สัมพันธบทของเชกสเปียร์และบริบทที่มักปรากฏในวรรณกรรมตะวันตก
Shakespearean Intertextuality and Recurrent Themes in Western Literature

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บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ของบทความเชิงวิชาการชิ้นนี้คือการสำรวจผลงานทางวรรณกรรมของวิลเลี่ยม เชคสเปียร์ตาม หลักแนวคิดทางด้านสัมพันธบท แนวคิดทางด้านสัมพันธบทนี้เป็นแนวคิดทางด้านวรรณคดีเกี่ยวกับความเชื่อมโยงกับ ตัวบทอื่นๆ บทความชิ้นนี้เน้นการศึกษาแนวคิดทางด้านสัมพันธบทที่ปรากฏอยู่ในบทละครของเชคสเปียร์เกี่ยวกับเรื่อง โรมัน ฮีโร่ (Roman hero) และคอริโอลานุส (Coriolanus) นอกจากนี้ผู้ศึกษายังได้ศึกษาตัวบทในบางส่วนของ ภาพยนตร์ซึ่งมีเนื้อเรื่องยึดตามบทละครจากต้นฉบับ จากการศึกษาสามารถกล่าวได้ว่างานวรรณกรรมของเชคสเปียร์มี พื้นฐานแนวคิดทางด้านสัมพันธบทในงานวรรณกรรมของนักเขียนคนอื่นๆ อย่างเช่น ซอโฟคลีส (Sophocles) พลูทาร์ก (Plutarch) และเพลโต (Plato) สรุปแล้วแนวคิดทางด้านสัมพันธบทในงานบทละครของเชคสเปียร์ได้ปรากฏหลักฐานที่ ชัดเจนในเรื่องของแนวคิดและกลวิธีการเล่าเรื่องตามแนวคิดนี้ไม่ได้ปรากฏอยู่แค่ในงานวรรณกรรมของเชคสเปียร์ แต่ แนวคิดและกลวิธีการเล่าเรื่องยังแทรกอยู่ในงานวรรณกรรมตะวันตก ศิลปะและวัฒนธรรมอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ : เชกสเปียร์ คอริโอเลนุส สัมพันธบท วรรณกรรมภาษาอังกฤษ อารยธรรมตะวันตก วัฒนธรรมตะวันตก

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the literary works of William Shakespeare with reference to the concept of intertextuality in his work. Intertextuality is a literary concept regarding the interrelationship between various texts. In this paper, particular attention is paid to intertextuality in Shakespeare's play about a Roman hero, Coriolanus. Parts of the subsequent movie, which is based on the original play, are also mentioned. It is noted that the work of Shakespeare has some intertextual origins in the literary works of previous artists such as Sophocles, Plutarch, and Plato. Hence, intertextuality in Shakespearean plays gives clear evidence that certain ideas and narratives not only preceded Shakespeare but also continue to permeate Western literature, art and culture.

Keywords: Coriolanus, English Literature, Intertextuality, Shakespeare, Western Civilisation, Western Culture.

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Introduction

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, on 23rd April 1564 and he died in the same town in 1616. It has been claimed that he died on the day of his 52nd birthday.

Shakespeare, as he is more commonly known, has had various other titles given to him by society such as "England's National Poet" and "The Bard". Shakespeare is celebrated worldwide as an excellent English playwright, actor and poet. Many consider him to be one of the greatest and most creative writers of English literature and much of his work is still studied by today's university students.

However, it should also be noted that Shakespeare's work typically illustrates many of the historical Western civilisation ideas, ideals and ideologies that have existed for centuries in both culture and literature, and which still exist today. Shakespeare basically took old stories and reworked them into new ones, often adding or inventing new vocabulary and producing phrases that were previously unheard of as he wrote his great plays and poems. Many of his inventive phrases have become parts of everyday modern English language and English speakers in contemporary times often quote Shakespearean text without actually realising that they are doing so.

