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Article: **Absence of the Transcendental Signified: Tracing the Dynamics of Intertextuality in Selected Essays of Shoaib Bin Hassan**


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Absence of the Transcendental Signified: Tracing the Dynamics of Intertextuality in Selected Essays of Shoaib Bin Hassan

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to analyse selected essays from the anthology *Aesthetics of Incompleteness* by Shoaib Bin Hassan to prove the intertextual nature of language in the Pakistani postmodern Anglophone literature. The objective was to explore the linguistic and thematic intertextual underpinnings to highlight how literary, cultural, and historical narratives are interwoven in the text, which denotes the absence of a transcendental signified and the text becomes a web of textuality. Using a deconstructionist approach, the study postulated that language bears the absence of a transcendental signified, which marks its decentred nature, complemented by the concept of intertextuality. In this research, the language and referents employed by Hassan in his essays were specifically analysed. This study fills the research gap that appears in contemporary Pakistani Anglophone literature due to a lack of poststructuralist research. The critical ideas propounded by (Derrida, 2009; Catherine Besley, 2008; Peter Barry, 2007; Leitch, 1983; Maria Jesus Martinez Alfaro, 1996) served as the basis of the theoretical framework utilized in this study and secondary texts for this research. Opening up similar poststructuralist viewpoints for the exploration of postmodern literature, this study paves the way for more research on Pakistani Anglophone literature intended to analyse textual innovations, specifically in contemporary texts. Moreover, since literary essay is a withering genre in Pakistani Anglophone literature, this research is likely to play a significant role in rejuvenating its importance and adding a new literary dimension to it.

Keywords: decentred, intertextuality, language, transcendental signified

Introduction

Shoaib Bin Hassan (born 1924) is a contemporary Pakistani Anglophone writer, who is known for his innovative and witty writing style, variety of puns, and diversity of references. Hassan has written two essay anthologies that can qualify as literary nonfiction. He is one of the very few Pakistani Anglophone writers who experimented with the genre of literary essays. This study examined literary essays, which is a neglected genre in Pakistani Anglophone literature and requires more research.

The primary text of this research is titled *Aesthetics of Incompleteness* by Shoaib Bin Hassan. It is an anthology of prose writings, which comprises literary essays on various aspects of society, culture, politics, history, literature and language. Hassan's writing style can be

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determined by analyzing his essays which are defined as an “expansive panorama of a profound, eclectic, subtle and unyieldingly witty text, enlivened by an all pervading, exhilarating humour, and encompassing the accumulated intellectual heritage of mankind, the known and the unknown facets of history, receding cultures and advancing civilizations” (Hassan, [2006](#)). This observation reveals that he often writes about serious subjects in humorous undertones, which has become a hallmark of his style.

This study aimed to prove that the absence of a transcendental signified reveals the free play of textual referents. According to Derrida ([2009](#)), in the absence of a universal signified, the quintessential decentred nature of language becomes evident, marking its lack of origin. This absence gives way to intertextuality which is an essential component of language, because “in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse ... when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified is never absolutely present outside a system of differences” Derrida ([2009](#)). Hence, language becomes a system of differences where various signified interact and their differences become evident. In other words, language is a system where texts constantly refer to other texts in an implicit manner.

This research explored intertextuality; first, by tracing and analyzing textual references, and second, by studying the various socio-political, cultural, and historical narratives acting as textual referents. It is deduced that the intertextual underpinnings in the primary text are used as devices to satirize or generate humour. Hence, the study answers the following research questions:

1. How are postmodern texts a “prison house of language?” Leitch ([1983](#))
2. How does such interplay of textual references correspond to the quintessential lack of origin and center in language?

Literature Review

The paper draws on the poststructuralist school of thought which refutes the absolute and independent nature of the text and emphasizes the intertextual nature of language. According to Derrida in “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, poststructuralism deconstructs the structuralist notion of transcendental signified to highlight the absence of a universal signified ([2009](#)). This process complements the idea of the intertextual, free play of language. In the primary text, language is mostly employed figuratively. The contextual use of references makes use of various referents such as historical, political, literary or other narratives. This concept is known as ‘intertextuality’ in deconstructive analysis. In this regard, Barry ([2007](#)) states that poststructuralist philosophy “distrusts the very notion of reason, and the notion of human beings as an independent entity” because it considers individuals as a “product of social and linguistic forces” and a “tissue of textualities” ([2007](#)). According to this concept, a text is always composed of various textualities which disregard the meta-narrative of individual texts to make connections between diverse narratives.

