

Intertextuality In The Novel “By The Sea”

Abdulrazak Gurnah

Nazokat Sadullayeva Kuvondik kizi¹, Uralova Lobar Akhrovovna²

¹Teacher, Uzbekistan State World Languages University
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

E-mail: Nazoshka9300@gmail.com
ORCID iD:0009-0004-4046-0746

²Master student, Uzbekistan State World Languages University
E-mail: lobar_uralova@mail.ru



Abstract – This article aims to explore the intricate intertextual references within Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel "By the Sea," examining how these references enrich the narrative and deepen readers' engagement with the text. The primary task is to identify and analyze specific intertextual elements, including references to "A Thousand and One Nights," "Bartleby the Scrivener," and various historical and cultural motifs. The problem addressed in this article is the need for a comprehensive understanding of how intertextuality functions in "By the Sea" to enhance the thematic depth and character development.

The discussion delves into how Gurnah employs intertextuality to create a multi-layered narrative. References to "A Thousand and One Nights" immerse readers in Middle Eastern storytelling traditions, enriching the cultural landscape of the novel and providing insights into the characters' personalities and perspectives. The recurring phrase "I would prefer not to," from Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," symbolizes resistance and alienation, reflecting the protagonists' struggles as refugees and their defiance against societal expectations. Additionally, these intertextual connections create a dialogue between the characters' contemporary struggles and timeless themes of non-conformity and isolation in literature.

This article demonstrates that Gurnah's strategic use of intertextuality in "By the Sea" significantly enhances the narrative's complexity and emotional resonance. By weaving in references to classic literature and cultural texts, Gurnah not only enriches the reader's experience but also underscores the universal nature of his characters' struggles. This analysis underscores the importance of intertextuality in literature as a tool for deepening thematic exploration and fostering a richer reader engagement.

Keywords – Intertextuality, colonial history, cultural references, refugee, identity crisis, Zanzibar, postmodernism, Abdulrazak Gurnah, "A Thousand and One Nights", Bartleby the Scrivener, literary allusion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Abdulrazak Gurnah is a distinguished Tanzanian-born British author and academic, renowned for his literary works that often explore themes of displacement, identity, and the postcolonial experience. Born on December 20, 1948, in Zanzibar, Gurnah moved to the United Kingdom in the late 1960s following the Zanzibar Revolution.

His experiences as an immigrant and the political turbulence of his homeland significantly influence his writing. "By the Sea" (2001), one of Gurnah's most acclaimed works, exemplifies his skill in integrating intertextual references and historical context into a compelling narrative. This novel deeply examines themes of displacement, memory, and identity. As with much of Gurnah's work, it is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural contexts of East Africa, particularly Zanzibar.

A significant aspect of the novel's richness and complexity is its intertextuality—the way it integrates references to various literary and historical texts, to create a layered narrative. This article explores the various dimensions of intertextuality in "By the Sea," examining how Gurnah uses these connections to deepen the themes and impact of his story.

Intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, refers to "the sum of relationships between and among writings. This modern critical term usually covers the range of ways in which one 'text' may respond to, allude to, derive from, mimic, or adapt another" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It is the relationship between texts and the way that texts influence and reflect each other. This concept suggests that a text is not an isolated entity but is interconnected with other texts, creating various meanings that enhances its significance. Intertextuality can manifest through direct quotations, allusions, or even the adoption of certain narrative structures or styles from other works.

II. MAIN PART

The book "By the Sea" contains numerous intertextual elements, skillfully combining allusions to history, literature, and culture to form a complex narrative that enhances the reader's immersion and enriches their experience.

One of the most profound layers of intertextuality in "By the Sea" is its engagement with the colonial history of Zanzibar. The novel's protagonist, Saleh Omar, recounts his life story against the backdrop of British colonial rule and its aftermath. Gurnah's narrative is infused with references to the political and social upheavals of the time, which serve to contextualize the personal struggles of his characters.

For instance, the impact of colonialism is evident in the characters' sense of dislocation and identity crisis. Saleh reflects on the colonial legacy, stating, "The maps created by the colonizers did not just chart the land; they divided and displaced its people" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 15). This statement shows the role of colonial cartography in disrupting indigenous identities and communities.

Similarly, Latif Mahmud, another key character, discusses the internalized colonial attitudes, recalling, "In school, we were taught a history that belittled our own. It was as if they had remade us, and in ways that we no longer had any recourse but to accept" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 18). This highlights the pervasive influence of colonial education in shaping the self-perception of the colonized.