Shakespeare's various writings are, for the most part, a good example of Western cultural discourse and familiar narratives which have existed prevalently over a vast period of time in Western civilisation. Many of these narratives date back as far as the ancient classical Athenian period, and these cultural discourses and narratives are still in existence in today's postmodernist society. This is simply because Western stories are a reflection of Western ideologies and cultures and as such they tend to be repeated over and over again with the same themes and very often the same pro-Western heroism. However, in order to better understand how Shakespeare's work has remained relevant even today, and in order to perceive the significant way in which Shakespeare's work demonstrates recurring Western ideas and ideologies, we should consider the concept of intertextuality in Shakespeare's work.

Intertextuality

As the world famous T.S. Eliot (1921) wrote in The Sacred Wood:

"No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relationship to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism" (p.1).

Thus, intertextuality is a process that involves the borrowing or use of previous texts, ideas, and narratives, and then transforming them into something either new, or perhaps more relevant to current-day life and affairs. It could be considered that literary texts and arts evolve reciprocatively with the culture. According to Briggs and Bauman (1992), investigating generic intertextuality can illuminate questions of ideology, political economy, and power.

Intertextuality is a very complex concept, very closely related to culture, as both take ideas and beliefs which are repetitive and relevant within a given society. The process of intertextuality

allows an artist to take text from a previous piece of literature and then put their own spin, that is, angle on the content. In other words, the artist creates a new perspective on an old story in order to give a distinctive or intended current interpretation for a given audience. Shakespeare was extremely good at doing this and his works were often a clever reflection and adaption of earlier texts. Shakespeare's work, therefore, contains many intertextual elements.

The Story of Oedipus and the Oedipus Complex in English Literature

When Sophocles wrote the story of *Oedipus the King,* the idea of the strong relationship between mother and son and the maternal bond between them became very prominent within the Sophocles narrative. The *Oedipus the King* story tells of a special relationship and bond between a mother and her biological son in the absence of the father. Deriving directly from the Sophocles tragedy, which has existed in English literature for many centuries, is the theory of the "Oedipus Complex".

The Oedipus complex is a Freudian theory. In the *Oedipus complex theory*, a boy is fixated on his mother and competes with his father for maternal attention. The opposite side of the coin to the Oedipus complex is the attraction of a girl to her father and the resultant competitive rivalry between the girl and her mother. This opposite concept is described in Freudian theory as the Electra *complex (Buchanan, 2010).*

Nevertheless, Freudian Oedipal Complex can be defined as the typical emotion and feelings of a child, any child, characterized by the simultaneous and ambivalent presence of desires, both amorous and hostile towards the parents.

This is the main concept of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, introduced in his "Interpretation of Dreams" (1899).

In Freudian theory, the Oedipus Complex is present in every human being, both males and females, irrespective of their education, ethnicity or culture. Therefore, it is considered to be universal in any society and it is reflected in the literary work of William Shakespeare in his play about a tragic Roman war hero, *Coriolanus.*

Shakespeare's Coriolanus

In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, there is clear evidence that Shakespeare wanted to demonstrate the power of mother and son relationships in the text and highlights the power that the mother has over her son. The almost overbearing power of the mother, Volumnia, is one of the main themes within the story. Shakespeare demonstrated in the text that the mother and son bond is very strong, and we see evidence in the text that the mother, Volumnia, worships her son as though he were her own husband. She dominates the child and controls everything that he does. Consequently, manipulating him and moulding his character into the grown man that she most desires to call her son.

According to Bergmann and Green (2013),

"In *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare showed an astonishing understanding of a mother-son relationship. Today, largely under the influence of psychoanalysis, we take it for granted that the early years and the relationship to the parents are decisive in forming our characters, but in Shakespeare's time none of this was known. Even today, psychoanalytic patients discover, to their astonishment, how decisive the father or mother

was in the formation of their characters" (pp.145-155).

