). The fragments are not only from precursor written texts; rather, the African writers also rely on oral texts, that is, the oral traditions of their society. With intertextuality, most especially the intertextual links between oral and written texts, the postcolonial writer always participates in his nation’s decolonization project (literary and political).

However, it must be stressed that African literary historians who wish to make effective and objective use of intertextuality must be familiar with the descriptive systems of African literature, its themes, its enabling society’s mythologies and its coeval texts. If this is not done, the historians will fall victim to making hasty and sweeping overgeneralizations about textual relations and awkward influences.

### 3. INTERTEXTUALITY: THE EXAMPLE OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN FICTION

As a writer, Chinua Achebe sees his primary role as that of a ‘teacher’ instructing the ignorant about the bewildering amalgam of African cultures. Therefore, his fiction established a firmly Afrocentric indigenous basis for African culture. Also, his initial texts were partly aimed at correcting some Eurocentric jaundiced stereotypes about Africa and Africans. For instance, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is full of passages highlighting a complex series of evasions, open-eyed blindness, willful forgetfulness, lacunae, egoisms, and the like, against Africa and her people (Niyi Osundare, 1993: 11). The constant repetition of such words as ‘inscrutable’, ‘incomprehensible’ and ‘blank’ in Conrad’s text betrays his subjective portrayal of African culture and people. Although African life is not directly presented in the novel, Africa, as the setting of the action of the novel emerges as the negation of rationality. *Heart of Darkness*, therefore, shows a typical European attitude to Africa, typical especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To place African writers in the right context, the representations of European attitudes to Africa must be kept in view. Thus, most subsequent texts published by African writers strive at correcting the wrong notions about Africa. Ernest Emenyonu

(2002: 2) comments on this: “*Things Fall Apart* in 1958 began, even when the yoke of colonialism was still with us, to retell the story of Africa.”

We can therefore posit that texts like *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe’s well-known revisionary reading of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, pay attention to the gaps, omissions, silences and absences perceivable in the precursor colonial texts, which also include Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* and H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. *Things Fall Apart* gives the contemporary reader a different perception of Africa and Africans from that given by Conrad. The novel is usually read as a documentary of tribal life. This documentation of indigenous values, mores, cultures and norms is not fortuitous; rather, it is organized to present a society that is bathed in the light of its own culture. The rejection of “darkness” as the defining quality of “African experience” is a relegation of the power of intuition, the emotionalism and the insane laughter in which Marlow heard the thrill of primordial appetites. Therefore, there is an intertextual link between Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. They hold each other in a duel of social and racial outrage and dialogue.

There is also a similar correspondence between some prose works of Achebe and the works of some twentieth-century English writers, most especially William Butler Yeats. With his leaning on Euro-Western literature, Achebe is able to retrieve fascinating antecedent works to espouse his philosophical outlook, i.e., his belief in the cyclical theory of history. Just as the birth of Jesus Christ terminated a 2000-year period of history and started another era, the coming of Europeans to Africa put an end to precolonial African history and inaugurated a new epoch. Thus, in *Things Fall Apart*, there are snippets from Yeats’s “The Second Coming.” The novel of Achebe centers on the contact of an alien culture with the indigenous culture. The latter is heavily crushed and bastardized by the former. This is the significance of the title of the novel (*Things Fall Apart*) taken from the third verse of Yeats’s “The Second Coming”.

Apart from their intertextual link with precursor written texts, Achebe’s texts also rely heavily on African (most especially Igbo) folk traditions. He has once commented on the oral intertextuality in his written texts: “I have used such things (oral tradition materials) before, and I will use them again. This is what I have set myself to do: to reconstruct our history through literature (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2000: 122). Therefore, in Achebe’s works most especially *Things Fall Apart*, the reader comes across Igbo Customs, myths, legends, folk tales and beliefs in magic, superstition, omens and spells. In the same novel, Achebe foregrounds some Igbo folktales with a view to deconstructing the jaundiced portrayal of African history and culture. The folktales include “How the Birds and Tortoise were Hosted in Heaven” and “The Earth and the Sky”. These folktales give the African concepts of creation, communality and diligence.