Gurnah's depiction of these historical realities draws on historical texts and records, creating a dialogue between the novel and the documented history of the region. The novel frequently references historical documents, such as when Saleh mentions, "I often found myself speaking to the maps and sometimes they spoke back" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 35), indicating a deep engagement with the colonial archives that recorded Zanzibar's transformation under British rule. Gurnah's depiction of these historical realities draws on historical texts and records, creating a dialogue between the novel and the documented history of the region.

"By the Sea" abounds with intertextual references to classical literature, religious texts, and folk tales, enriching the narrative with layers of cultural heritage and tradition.

References to "A Thousand and One Nights" are scattered throughout Abdulrazak Gurnah's "By the Sea," adding layers of cultural and literary depth to the narrative. In one instance, the character Latif Mahmud compares a man named Faru to the scowling bawabs depicted in the tales. These bawabs, or doorkeepers, are reminiscent of characters from the famous collection of Middle Eastern folk tales, known for their fantastical elements and rich storytelling tradition.

Furthermore, the mention of bawabs being neutered as boys in the stories of "A Thousand and One Nights" adds an intriguing dimension to the conversation. This reference not only highlights the cultural background of the characters but also prompts speculation about the methods used in the tales to carry out such practices. The protagonist's interaction with Latif Mahmud reflects the nuanced interplay between real-life experiences and the literary motifs drawn from classic texts like "A Thousand and One Nights."

Referencing "A Thousand and One Nights" serves multiple purposes within the context of the novel. Firstly, by referencing a classic work of literature like "A Thousand and One Nights," Gurnah enriches the cultural landscape of the narrative, immersing readers in the traditions and storytelling conventions of the Middle East. Secondly, the allusions to

characters and motifs provide insights into the personalities and perspectives of the characters in "By the Sea." For example, comparing a character to the scowling bawabs from the tales adds depth to their portrayal and contributes to their characterization.

Thirdly, it establishes intertextual connections that deepen the reader's engagement with the text, inviting readers to draw parallels between the themes, motifs, and characters of both works, enriching their understanding and interpretation of the narrative. Lastly, the mention can evoke a sense of exoticism and mystery, setting a particular ambiance or mood within the story. This can contribute to the overall atmosphere of the narrative and enhance its immersive quality.

In Abdulrazak Gurnah's "By the Sea," the reference to the Miraj (the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)'s night journey) serves as a rich intertextual element that combines Islamic religious history and cultural heritage into the narrative. This reference not only provides cultural context but also deepens the reader's understanding of the character's identity and the themes of journey and transformation. The passage where the protagonist reflects on his borrowed name, Rajab Shaaban, integrates the story of the Miraj:

"Rajab is the month which precedes both, the seventh month, the revered month. It was during Rajab that the night of the Miraj occurred, when the Prophet was taken through the seven heavens to the Presence of God. How we loved that story when we were young. On the night of the 27th of Rajab, the Prophet was sleeping when the Angel Jibreel woke him and made him mount the winged beast Burakh, who took him through the sky to al-Quds, Jerusalem" (Gurnah, 2001, p. 41). The protagonist explains the significance of his borrowed name and recounts the Miraj, linking his personal history to a broader cultural narrative.

Furthermore, Gurnah incorporates intertextual references to legal and religious teachings, particularly regarding inheritance laws, highlighting the characters' struggles with justice and familial betrayal. Through dialogue and narrative exposition, the novel explores the complexities of moral and ethical dilemmas, drawing on religious principles and historical precedents to underscore themes of righteousness and societal injustice. "What the relatives had done was against God's law, she told him, which stipulated the laws of inheritance with precision. Here they are. When a person died, his property was disposed of in this manner: 1) the debts of the deceased had to be repaid, as well as any other business or public obligations; 2) half of the remaining inheritance was to be divided equally between

surviving male children; 3) a third was to be divided between surviving wives; 4) the rest was to be divided between the daughters. Since Nassor was the only male offspring of his father, or any kind of offspring come to that, he should have inherited at least half of what his father owned." (Gurnah, 2001, p.179).

By incorporating this intertextual reference to inheritance laws and religious teachings, Gurnah adds layers of complexity to the characters' struggles, inviting readers to reflect on the intersection of faith, morality, and societal norms in navigating life's injustices.