Indeed, it is quite apparent in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* that Volumnia has an overbearing presence on her son and she is certainly responsible for the shaping of the character of her son.

When analysed, Shakespeare's work does portray intertextuality in relation to mother and son relationships and these types of relationships have been apparent in literary text and in Western civilisation since Sophocles was alive. Parts of the *Coriolanus* text is considered by some to be Shakespeare's intertextual reworking of the Sophocles *Oedipal* narrative.

"If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love" (Shakespeare, I. iii.1-5).

Western Cultural Militarisation in Literature

In addition to the intertextuality between *Coriolanus* and the *Oedipal* narrative, Shakespeare draws other references in his writings to Western family institutions and behaviours, and he highlights how Volumnia has militarised her son.

In a typical Western manner, Volumnia conditions her son for war from an early age. She relishes the fact that he is a warrior, a strong and masculine man who collects and counts the scars on his body. For Volumnia, and for the Roman citizens at that particular time, the scars are regarded as a token of suffering for and on behalf of others, although at times, *Coriolanus* refuses to display them (Benson, 1999). Suffering for others in this manner is part of the Western civilisation's glorification of war itself. In *Coriolanus*, Volumnia proudly claims;

"To a cruel war I sent him; from whence he returned, his brows bound with oak. I tell the daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man" (Shakespeare, I.iii.14-19).

The war theme and a significant part of the text in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is derived from and reflected in Plutarch's original *Coriolanus* story. Plutarch was a Greek-Roman biographer whose work has historically influenced what we know today as the essay and the biography in English writing.

In Plutarch's original version of *Coriolanus,* he wrote about a real-life family that lived in ancient Rome. In his story, Plutarch defined a character known as Caius Marcius. Marcius was a strong and powerful man, raised by his domineering mother and pushed into war. Again we see evidence of intertextuality.

As can be seen from the boy's given name Marcius, the war theme is also prominent in Western civilisation in the context of names given to male infants. For example, the name "Marcius" can be traced back to its origins as far as the Roman God of War, Mars. Hence, this Plutarch story not only forms the textual basis for Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, but also demonstrates the repetition of Western ideologies in English literature and the concepts of men in conflict who were born to go fighting in war. War, as we can observe, that is always prevalent in Western art, culture and literature.

Stories of Colonisation in Literature

Staying with the theme of war and conflict, Shakespeare was writing at a time when Britain formed an empire and colonised many parts of the globe. Consequently, war and the conquering of

other countries and their citizens would never at this time have been far from Western cultural discourse. Unfortunately, it appears in this period of Western history that war was considered to a desirable and beneficial activity, especially in the eyes of the great British Kings and Queens of the time. As a result, both the current literature of the period and the Elizabethan plays were full of the glorification of war.

Queen Elizabeth I was also a great advocate of colonising countries across the globe and took great delight in seeing her army conquering other parts of the world. She also ruled England at the time when a great deal of English exploration took place and merchants travelled far and wide to bring back luxuries such as spices for Her Majesty and the English elite.

Shakespeare's writing and theatrical plays were also an integral part of Queen Elizabeth I's reign. Her Royal Highness is known to have been one of Shakespeare's patrons and she had a great love of the theatre. Apparently, she even financed some of its operations. As a consequence, the themes of war were also a welcome part of popular theatre. Theatre, being part of social practice, also featured a great deal of militarism and portrayed militarism as a normal social activity much to the delight of the Queen.

"While individual or indiscriminate uses of violence may be deemed criminal according to the law, they reflect a readiness for conflict that is inherent in militarism, which at a cultural level manifests as 'a set of attitudes and social practices, which regards war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity" (Mann, 1987).

Militarisation of Boys in Western Culture and Literature

Not only can it be deduced that war themes have permeated Western art and literature for centuries, but also the theme of boys being militarised is reasonably common in Western culture. According to Higate and Hopton (2005), militarism is a framework that has historically moulded the socio-ideological aspect of masculinity in the Western world.