Also, in *Arrow of God*, Achebe relies heavily on African folk traditions. There is an intertextual link between the novel and African ritual drama (*Egwugwu* - Masquerade), proverbs and festival institutions (*Akwu Nro*). With these fragments from his cultural environment and traditions, Achebe, like many other contemporary African writers, is able to enrich his creativity. This is a

common attribute of many African writers. The attempt to parachute the world of folklore and mythology into contemporary African fiction is a postcolonial weapon used to foreground the richness of African culture. Bill Ashcroft, et al (1989: 64) comment on the importance of such cultural signifiers in postcolonial writings: “such devise not only acts to signify the difference between cultures but also illustrates the importance of discourse in interpreting cultural concepts.” Achebe exhibits the cultural wealth of Africans in his novels with a view to informing foreigners that Africa is not a cultural desert.

Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* also has an apparent intertextual relationship with Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. The hero of Conrad's text Razumov is a literary twin-brother of Mugo, the anti-hero of Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*. Razumov, in *Under Western Eyes*, strives courageously to lift himself from poverty and obscurity. He therefore resents any claims upon him by causes or individuals. Again, revolutionary colleagues often mistake his constant aloofness as evidence of his austere dedication to the cause.

The young revolutionary hero, Haldin, also visits Razumov immediately after an undisguised assassination. This is the case of Mugo who is also visited by Kihika in Ngugi's text. As Kihika expresses faith in his taciturn and unwilling host (Mugo), so does Haldin express faith in Razumov.

The theme of betrayal of trust, which is central to Ngugi's concern in *A Grain of Wheat*, bears certain resemblance to the same theme treated in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. This intertextual thematic focus is a means to comment on some of the universal problems of man, that is, modern man, irrespective of geographical setting, cultural affiliation and social status, is a betrayer.

Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* also has an intertextual link with Conrad's *Lord Jim*. The sense of guilt, the psychological disposition of man under guilt, has a similar treatment in both novels. Jim's fate is full of guilt, confession and expiation. This is akin to the experience of Mugo after his betrayal of Kihika. The biblical guilty conscience of Judas who betrayed Jesus Christ is a common motif in both novels. The metamorphosis in the experience of guilt in both characters (Jim and Mugo) is also alike. They both undergo a three-level metamorphosis: the stage of transgression of guilt, followed by that of confession, and the final stage of expiation where they respectively atone for their sin. In spite of differences in cultures, locales and generations, Conrad and Ngugi have a similar perception of moral philosophy and human reaction to the experience of guilt. Thus, the subject of guilt is a universal phenomenon.

Furthermore, in characterization, Conrad's *Lord Jim* and Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* intersect. Jim is described as having strong physical attributes. He is depicted in the image of a charging bull. He also has a moral vice - he suffers from sublimated idealism. He is always a man of imagination. Like Jim, Mugo is given prominent and strong physical attributes. He is also given to fantasies. This is mostly revealed in the surging idea of killing his aunt, Waitherero: “His one desire was to kill his aunt” (*A Grain of Wheat*, 8).

Both characters (Jim and Mugo) also commit the social sin of betrayal, and either keeps to himself in order to avoid the source of his individual guilt. Jim keeps on changing his jobs constantly in order to keep himself elusive to the source of his guilt. In the case of Mugo, he becomes too taciturn, isolates himself, avoids visitors and refuses to visit willing hosts. The nature of Jim's and Mugo's confession and atonement is also very similar. Either of them faces his society's 'tribunal' willingly. Jim submits to Doramin, while Mugo submits to the duo of General R and Lt. Koinandu. Their individual final confession is also a source of redemptive action, and their individual guilty conscience is unburdened as soon as they confess their sin.

Taban Lo Liyong is another African novelist whose fiction relies heavily on the theory and practice of intertextuality. His novels have an intertextual bond with contemporary African written literature and African oral literary practices. Liyong's short stories are based on Amos Tutuola's example and on his own native Luo tales. For example, Tutuola's literary model recurs in Liyong's "Tombe Gworong's Own Story" and "Lexicographicide". In these stories, Liyong appropriates the fantasy characteristic of Tutuola's tales. In the main, the theme of the "complete Gentleman" which occurs in Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* recurs in the stories of Liyong.