The theoretical idea of intertextuality has been discussed in detail by Alfaro ([1996](#)) in her article titled “Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept”. Alfaro claimed that the term was initially used by Julia Kristeva, who argued that the text is a “dynamic site” whose center of analysis is “relational processes and practices” (Alfaro, [1996](#)). This implies an interrelation between texts which, according to Kristeva, is established through an “intersection of textual surfaces” and “a dialogue among several writings” because “each word (text) is an intersection of other words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read” (qtd. in Alfaro, [1996](#)). Intertextuality, according to this notion, serves as a dialogue between two texts, as

one comments on the other implicitly or explicitly. Alfaro further highlights the concept of otherness present in poststructuralist texts; she states that texts always possess an element of otherness since they are not “self-contained”, but are historical entities marked by the “repetition and transformation of other textual structures” (1996). It can be deduced from this stance that a text contains traces of other textual structures while transcending its structural bounds, and in this process, structures are defied and negated.

This concept has also been explored by Catherine Belsey (2008), who states that every text alludes to other texts and bears resemblance to them. According to her, every text carries both difference and resemblance to other texts to which it intertextually connects. These texts usually belong to the same genre with or without the author’s intention (2008). This view suggests that there is interconnectedness in literary works as the author quotes intertextual references in a manner completely dissimilar to the referred text. In this regard, Belsey writes that “the texts that tend to form the material of cultural criticism ... cannot be closed down by the one final definitive reading that would surpass all others. Instead, they can be shown to reveal more than their authors knew, and more than previous critics have identified” (2008). Hassan’s essays can qualify as one of such texts because they largely contain cultural criticism.

Similarly, Leitch (1983) discusses the concept of a “prison house of language” and states that “the world is a text. Nothing stands behind. There is no escape” (1983). However, textuality cannot commence in isolation because every text is essentially connected to various other texts. Leitch, in his note on intertextuality, employs the word ‘intertext’ for every text since he rejects the autonomy of a text and views it as a “set of relations” with other textual entities (1983). Thus, the text does not only allude to written books but also numerous narratives, such as social, religious or historical narratives. Based on this idea, Leitch declares that deconstruction “turns history and tradition into intertextuality” (1983). This notion befittingly applies to Hassan’s work which recurrently refers to various local and international social, political, and historical narratives, such as the World Wars as well as Medieval and colonial practices.

In order to further explore intertextuality, Leitch discusses Joseph Riddel’s notion of Intertextuality. According to Riddel, a text, being a “play of textuality”, is not only an idea that endorses the text’s relation with its predecessors; rather, it plays a role in the “displacement and reappropriation of other texts” (qtd. in Leitch, 1983). This notion suggests that a text appropriates reality in its narrative, while its references or allusions in another text are a reappropriation of the given notion. Just as the differences between meanings constantly carry out the task of readjusting, displacing, and appropriating the contexts of various texts, Hassan also changes the context of, for instance, literary texts by adding humor and wit in his essays. Leitch, in this regard, endorses Riddel’s concept of the amalgamation of textuality and intertextuality as well as the infiltration of texts by antecedent texts. Hence, he also rejects “nonintertextual textuality” (Leitch, 1983). Therefore, it can be deduced that every text is connected to several other texts. The critical notions of the above-mentioned critics are applicable on the chosen primary text because it contains embedded references, permeated by various levels of textuality under a single, apparent narrative.

Research Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature since it carried out a deconstructive analysis of a literary text. The primary text for this research is *Aesthetics of Incompleteness*, an anthology of essays by Shoaib Bin Hassan (2006). This study analysed selected essays from the primary text to discuss

its intertextual references and highlight the presence of the Derridian concept of the absent Transcendental Signified.

The secondary resources consulted for this research include relevant books and articles on poststructuralism and deconstruction by poststructuralist critics, such as Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", Leitch's *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*, and Belsey's "Poststructuralism". Since the theoretical framework is poststructuralism and deconstruction, the aforementioned and other critical works were thoroughly studied to conduct a comprehensive analysis of intertextuality.