In Western culture, boys are given toy guns from an early age and there is a weapons fetish in popular culture (Salter, 2014). Boys play war games, and they learn how to ambush one another from behind cars. Incidentally, and not really surprisingly, even the cars in Britain have also historically been given names which are relative to war and conflict:

"Victor": a person who defeats an enemy or opponent in a battle.

"Hunter": a person or animal that hunts and likely kills.

"Avenger": a person who inflicts a punishment or penalty as a form of revenge.

Besides, there were many more: Cavalier, Spitfire, Sceptre, and Triumph!

While no deaths occur in these boy's war-like games, an opinion can be reached that Western civilisation breeds a military culture which, in turn, reflects in the arts, literature and film making. Unfortunately, it is this very literature and media that seems to be having a reciprocal effect on Western social behaviour.

The desire to use aggression or force has long been associated with masculinity and honour (Liddle, 1996), and a willingness to use violence and aggression continues to be observed between

men, women, and those who oppose minority groups (Tomsen, 2009; Tyson, 2013).

Nevertheless, Western literary artists constantly depict white European men appearing as heroes, causing destruction, and trying to conquer the world. In most cases it is portrayed that they succeed, but in reality the outcomes would probably have much less of a Western-biased outcome.

Another of the problems with this tendency in English literature to glorify war is that it is naturally repeated in the culture and begins to either destroy, or at the least erode, the family institution. Poster (1978) claims that modern families display various forms of disequilibrium. Of course, the concept of family differs from one culture to another and if we compare countries such as China or Thailand with Western countries, it is very easy to realise how different the family institutions have become. Some of this difference is likely founded through years at war.

It could be considered that, in Western culture, the major social institution of the family has being constantly eroded over generations, and the more likely root causes of those destructions are simply born around the militarizing of either the children, the family, the society, or the state.

It is no wonder that literature bears some responsibility. According to Robert and Nye (2007), there are many examples in the text which date back as far as ancient Greece that promote the honour and glory associated with life in the military and militarism. It could be these are the very ideals that have destroyed the Western family institution.

However, there is occasionally a softer side portrayed in the literature. On the subject of masculinity, in watching the film *Coriolanus 2011* it is most interesting to witness the strong, all-conquering and powerful Marcius. A man who fears no enemy and bears the scars of his foes, yet even with his near death experiences of bravado, he falls to his knees and weeps with weakness at the feet of his ever-dominant mother at the moment that she chastises him. *Coriolanus's* submission to his mother is demonstrated by Shakespeare early in the play. As early as scene 1, we learn that *Coriolanus* is a boy who does everything to please his mother. "I say unto you, what he hath done famously, he did it to that end: though soft-conscienced men can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please his mother, and to be partly proud; which he is, even till the altitude of his virtue" (Shakespeare, I.i. 36-40).

Tragedy in Western Literature

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* play also ended with tragedy, another literary theme which is common between the works of Shakespeare, Sophocles, and many other artists.

Tragedy may be defined as:

"a dramatic composition, often in verse, dealing with a serious or downfall or utter destruction, as through a character flaw or conflict with some overpowering force, as fate or an unyielding society" (Multidictionary, 2016).

In the story of *Coriolanus*, we see not only clear evidence of a man with a flawed character, namely his inability or unwillingness to form relationships with common people, but also a man in conflict with two overpowering forces. The primary conflict is how to go about handling the overbearing dominance of his mother, and the secondary conflict being the constant search for the real self, the real Marcius. *Coriolanus* battles

with himself to be the perfect son, the devoted father, a warrior, and a consul. It is a struggle that eventually leads to his downfall, and his death. Tragedy, fate, and folly of pride are not only common in Shakespeare's work, but they are also recurrent themes throughout Western culture, arts and literature. Hence, they are also intertextual.

Finally, there is also intertextuality between Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and the work of Plato, who was a philosopher in Classical Greece and the founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world.