Liyong's "The Old Man of Usumbura and His Misery" probably derives its theme from that of Tutuola's *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle*. In Liyong's story, the old man of Usumbura, the eponymous hero of the story, is born lucky like Simbi in Tutuola's story. Also, like Simbi, the old man has his own poor friend (the miserable old man of Kagali). As Simbi is interested in tasting the extreme poverty and hardship of her friends (Rali and Sala), the old man of Usumbura also likes to experience his friend's misery.

Apart from intertextuality in thematic preoccupations, Tutuola and Liyong's novels also intersect in diction. Both favor simple language. This has a link with African oral narrative strategies. Their novels are suffused with oral traditional elements such as folktales, legends, riddles and proverbs that enable them to communicate effectively. They re-appropriate a borrowed genre (novel) and adapt the language of the elite (English) to suit African surroundings. Emenyonu (1991: 6) comments on the reliance of contemporary African novelists on oral traditions. In his words, "the oral performances have featured extensively in modern African writing as the authors interpose within the pages of their fiction elements from their oral heritage such as folktales, proverbs, sayings, songs, riddles, etc."

Another contemporary African novelist who has attracted the attention of literary historians interested in the theory and practice of intertextuality is the radical postcolonial writer, Ben Okri. In his novels, Okri imaginatively reconstructs thematic and stylistic materials, from African oral traditions. His re-enactments of myths, legends, riddles, folktales and real events of his society reveal him to be a practitioner of intertextuality. In fact, he participates in "a common stock of literary codes and conventions" (Abrams, 1981: 200).



Okri's *The Famished Road*, for instance, is connected with and 'revises' some previous texts in African prose fiction. It is perhaps the favorite among Okri's texts for many an intertextuality theorist. The setting of the text (Lagos) intertextually revises the Lagos of Cyprian Ekwensi's novels (*Jagua Nana and Jagua Nana's Daughter*). Okri is an inheritor of African oral traditions. He has learnt to discard the aspects of folk tradition that no longer apply in changing times and tries to preserve enduring values, that is, the values that do not change with time. Jeyifo remarks: "It is precisely such patterns and configurations of intertextual 'revisions' of previous writers in our modern African and Nigerian fiction that Ben Okri's two published novels so sharply force on our critical awareness" (1988: 277).

Therefore, Okri's *The Famished Road* can be read as a magic fiction. It is about the Yoruba myth of Abiku. The novel captures the exploits of the Abiku child-hero, Azaro, with his magical and apocalyptic super reality. The use of the convention of magic realism in the novel is a postcolonial writer's strategy. Okri probably uses the novel as an anti-imperial tool and a re-working of a historical moment. In the novel, the reader encounters codes and co-texts from different sources, including Plato, Buddhism, the Bible, Gnosticism, Sufism, Freemasonry, Blake, Goethe, Nietzsche, Yeats and, most especially, African cosmologies (myths of reincarnation and recurrence).

Abiku, in Yoruba cosmology, is a child born to die again, come again, and die again in an unbroken cycle. Wole Soyinka and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo in their respective poems titled "Abiku" popularize the myth of Abiku in African literature. The myth is still a popular one in African literature, most especially among Nigerian writers. Okri uses the myth of "Abiku" as a metaphor for the multitude of socio-political and economic problems facing the postcolonial nations. As the Abiku child defies any magical power that can make him stay alive, the myriads of problems facing the African continent and by extension, all neocolonial nations, have defied a lot of solutions. A majority of the nations, despite their political independence, are still encumbered with pains and conflicts.

In *The Famished Road*, Okri's belief in the cyclical theory of history is revealed. As used by the novelist, the myth of Abiku has socio-political and economic connotations. Thus, he is able to adopt the cyclical notion of history to foreground the recurrent ethos in the third-world. The spirit child (Azaro), who keeps on dying and coming back to his mother, comments on the enduring existential pangs of neocolonial nations thus:

In not wanting to stay, we caused much pain to mothers. The pain grew heavier with each return. Their anguish became for us an added spiritual weight which quickens the cycle of rebirth. Each new birth was agony for us too, each shock of the raw world. Our cyclical rebellion made us resented by other spirits and ancestors. Disliked in the spirit world and branded among the living, our unwillingness to stay affected all kinds of balance (*The Famished Road*, 5).