The research primarily explored and analysed the intertextual nature of language by examining interwoven and underlying references. It also analysed the relationship between texts and various narratives. As the idea of a text being an independent entity is disregarded in deconstruction, this paper explored the connection between the primary text and other literary and artistic texts, religious and political narratives, and historical accounts through textual references, symbolic references, and allusions. The theoretical ideas discussed in this paper are taken from Derrida (2009), Belsey (2008), Barry (2007), Leitch (1983), and Alfaro (1996). Thereby, the methodology includes textual exploration, development of connections, and linguistic embedding of references. This study fills the research gap that appears in contemporary Pakistani Anglophone literature due to a lack of poststructuralist research.

Analysis

In poststructuralism, the central signified is absent in a literary text, whereby the text lacks a specific center which makes it a unified entity. One aspect of this absence is intertextuality. Meanings, in poststructuralist texts, are often used contextually; this contextual use contains explicit or implicit references to various historical, political, literary or other narratives. This concept is known as 'intertextuality' in deconstructive analysis, whereby the writer makes use of allusion as a technique. Poststructuralism believes in the interwoven nature of texts or narratives and disregards the complete independence of a text. Disregarding the "very notion of ... human being as an independent entity", Barry states that an individual is a 'tissue of textualities'" (2007).

Hassan's essays comprise embedded literary references from various poets and writers, suggesting a variety of meanings. Moreover, the essays also utilize political or historical narratives, such as the World Wars and medieval practices, which are alluded to in an underlying manner. To maintain his witty tone throughout his essays, Hassan employs literary references in ordinary sentences, adding humour to his expression. For instance, in a letter to his friend, he writes, "Thank you so very much for the picture post-card which, contrary to my great expectations, turned out to be a full-colour reproduction of William Turner" (2006). The embedded allusion to Dickens' *Great Expectations* not only incorporates humor by associating the word 'great' to his expectations regarding a trivial matter but also exemplifies the concept of intertextuality. In this regard, Joseph Riddel states that "literary text as irreducibly infiltrated by previous texts" (qtd. in Leitch, 1983). Besides the above-mentioned example, various other instances of intertextuality can be largely traced in Hassan's essays.

Similarly, Hassan subtly refers to T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in his autobiographical writings. "Evenings", he writes, "however, were spent over a cup of tea in a one-night cheap hotel" (2006). The statement alludes to the first stanza of Eliot's poem, in which he states that "when the evening is spread out against the sky", he asks his beloved to go through "the muttering retreats/ of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels" (Eliot, 2009). On one hand,

the references incorporate a poetic quality to the narrative, on the other hand, they also serve as an underlying critique on the shallow lifestyle of modern or postmodern Europe. Similarly, Hassan also writes about his Indian friend whom he meets on the same journey. He states that “The Indian, however, had a pair of warm, brown, large, shiny eyes which fixed you in a formulated gaze” (2006). The line again refers to Eliot’s “Love Song”, whereby he writes, “I have known the eyes already, known them all / the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase” (Eliot, 2009). The intertextual references from Eliot’s poem not only challenge the structuralist philosophy of the autonomous nature of a text but also rejects the grand narrative of a specific structural demarcation between poetry and prose. Hassan’s expression also blurs / the structural demarcation between poetry and prose, making his writings poetic prose. The poststructuralist nature of the primary text can be identified by its rejection of the already existing structural and linguistic patterns.

The poststructuralist nature of his writings can also be traced by examining the connection drawn between Eliot and Chekov in his narrative. In his autobiographical essay, he writes, “As at the end of Chekov’s *The Cherry Orchard*, new tenants have unpacked, moved in and settled down. Abbass, Hamid, Naseem, Saleem, Shahid, Sohail and Ikram come and go talking of Michelangelo” (2006). On the one hand, the statement bears a reference to the ending of Anton Chekov’s play where the cherry orchard signifies the past, while the arrival of a new owner denotes change as is the case with the Hassan’s new tenants in England. On the other hand, he alludes to Eliot’s famous lines, “In the room women come and go,/ Talking of Michelangelo” (2009). Hassan’s appropriation of this expression depicts a modern man’s life, in which art and literature have become mundane subjects of discussion, lacking depth and proper understanding.. Moreover, the reference also brings to light the importance of the transience of life and the permanence of change.