"Then, if anyone at all is to have the privilege of lying, the rulers of the State should be the persons; and they, in their dealings either with enemies or with their own citizens, may be allowed to lie for the public good" (Plato, 360BCE).

When Plato wrote the lines, he was perhaps alluding to what might be considered a deceptive method of governing a society. Shakespeare also alluded to the concept of deceptive governance in *Coriolanus* because he defined a constant struggle between the rich and the poor. The poor tend to believe that their governors are dishonest, and they favour only Martius's attitude and honesty towards them: "He's one honest enough! Would all the rest were so!" (Shakespeare, I.i.49-52).

Fair and Just Governance in Literature

Fair and just societies are often portrayed in English literature and many stories are based around the struggle for social equality. A fair and just society would be one where there is equal distribution of land, wealth and food. It would also be a place where voices were not suppressed in fear of violence. This has clearly not always the case throughout Western history, nor is it all that apparent in modern day societies everywhere

around the globe. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's literary ideas surrounding politics in *Coriolanus* still have relevance even today.

"It is so applicable to 21st Century politics, where people pit class against class, demonize opponents, conspire against political "enemies," base their appeals on part truths or falsehoods and feed upon the ignorance and visceral tendencies of people. The play captures the vacillation of public opinion, the tragedy of seeking revenge and is a call for citizens to become informed about their respective governments" (Roueche, 2013).

Of course, injustice in societies and suppression of voice is not only a condition of Western civilisation; it is also prevalent in countries such as Thailand where we see constant political unrest due to a perceived unfair distribution of wealth and power. We know that even on a world-wide basis, social injustices tend to be historical, widespread and enduring. In other words, they become accepted as the social norm. Hence, they may also be intertextualised and become part of the local narratives, the literature, and indeed the local culture too.

Shakespeare was very aware of historical injustices, and was also writing his plays during a time in which there was a huge social class division and injustice in his own society, England. For example, in the process of "enclosure" common land was being bought up and seized by the wealthy, and the poor peasantry who had existed with their families for centuries on the fruits of the land were being driven, sometimes by force, into the cities. These poor citizens were both hungry and angry. It was perhaps with this in mind that Shakespeare includes the concept of fair and just society in his *Coriolanus* play. In *Coriolanus*,

Shakespeare highlighted recurring narratives; injustice, unfair distribution of power and wealth, desire or greed, and the resulting conflict between patricians and the plebeians. For example, in the *Coriolanus* play, the plebeians are rioting against the patricians, in other words, the elite and powerful. They accuse their patrician governors of selfishness and manipulation. The plebeians are angry and hungry, and they seek justice. "The gods know I speak this in hunger for bread, not thirst for revenge" (Shakespeare, I.i.22-23). In times where there is widespread famine, the elite in *Coriolanus* are never seen to be able to justify their control over the food.

Methods

The research methodology for this study is purely qualitative in nature. The aim is to evaluate literature from a variety of sources in order to discover recurrent themes in Western narratives and to establish if there is also evidence of intertextuality with the work of William Shakespeare. The aim of adopting qualitative methods in this case is to take a holistic view of the phenomena under investigation and to provide useful insights for future researchers.

A review of journal articles, books and a movie was conducted. In particular, data and text from the original Shakespeare play and subsequent contemporary movie *Coriolanus* were investigated. The purpose of the review was to capture various perspectives on Shakespeare's work and to determine how his works might be related to the concept of intertextuality in Western literature. While the researcher's personal experience of Western cultural phenomena was important, observations were conducted with openness to new ideas and mindfulness towards reducing bias.

Data were analysed in order to reveal if there were associations or patterns between the texts, any recurrent themes or interrelationships, and as a logical consequence, intertextuality between the texts. Analysis was restricted to social and historical contexts such as Western literature, Western cultural discourse, and the work of William Shakespeare.