The above quotation from Okri's text highlights vividly some of the problems facing the postcolonial world. Hiding under the cover of mysticism, Okri is able to comment on man's fate in the neocolonies of the African continent.

Debo Kotun, the Nigerian novelist, in his highly successful maiden literary enterprise titled *Abiku*, has also reconstructed the myth of Abiku to critique the evil machinations under military rule in Nigeria. In the novel, Kotun makes use of highly abrasively bitter and gruesomely satirical temper. He is able to lampoon the military for ravishing and devaluing Nigeria, the hitherto giant of Africa. He depicts the foibles of the military rulers lucidly - corruption, brutality, press censorship, graft, nepotism, lack of freedoms and all sorts of neocolonial decadence. In the novel, Kotun relies heavily on the method of magical realism redolent of the works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri. Improbable events are made probable; the dead enter into phatic communion with the living; African gods and goddesses are also called to a feast. Actually, in *Abiku*, Kotun, like Okri, vividly illuminates some autochthonous oral traditions of African people in general and the Yoruba people in particular, in order to artistically reconstruct the deadly political subterfuge of Africa.

Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* is an exposition of the dehumanizing behavior of a male chauvinist. It is subtle and positive propaganda on the emancipation of womenfolk. Actually, the epistolary novel is a treatise on polygamy and its side effects. In the main, the novel foregrounds a catalogue of problems resulting from the traditional system of marriage which allows polygamy. Ba, in the text, employs the mode of a ventriloquist to condemn the excessive practice of patriarchy in African societies (M.E.M. Kolawole, 1992: 96).

Fourteen years after the publication of Ba's anti-sexist discourse, Ndubuisi Umuunnakwe, a budding Nigerian novelist, writes a rejoinder to the novel, on behalf of the menfolk. His novel is titled *Dear Ramatoulaye*. It is a male-oriented reply to the letter of Ramatoulaye to her friend, Aissatou. Umuunnakwe's counter-text is a patriarchal deconstruction of the feminist claim in the precursor text. In the dialogue between feminine and masculine texts, the reader witnesses a situation whereby the 'other' (menfolk) now becomes the self. Also, the two antagonistic texts provide a forum for a counter discourse between menfolk and womenfolk, between the liberative feminist consciousness and the patriarchal consciousness. Both texts also intersect in characterization, themes, plot, mode of discourse (epistolary technique) and conflicts.

J. M. Coetzee, the white South African writer, the first person to twice win the popular Booker Prize, Britain's most prestigious literary award, is another intertextuality practitioner. The critique of canonical texts has been a strong current in postcolonial writings. Coetzee's *Foe* is one such postmodernist/postcolonial attempt to engage in dialectal intertextuality with precursor texts that have presented negative stereotypes of Africa and her people. Bill Ashcroft, et al and Elleke Boehmer in her seminal book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* corroborate this view. *Foe* is a parodic inversion of

Daniel Defoe's story *Robinson Crusoe*, Although Coetzee surprisingly still advertently retains some of old-age stereotypes about the black world, he is able to create a new kind of novel that implicitly interrogates the form and content of Defoe's classic. *Foe* is thus a tropological revision of Defoe's text.

*Foe* demonstrates an allegorical counter-discursivity as postcolonial discourse. As a postmodern/postcolonial version of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee's *Foe* fills the silence of the precursor text, uncovers the hidden colonialism and oppression in the text. *Foe* also seeks to reject the canonical formulation of the colonial encounter, thereby drawing the reader's attention to the symbiosis between discourse and power. Hanjo Beressem remarks that Coetzee deconstructs "the economic utopia of Crusoe's island" (1988: 222). Therefore, to a great extent Coetzee's *Foe* provides a counter-text for Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

Biyi Bandele-Thomas, the radical young Nigerian novelist, also seems to believe that postmodernist culture favors no single culture. This is a result of the instability and disillusionment in the (post) modern world. This is depicted in the patronage of intertextuality, eclecticism, digression and generic infidelity in his novels. These devices are primarily employed to show the interplay of ideas and genres. Bandele-Thomas's *The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond* displays the intersection and neutralization of texts in the spaces of each text. For instance, in the novel, Mrs. Abednego's plight echoes that of Ihuoma in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*. Mrs Abednego retorts:

He said I was already a bride of the gods that I couldn't possibly marry again. He reminded me that gods never forget an insult and that they would never forgive me for my unfaithfulness to them (*The Man who Came*, 50).