Language, in deconstructionist texts such as Hassan’s essays, plays a significant role in giving rise to intertextuality, because a text never stands as an autonomous body; its language “drags along numerous bit and pieces” making it an intertext (Leitch, 1983). Hassan’s essays also drag various ‘bits and pieces’ alongside the actual narrative. Another example of intertextuality is Hassan’s description of an acquaintance named Ahson Tair. Hassan states, “All he knows and does is sting like a scorpion. A Kafkaish-character. Bristles with nasty quarrelsomeness” (2006). The sketch of this character is similar to Franz Kafka’s character, named Gregor Samsa, from his novel *The Metamorphosis* published in 1915. Samsa mysteriously and inexplicably transforms into a vermin after waking up one morning. Using figurative language, Samsa’s transformation highlights the existential dilemma of humans; whereas, Tair’s resemblance to a scorpion is established to highlight his quarrelsome nature with a tinge of humor. Hence, this intertextual reference is in accordance with Katherine Belsey’s concept of intertextuality (2008). In the above-given examples, Hassan’s writing appropriates references from Eliot and Kafka’s writing, which makes his writing similar yet different from the referents.

Other interesting intertextual analogies can be traced in his work. Hassan writes about Zia-ul-Haq, a former president of Pakistan, in one of his essays, when he states, “American-pulled, Russian-pushed, Zia made for the top but in his lanky brittle bones, all along he felt utter lack of pace and security. Broken, rather than shaken, internally, he like Lady Macbeth developed compulsive neurotic ties and habits” (2006). At the basis of this interconnection between his narrative and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* lies an element of humor; however, the reference to Lady Macbeth’s character is quite significant. This reference suggests that both Zia and Lady Macbeth

felt subconscious guilt after committing a crime. This intertextual example is in accordance with Riddel's idea of textuality, which states that a text emerges "in the historical field of its predecessors" (qtd. in Leitch, 1983). This suggests that by reappropriation of references, different meanings or connotations in text connects the text to the original referents, such as in the case of the above-given example.

Conversely, Hassan refutes his own analogical association between Zia and Lady Macbeth and writes in the very next paragraph that "Not from Shakespeare, Zia seems to have come out straight from Dickens. A happy or unhappy mix of Mr. Bumble (*Oliver Twist*) and Sir Samuel Slumky or Slumky Hall (*Pickwick Papers*)" (2006). Hassan uses satire to describe Zia, he compares him to Slumky, an elected blue candidate, and Mr. Bumble, the beadle, who under the garb of religiosity hides his greed and hypocrisy. The paradoxical combination of Zia's Islamization and dictatorship justifies the comparison with Mr. Bumble. Here, the appropriation of Dickens' novels is thematic in nature. Thereby, an intertextual link is established between a Shakespearean text, local politics, and Dickens' characters.

Hassan also referred to Emma Duncan's book *Breaking the Curfew* when he states: "The message of her "A Passage to Pakistan" unlike Forster's ... [is] there is no future" (2006). The title in quotation marks not only alludes to E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, which is a famous text, but it also alludes to the title of another text by Shoaib Bin Hassan. However, this intertextual phrase carries sarcastic undertones that are more prominent than the humorous tones. Hassan uses also sarcasm and humor to describe his Pathan friend. He writes, "He looked around for job and managed to obtain a white collar job with a warehouse. Earned his bread and butter but saved some for his little passage to India" (2006). This reference highlights postcolonial and diasporic concerns since the idea of achieving a white-collar job in a foreign country symbolizes superiority; whereas, his original roots, which lie in the Subcontinent, earns him the status of a third world citizen of a previously colonized nation. On another instance, Hassan compares him to King Lear and states that "He reasoned like King Lear. I was amused by his reasoning" (2006). The reference to King Lear employs sarcasm and wit, this style of writing is used throughout the text. Due to his irrational reasoning, Lear banishes his daughter, since he fails to understand the depth of her love for him. Lear's irrational reasoning is likened to Hassan's Pathan friend. The text, therefore, in Riddel's words, becomes a "play of textuality" (qtd. in Leitch, 1983).