Results

The results of the qualitative analysis illustrate that when Shakespeare wrote his work it contained borrowed ideas from previous artists such as Sophocles, Plutarch, and Plato. The research also revealed that the same ideas, even in current times, continue to be prevalent in Western cultural discourse. Common literary themes such as the Oedipus complex, mother and son power relationships, the militarisation of boys, the admiration of war, tragedy and social inequality were all historically evident during the analysis of the chosen Western cultural texts and in the analysis of Shakespeare's work. For instance, it was noted that in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* there is evidence that Shakespeare wanted to demonstrate the power of mother and son relationships in his work as he emphasised the power that the mother had over her son in addition to the unusual bond between the two. The almost overbearing power of the mother, Volumnia, is one of the main themes in the story and this implies that Shakespeare was aware of the concept of Oedipal complex. The results also indicated that militarisation in general, along with tragedy, fate and folly of pride were also recurrent themes in the literature and that

Shakespeare also highlighted these human conditions in his work. It was also noted that a considerable part of Shakespeare's writing actually glorifies conflict and war and that texts based on conflict formed and still form part of the ideologies of the Western world.

Finally the argument of what constitutes fair and just governance and equality within societies emerged from the research. It was revealed that a long and constant battle for equality was an inherent element of both Western culture and intertextuality. In summary, many of these themes continue to be evident in Western literature today. Thus, there is some justification to state that certain ideas and narratives do and will continue to permeate Western art, culture, and literature.

Discussion - Shakespearean Intertextuality

In essence, Shakespeare recycled ideas and literary narratives from artists such as Sophocles, Plutarch and Plato. He found new unique ways of expressing and adapting these old ideas whilst forming his theatrical plays for an Elizabethan audience. This concept is known intertextuality and it is apparent in Shakespeare's work.

Shakespeare's plays were no doubt interactive, a new dynamic experience using tricks with the daylight or candles, and physical movements and gestures. With those kinds of effects and no electricity available it would have been a very surreal experience for the audience, much like a ritual, especially for those who were on drink or drugs. In the days of Shakespeare there were certainly drug takers, just as there are in our modern society.

The aim of Shakespearean literature was to make all his plays work in a manner to highlight awareness of the current human condition, to demonstrate through art and literature that cultural ideas and concepts dating as far back as classical Athenian times were still as relevant then as they are now. Concepts such as democracy, patriarchal structures, societal power relationships, the distribution of wealth, politics, and the fairness or injustice in societies were as relevant in his day as they have always been.

When *Coriolanus* was being performed to the audience, Shakespeare's was in fact holding a mirror of reality up to the audience and showing them their own culture, their own habits, and their own behaviours. His texts highlighting who they were, where they originated from, and more importantly where they might be heading. Through his complex literary characters, he was showing his audience the realities of their human condition while cleverly disguising it as an old Roman story because, in reality, certain ideas were not allowed to be expressed. Hence, under the watchful gaze of Queen Elizabeth I, his technique was a fairly clever way of retaining his head, so to speak.

The audience, including the noblemen upstairs and the peasantry huddled in downstairs, would likely have connected with the story in their own unique way. Everyone would have recognised something that touched their personal emotions and they could jeer about it in a drunken stupor. In this rowdy atmosphere, angers would have been appropriately vented and left inside the theatre for the cost of one penny. Such was the mastery of William Shakespeare.

Conclusion

Western cultural stories will continue to be told again and again, and the literary works and characters of Shakespeare, Sophocles, Plutarch, and Plato will be intertextualised and reused time after time because they are perfect representations of Western cultural existences. Western civilians continue to structure their lives in narratives that transcend centuries. The narratives are ever present in Western arts, Western culture, and Western literature because all three concepts are intrinsically linked.

Taking into account that one of the major reasons why we study is to preserve the culture, and preserving the culture involves borrowing something and transforming it into updated ideas, we are already influenced by our knowledge. Hence, a level of intertextuality in any culture is almost impossible to avoid.

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