 Teaching notes on intertextuality

Students generally understand intertextuality to mean the simple referencing of one text within another. However Doerr uses intertextuality in a more complex way which reflects the thoughts of literary theorist Julia Kristeva. Intertextuality can take on different forms but in All the Light We Cannot See it is primarily novels within a novel.

“Intertextuality is a literary device that creates an ‘interrelationship between texts” and generates related understanding in separate works. These references are made to influence the reader and add layers of depth to a text, based on the readers’ prior knowledge and understanding ([knowledge base website](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Crmartin88%5CDesktop%5Cwww.basicknowledge101.com)). It denotes the way in which texts create meaning through the use of other texts.

Julia Kristeva’s work on intertextuality refers to texts in terms of two axes: a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of the text, and a vertical axis, which connects the text to other texts (chandler pg 1) uniting these two axes are shared codes: every text and every reading depends on prior codes. Kristeva declared that ‘every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it.’

Heinrich Hertz, author of “The Principles of Mechanics”, has his work described in Wikipedia as “basically summaris(ing) how two axi-symmetric objects placed in contact will behave under loading.”

The novel alludes to repeating waves of the human experience by using the works of Dumas and Verne. Both Dumas’ Three Musketeers and the works of Jules Verne are based on other works. Dumas’ is based on “Memoires de Monsier d’Artagnan (1700) a historical novel by Gatien de Courtilz de Sandra.’ (Wikipedia) Jules Verne unusually (at the time) based his novels on specific scientific knowledge according to David Coward in his 2017 translation “All Verne’s stories are firmly planted in the facts of the world, of which he had only second-hand knowledge. His detailed descriptions of flora and fauna he had never seen were taken from authoritative published sources. For the most intensively documented of all his novels, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, he combed volumes of physical geography, oceanography, malacology, marine zoology by authorities both old and new.” Pg xix. Also according to Coward “Verne’s appetite for knowledge was shared by a generation coming to grips with a world that was being transformed by technology.”

In one interview Anthony Doerr stated he had “spent anything up to 30 hours on research for just one paragraph.”

In another interview with Net Galley Doerr was asked “How did Jules Verne’s Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea find its way in the novel? How meaningful was it for you to have Marie-Laure read this book in particular?

He responded “Twenty Thousand Leagues was a childhood favourite of my own.Verne’s novel is about wonder and technology, and he uses narrative to amplify a reader’s interest in the natural world. This is so similar to the kind of projects I try to make with my own fiction, that – one day, when I started re-reading it – I decided Verne’s text might serve as an effective book-within-a-book and might be the right text to have Marie-Laure broadcast over her radio. To me, Marie-Laure’s most salient characteristic is her curiosity – she is a learner first and foremost. So giving her Verne, whose books celebrate the quest for knowledge, seemed like a good fit.”