Similar to previous examples, Hassan uses wit and humour to refer to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* when he narrates "The *tonga-walla* had agreed to help us like the apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*" (2006). He uses a similar style of writing when he refers to the Shakespearean character Falstaff, he states that "The fat Egyptian customs officer guarding the entrance to the ship had fallen asleep ... The passengers sniggered and smiled on this sleeping, snorting Falstaff" (2006). Such minor textual or literary references highlight that the linguistic and stylistic structure of the primary text breaks free from the autonomy of language or logocentrism which, according to Derrida, is contested by the deconstructionist approach (qtd. in Benjamin, 2008). Hence, by defying this autonomy, the text is infiltrated by other texts.

In a similar fashion, many Shakespearean references can be found in abundance in Hassan's essays. Such allusions, along with political humor, are often witty remarks about world politics. One example of such an allusion is found in the essay "A Wilderness of Shylocks", in which he writes, "the new state of Israel is a wilderness of Shylocks. Deadlocked because Shylocked" (Hassan, 2006). In this reference, an analogy is drawn between Shylock, who was a Jew and the villain of *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Jewish state of Israel to convey an underlying

meaning, which suggests that Shylock's shrewd, untrustworthy, and unscrupulous nature is similar Israel's state of affairs. Israel is deadlocked by the rest of the world because its status as a sovereign state is not recognized. It is 'Shylocked' because it possesses villainous traits. Similarly, on another instance, he states, "Sons and daughters of Barabas and Shylock now in Israel lead no longer a dog-like existence, no phantasy-life of death and destruction. They freely bark, bite, loot, plunder, terrorize, deport and murder whomsoever they like or dislike or both" (2006). Barabas, the Jew and protagonist of Marlowe's famous play *The Jew of Malta*, resembled Shylock because both characters were maltreated at the hands of the Christian community. This comparison highlights how Jews as a minority were mistreated by the majority of the nations. However, the scenario is reversed in the case of Israel, a Jewish state imposing tyrannical hegemony over Palestine. The reference to Barabas and Shylock with respect to Israel not only highlights the discourse of the oppressor and oppressed but also proves that the text is a "dynamic site of relational processes" (qtd. in Alfaro, 1996).

Hassan also writes, "East Germany never paid any 'blood money' to Israel. After their union into one Germany, Israel is going to claim its pound of flesh, as things are, under American pressure, they may get it" (2006). The statement displays embedded references to *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Shylock, whom again Israel is likened to, demands a pound of flesh from Antonio when the latter fails to pay his debt. In Hassan's writing, bearing the same shrewdness as Shylock, Israel is going to demand compensation for the Holocaust from Germany. Such sites of references in the text are in accordance with Alfaro's denial of the self-contained nature of texts, which are "historical and differential" and thus transcend "textual structures" (1996). A similar "intersection of textual references" (Alfaro, 1996) were found in Hassan's letter to his friend Athar Tahir entitled "Abusing Queen's English and God's Patience". In this essay, he writes, "Much is lost – the love's labour lavished on this letter won't be I hope, lost" (2006). Here, the linguistic appropriation of the title of Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* is again employed in a subtle, humorous tone.

Hassan's essays disregard the notion of self-sufficient textuality since they encompass references of artistic texts as well as literary texts. (Leitch, 1983). In his essays, he writes, "On board the R.M.S Caledonia... we were a mighty motley mob, indeed; a small Vanity Fair afloat; or perhaps we were on board Hieronymous Bosch's Ship of Fools" (2006). The given sentence contains two intertextual references: *Vanity Fair*, a novel by William Makepeace Thackeray, and *Ship of Fools*, a painting by Bosch. The former symbolizes the variety of people on the ship including the author. As per the former reference, these people are engrossed with trivial, materialistic, and worldly concerns. The latter indicates that the ship, which represents humanity and is travelling through the sea of life, is boarded by individuals who are marked by their foolishness since they indulge in petty pursuits (Bosch, 2002). These references not only connect the primary text to its predecessors but also establish a connection between Thackeray's and Bosch's texts, making a web of connections.

