



INTERTEXTUALITY IN POSTMODERN NOVELLAS: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF TRADITIONAL PLOTS

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how intertextuality functions as a principal engine of deconstruction in postmodern novellas, reorganizing inherited plots into reflexive, multi-voiced architectures. Drawing on the theories of Kristeva, Barthes, Genette, Bakhtin, Hutcheon, Eco, and McHale, the study argues that postmodern novella writing treats canonical narratives not as stable templates to be adapted but as textual ecosystems to be sampled, reframed, and contested. Methodologically, the article synthesizes narratological modeling with close reading of emblematic postmodern short fiction and novella forms, tracking how quotation, pastiche, parody, palimpsest, and metafictional frames redistribute causality, agency, and closure. The results show that intertextuality shifts the novella's center of gravity from linear plotting to dialogic patterning: the plot becomes a site of negotiations between prior texts and present voices, while readers are interpellated as co-authors who must decode signals across genres and traditions. The conclusion proposes that such intertextual design does not abolish plot but relocates it into a field of competing scripts whose tensions generate meaning, offering productive pathways for pedagogy, translation, and comparative study.

KEYWORDS: Intertextuality; postmodernism; novella; deconstruction; palimpsest; metafiction; parody; narratology.

INTRODUCTION

The novella historically mediates between the concision of the short story and the amplitude of the novel, often relying on a strong through-line and a decisive ending. Postmodern literature unsettles this equilibrium by putting the very idea of plot under erasure. Rather than simply retelling established narratives, postmodern novellas foreground their dependence on other texts, staging encounters where sources are quoted, mistranslated, spoofed, annotated, or pieced together as archival fragments. This shift owes much to the intellectual climate in which the "death of the author," the heteroglossia of discourse, and the textuality of culture became axioms. In such a milieu, the novella's relative compactness proves advantageous: its scale allows dense intertextual play while maintaining enough continuity to register deconstructive operations as meaningful transformations rather than mere collage.

The aim of this article is to explain how intertextuality reconfigures plotting in postmodern novellas, demonstrating that deconstruction operates not only as philosophical critique but as concrete compositional practice shaping temporality, focalization, and closure.

The materials comprise widely acknowledged postmodern short fictions and novellas in which prior texts are visibly embedded, reframed, or ironized. While specific examples vary across languages and traditions, the method emphasizes recurrent formal procedures observable across the corpus: overt quotation and allusion; parody and pastiche as modes of rewriting;

palimpsest structures in which a hypertext stands atop a recognizable hypotext; and metafictional intrusions that expose narrative construction. Genette's taxonomy of transtextual relations provides a vocabulary for mapping these procedures, Bakhtin's dialogism clarifies how voices interact within hybrid discourse, and Kristeva's original formulation of intertextuality grounds the transition from sources to networks. Close reading attends to how these models materialize at the level of scene progression, character agency, and narratorial stance.

Intertextuality deconstructs traditional plots first by displacing the locus of narrative authority. In classical plotting, causality typically flows from actions to consequences under a stable narratorial frame. Postmodern novellas insert competing scripts into this flow so that each decisive moment becomes the site of citation: a quest motif echoes a medieval romance even as it is mocked by advertising slogans; a confession adopts the rhythms of legal discourse while undermining them with lyrical asides. This contamination of discourses diminishes any single source's sovereignty and redefines plot as the emergent pattern of collisions among codes. The reader's task is less to follow what happens next than to infer which textual regime is steering the scene at hand and how long that regime will hold.

A second transformation concerns temporality. Because the novella's episodes often arrive as rewritings of earlier tales, time thickens into layers: the present action proceeds while past narratives resonate within it as pressure and promise. Palimpsest composition allows the hypotext to show through at critical junctures, producing ironies that the characters may not perceive but that shape the reader's expectations. When a supposed revelation is anticipated by a famous precedent, suspense is replaced by a subtler affect: recognition with difference. This layered time recalibrates closure. Endings tend to defer absolute resolution, instead orchestrating a last reframing that changes the hierarchy among the intertexts. The finale reads like the final move in a debate rather than the final event in a chain.

Intertextuality also reassigned agency. Characters in postmodern novellas frequently act under the sign of reading; their choices are constrained or animated by the scripts they inherit. A self-conscious protagonist may attempt to avoid becoming the tragic hero that a hypotext dictates, only to discover that resistance produces another citation—parody that still belongs to the system it negates. Deconstruction does not simply dismantle plots; it makes visible how plots pre-exist individual agency as cultural templates. Yet this visibility confers a limited freedom. By choosing which script to inhabit or sabotage, characters and narrators exercise curatorial power. The novella form, with its economy of scenes, sharpens these decisions into legible pivots.

The linguistic surface registers these negotiations through pastiche and parody. Pastiche borrows styles without overt critique, allowing a text to host multiple idioms in uneasy harmony. Parody adds an evaluative edge, exposing the limits of grand narratives while acknowledging their seduction. In both cases, the deconstructive force arises from articulation rather than annihilation. The plot is not replaced by random discontinuity but reoriented toward the rhetorical labor of demonstrating how meaning depends on framing. This rhetorical labor is often carried out by metafictional devices: narrators confess their borrowings, footnotes proliferate, and editorial personae dispute textual authority. Such gestures do not merely break illusion; they thematize the ethical stakes of narration in a culture saturated with prior speech.

Intertextual novellas further redistribute the function of setting. Places appear as archives of stories rather than neutral backdrops. A city square operates as a palimpsest of literary and historical scenes, and movement through it doubles as movement through citation. This spatial intertextuality directs plot away from a single trajectory and toward a choreography of returns and detours. The novella's compact frame turns these detours into structural principles rather than digressions, making the very act of wandering into a method of argument about tradition and change.

Reader participation intensifies under these conditions. The novella counts on the audience to recognize echoes and to supply missing links; it designs pleasures for multiple competencies, offering a coherent surface while rewarding deeper cultural memory. Eco's notion of the "open work" is realized pragmatically: the text scripts an activity that completes its patterning without fixing a singular path. Deconstruction thus becomes a pedagogy. By forcing readers to test hypotheses about sources and stakes, the novella trains a critical vigilance useful beyond literature, especially in media environments where recycled narratives and memetic forms dominate attention.

Finally, translation and transnational circulation reveal an additional layer of intertextual design. Because references travel unevenly across languages, the postmodern novella often encodes redundancy—glosses, double allusions, explicit acknowledgments—to keep its network legible in new contexts. This redundancy is not a weakness; it is a recognition that intertextuality is a social practice. The deconstruction of plots depends on communities of reading that can debate which scripts are in play. The novella form, historically linked to oral and printed circulation alike, proves apt for sustaining such communities.

Intertextuality in postmodern novellas does not merely embellish inherited plots; it relocates plotting into a dialogic field where scripts compete, overlap, and expose one another's limits. Deconstruction, in this practical sense, names the compositional strategy by which novellas reassigned authority from master narratives to negotiated framings, thicken time into layered recognitions, and transform readers from consumers of events into co-producers of meaning. The result preserves the novella's intensity while enlarging its argumentative reach. For scholarship and teaching, these works demonstrate that to analyze plot today is to analyze networks of prior discourse; for writers and translators, they show how compact forms can sustain complex cultural conversations without forfeiting clarity or aesthetic pleasure.

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