Gurnah's narrative is rich with allusions to classical literature, particularly works that deal with themes of exile and journey. One prominent example is the echo of Homer's "Odyssey" in the structure of Saleh Omar's journey. Like Odysseus, Omar is a wanderer, navigating the turbulent waters of his past and seeking a place where he can find peace and belonging.

This classical intertextuality adds a layer of universality to Omar's story, connecting his personal odyssey to the timeless human quest for home and identity. It also highlights the cyclical nature of such journeys, suggesting that the struggles of displacement and the search for belonging are enduring aspects of the human experience.

In "By the Sea," the intertextual reference to Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" plays a significant role in illustrating themes of alienation, resistance, and non-conformity. The characters Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud often draw on Melville's story to express their own feelings of dislocation and defiance.

Throughout the novel, the phrase "I would prefer not to" recurs several times. In one instance, the protagonist recalls the phrase from the story "Bartleby the Scrivener." This reference sparks a conversation between characters, where they discuss their interpretations and connections to the story. The protagonist's familiarity with "Bartleby" stems from encountering numerous books, particularly those left behind by departing British residents. This interaction not only reveals the protagonist's exposure to literature but also hints at complex relationships and influences within the narrative. This intertextual reference serves multiple purposes within the narrative of "By the Sea."

It acts as a symbol of resistance, highlighting the characters' defiance against societal norms and expectations. It also serves as an expression of alienation, mirroring *Bartleby's* profound sense of isolation within the confines of Wall Street to the characters' own feelings of displacement and estrangement as refugees in an unfamiliar land. Additionally, it establishes a literary connection, enabling Gurnah to engage in a dialogue between the contemporary struggles of Saleh and Latif and the timeless theme of non-conformity depicted in Melville's work.

In addition to Western classical texts, Gurnah incorporates elements of Arabic and Swahili literature, reflecting the cultural milieu of Zanzibar. The narrative often references traditional Swahili poetry and the storytelling traditions of the region. These allusions serve to root the novel in its specific cultural context, while also illustrating the hybrid nature of Zanzibari identity, which is shaped by a confluence of African, Arab, and European influences. For instance, the use of proverbs and idiomatic expressions in Swahili throughout the novel not only enriches the narrative but also connects it to the oral literary traditions of East Africa. The interaction among various literary traditions highlights the diverse cultural mix of the area and emphasizes the intricate nature of the characters' identities.

The structure of "By the Sea" itself is a form of intertextuality, as it mirrors the fragmented and non-linear narrative styles found in modernist literature. Authors like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce have utilized such structures to reflect the complexities of consciousness and memory. Similarly, Gurnah's use of a fragmented narrative allows him to explore the multifaceted nature of his characters' experiences and memories.

This narrative style also evokes the disjointed nature of the postcolonial condition, where the past and present are in constant dialogue, and identities are continuously being reconstructed. The fragmented structure thus serves both a thematic and a formal purpose, enhancing the novel's exploration of memory and identity.

"By the Sea" employs multiple perspectives, shifting between the voices of Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud. This technique can be seen as intertextual, drawing on narrative strategies used by authors like William Faulkner and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who employ multiple viewpoints to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their characters and themes.

By giving voice to both Omar and Latif, Gurnah highlights the subjectivity of memory and the different ways in which individuals interpret their pasts. This multiplicity of perspectives also reflects the fragmented and layered nature of postcolonial identities, emphasizing that there is no single, unified narrative of displacement and exile.

The themes of exile and displacement in "By the Sea" resonate with a wide range of literary works, from classical epics to contemporary refugee narratives. Gurnah's exploration of these themes is intertextual in the sense that it dialogues with other texts that address similar issues, creating a broader context for understanding the experiences of his characters.

III. CONCLUSION

Intertextuality in Abdulrazak Gurnah's "By the Sea" is a multifaceted and richly layered aspect of the novel. By engaging with a wide range of texts—from historical records and postcolonial literature to classical and Swahili literary traditions—Gurnah creates a complex narrative that reflects the intricacies of memory, identity, and displacement.

The intertextual connections enhance the novel's thematic depth and situate it within a broader literary and historical context, enriching the reader's understanding of the characters' experiences and the world they inhabit. Through this intricate web of intertextuality, Gurnah not only tells a compelling story but also invites readers to reflect on the enduring impacts of colonialism and the ongoing search for belonging and identity in a fragmented world.

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