Though allusions to famous literary texts are largely present in his essays, Hassan also incorporates historical narratives and interweaves them with his own. For instance, he mentions three famous historical episodes in one sentence, which, though used in subtle tones, offer a thorough insight into the medieval and modern eras. He writes about his Indian friend and states, "On his hind bandy legs he stood before me as an archetype of those who have, throughout the ages and in different countries, led the yelling mobs to Jew-baiting, nigger-lynching and witch-hunting" (2006). The phrase 'Jew-baiting' alludes to historical instances of antisemitism, such as the Crucifixion of Christ and the Holocaust. Similarly, 'nigger-lynching' is a reference to

African and Afro-American history, which alludes to the Black experience of colonization and oppression; whereas, ‘witch-hunting’ refers to the witch trials held in the Middle Ages, during which unorthodox women were executed after being declared witches. Though described in humorous undertones, the Indian passenger represented oppressors from all ages that committed inhumane acts in the history of human civilization through oratorical power. According to Leitch, poststructuralist texts utilize various historical and traditional references to exhibit intertextuality (Leitch, [1983](#)). In this regard, history and tradition become texts or narratives in themselves and appear as a “play of textuality” (Leitch, [1983](#)).

As described above, history, culture, and religion can be utilized as texts for referential purposes. Hassan’s also uses American and Hindu mythology to present a satirical analogy in his texts. He writes, “Another aspect of American exceptionalism. Not two, they have, like the Indian Kali Devi, many, uncountable, unaccountable revolving evolving, grasping hands” ([2006](#)). Hassan used political, historical, and mythological references with sarcastic undertones to suggest that USA is the only superpower, whose good or bad deeds are ‘unaccountable’, since its power is far-reaching. Kali Devi, a Hindu goddess, is often associated with death, doomsday, and violence. In cultural art, Kali is usually painted and portrayed in “her most fearsome guise as the slayer of demons, where she stands or dances with one foot on a collapsed Shiva and holds a severed head. She wears a skirt of severed human arms, a necklace of decapitated heads, and earrings of dead children, and she often has a terrifying expression with a lolling tongue which drips blood” (Cartwright, [2013](#)). The pictorial description suggests that she has authoritative power over Hindu gods and mortals. The analogical connection drawn between her and USA is apt with regards to U.S. neocolonial tendencies. In this regard, Catherine Belsey states, “The texts that tend to form the material of cultural criticism ... cannot be closed down by the one final definitive reading that would surpass all others. Instead, they can be shown to reveal more than their authors knew, and more than previous critics have identified” ([2008](#)). Based on this, it can be stated that the relational dynamics of cultural and political narratives find a pertinent ground in Hassan’s essays.

Similarly, Hassan employs humorous and witty undertones to refer to the atomic bombings during World War II. He uses various historical analogies loaded with metaphorical connotations to convey his sentiments. He writes, “About the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: nicknamed Fat boy, Little Boy – were not only good jokes in themselves but, like fat Falstaff, were a constant source of joy and jokes for all around. ‘Little boy’ was stuck with a photograph of naked Rita Hayworth to cover, perhaps little Boy’s little nakedness and shame like fig leaves” ([2006](#)). Like a Shakespearean fool, the two bombs can be regarded as a source of comic and dark humour. First, their nicknames suggest that the deed is a child’s game, rather than a grotesque act of massacre. Second, the absurdity of calling a bomb naked also highlights comic traits in the reference. The Biblical reference of shame and fig leaves figuratively refers to the original sin, which is also being compared with the sin associated with the massacre caused by the atomic bombings.

Hassan further writes about the first bombing and states that “The day after. Knowing all the damage, destruction and death caused ... One of the crew, Col Paul Tibbetts ... said ‘Yes Sir, I will do it again’. A ba-ba-ing sheep-like response” ([2006](#)). Serving as a sarcastic comment, the words ‘yes sir’ and ‘ba-ba-ing sheep like response’ refers to the nursery rhyme “Baa Baa Black Sheep”, which symbolizes how human beings develop sheep mentality and follow the leader without asking questions . In the above-mentioned examples, literary, political, historical, and

religious references commingle and exemplify intertextuality. This form of intertextuality is the same as the idea of a text bearing “traces and tracings of otherness” (Alfaro, [1996](#)).