Therefore, one can infer that the belief in god spirits being in wedlock with human beings cuts across cultures, as reflected in both novels (by Amadi and Bandele-Thomas). This belief is also common in African folk-tales.

Also, Bandele-Thomas's novel has some literary allusions from Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*: "then he cut off their heads, sprinkled them with salt and chewed them raw like the old man in Hemingway" (101). And to hint that striving for wealth is a perennial and universal human vice, Bandele-Thomas, in his novel, takes a quote from the work of a classical writer, Horace: "As Horace, the Roman poet, rhymed: 'By honest means, if you can, but by any means make money'" (120).

Moreover to assert that the problem of drug addiction is a cross-cultural and ubiquitous social ill, Bandele-Thomas, in his novel, uses a track from the album of the popular Reggae maestro (Bob Marley) entitled 'Kaya'. Bozo, a character in the novel wants to feel high with the 'herb' sold by Mitchell. In fact he is addicted to the drug that makes him feel very high:

I feel so high  
I even touch the sky

Above the falling rain  
I feel so good  
In my neighbourhood  
So here I come again  
I've got to have Kaya now Kay' Kaya (*The Man Who Came* 68).

The second African writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, Naguib Mahfouz, is also a great practitioner of the literary convention of intertextuality. In his novels, the reader comes across a fusion of myths and contemporary realities. This, he also does through his reliance on precursor literary texts (written texts and African folk tradition). In his *Children of Gebelawi*, for example, Mahfouz does not hide the fact that his story is based on oral folk-tales which he used to listen to when he was young, that is, from: "professional story tellers who learnt them in cafés or from their fathers" (Prologue to *Children of Gebelawi*, 1). It is pertinent to hear from the narrator of the story talking about Rifaa, one of the leaders of the quarters:

His life became a glorious story repeated by everyone and chanted to the music of the fiddle especially the part about Gebelawi taking up his body and burying it in the garden (197–198).

The sentences in the novel are unmistakably lyrical, and the images are typical of those employed in oral poetry. The content of the story is also a re-enactment of the glorious memories of the people's ancestor (Rifaa). The text also has an intertextual link with the archetypal language of oral narratives, legends and myths, showing 'long ago' and no precision in time. Actually, Mahfouz does not believe in people throwing away their cultures and rituals. This is because "if we throw away our rituals we are as good as dead" (Miriam Tlali, 1989: 15)

Mahfouz's *Children of Gebelawi* also relies heavily on traditional epic structures. The story centers on the fall of Adham, the immutable punishment, the birth and growth of each alley (or quarter), the legendary story of its founders, wars and brutalities, the miraculous conquests and reversal of order of things. The structure of the novel is typical of similar epic narratives such as J.P. Clark's *Ozidi Saga* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Therefore, it is convenient to agree with Odia Ofeimun (1988: 5) that Mahfouz's fiction "takes the reader through the streets of Arabic mythology to walk hand-in-hand with mythical personages dressed in the clothes of ordinary human beings."

#### 4. CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated in this paper the relevance of the theory of intertextuality to the evaluation of the contemporary African novel. The basic issues relating to the theory of intertextuality have been discussed - its origin, goals, cultural manifestations and basic tenets. Examples are drawn from a few relevant novels

to examine how the process of intertextuality evolves through specific texts. It has also been discovered that the theory is a multicultural / cross-cultural one which ably foregrounds postcolonial issues. And it has been observed that every text is inherently an intertext, and every creative artist is inescapably influenced by precursors.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to conclude that, controversial as it seems, as indeed other theories have been, intertextuality appears relevant to African fiction. The issue of tropological revision, as well as the parodic intertexts formulated in the theory, creates a discursive biculturality or cross-culturality (dialectic of traditions) that effectively contests and re-formulates the dominant, colonial or Eurocentric perception of and approach to different cultural phenomena.

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