In a like manner, when Hassan talks about Hitler and World War II, he states, “Like Dostoevsky’s ‘Underground Man’ (1864), Hitler and his gangsters were of tormented, twisted mentality, abnormally veering between extremes” ([2006](#)). Being an existentialist text, Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* highlight the subconscious thoughts of the protagonist who is a bitter, cynical, introverted, and egotistical extremist. Likening Hitler to the Underground Man, Hassan not only attributes these characteristics to Hitler but also associates an entire philosophy related to human existence with the upheavals of 20th century, such as the World Wars. Just like the Underground Man, who is a self-centred individual with nihilistic streaks, Hitler also stands for a fascist ideology which became the cause of extremist events in history. Thereby, associational practices can be seen at work in this example.

Hassan’s essays on the love life of Charles Dickens also utilize his witty style of writing, which plays a significant role in satirizing Dickens’ promiscuous lifestyle. “In marrying Catherine”, writes Hassan, “Dickens ‘married’ all her sisters and many more who were not her sisters. A male Wyfe of Bath. A child-wifer” ([2006](#)). Here, Hassan sarcastically used the term ‘married’ to refer to his promiscuous behaviour and broken vows of marriage. In Dickens’ case, he is given the title of a ‘male Wyfe of Bath’ because he has extramarital affairs with his wife’s sister. The title ‘Wyfe of Bath’ is employed as a pun. Firstly, it refers to Geoffrey Chaucer’s famous character with the same name, who is known for her many marriages and stands for licentiousness. Secondly, ‘Wyfe of Bath’ is the name of an English cheese made from the milk of organic cows located in the outskirts of the city of Bath. The cheese takes its name from Chaucer’s character and represents a lustful appetite (The Fine Cheese Co., 2019). Such expression is emblematic of a “dialogue [going on] among several writings” (Alfaro, [1996](#)).

In another example, this dialogue goes on between three units: the primary text, a text by D.H. Lawrence, and Freud’s theoretical ideas. Hassan, in an essay about Lawrence, elucidates the relationship between Lawrence and his mother in the following words, “His mother reduced his father to a ghostly non-existence, Sickly son, possessive mother symbiotically attached. Shades of Freud. Mother and son, a mishmash of Sons and Lovers” ([2006](#)). The ‘shades of Freud’ refers to Freud’s theory of the Oedipus Complex in which he describes the “psychosexual stages of development to describe a child’s feelings of desire for his or her opposite-sex parent and jealousy and anger toward his or her same-sex parent” (Cherry, [2019](#)). This term has been specifically used to describe a son’s feelings for his mother. Furthermore, this term when used with ‘Sons and Lovers’ also refers to Lawrence’s novel titled *Sons and Lovers*. In this novel, the protagonist and his mother also have an unhealthy relationship. Hassan suggests traces of a similar relationship between Lawrence and his mother.

The above analysis reveals that intertextuality in Hassan’s essays not only enriches connotations and thematic concerns but also linguistically appropriates various texts. Through this analysis, his work is proven to be a web of textual references where literature, politics, history, and mythology correlate. Additionally, these references not only add an element of wit, humour, sarcasm, and richness to the text, they also connect the text to various other narratives through intertextual references. This particular feature of the primary text supports the idea of the absence of a transcendental signified, since “everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present” (Derrida, [2009](#)).. Thereby, the primary text is “a dynamic site in which relational processes and practices are the

focus of analysis” (Alfaro, 1996). Hence, intertextuality not only rejects strict stylistic and linguistic structures but also generates a variety of meanings.

Conclusion

This study is an intertextual analysis of Hassan’s prose. It aimed to prove that narratives are interconnected and this fact goes against the very premise of the complete independence of a text. The study also explored embedded references in the primary text. Additionally, it identified and examined the relationship between the text and other literary narratives including artistic, historical, religious, mythological, and political texts. The literary texts include references from various sources, ranging from Shakespeare to modern poets. Other references include paintings, historical and political incidents, and religious doctrines, which qualify as different narratives, making the text a “prison house of language” (Leitch, 1983).

This analysis also identified the repetitive use of various literary devices, such as wit and sarcasm, to highlight the wide range of intertextual meanings associated with a reference. However, language in postmodern literature is quintessentially intertextual and does not conform to structural bounds. The absence of center and origin in language, caused by this intertextual nature of language, is the primary conclusion of this research. Hence, this study proved that Hassan’s writing is poststructuralist in nature, suggesting that other Pakistani Anglophone literature written in postmodern times might also employ similar literary tropes, which can be explored further by future researchers.

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