



## Lost in Déjà Vu

### —The Textual Analysis of *Nettles* Based on Intertextuality

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#### Abstract

In this thesis, the author focuses on the application of intertextuality depending on the textual analysis of *Nettles* in order to demonstrate how the art of intertextuality helps to achieve this story by employing other texts to serve this story. Just like a mosaic, this text is a coinage of quotations and a combination of absorption and transformation of another texts. As a result, this “mosaic” creates Déjà Vu—a kind of phenomenon that is somewhat similar to what recently happened, or something reminded you of something that happened in the past which you seem to have already encountered before. In this thesis, gender differences, gender roles, usage of different sources and readers' former images and knowledge will be involved in the analysis of this story from the angle of intertextuality. This thesis will help to enlighten how intertextuality being a device to create Déjà Vu phenomenon, and in what world that can people get lost.

**Keywords:** Nettles, Textual analysis, Intertextuality, Déjà Vu

The fiction *Nettles* is a short story written by the famous Canada female writer Alice Munro. The story gains its fame by its narrative strategies, theme, and usage of symbolism. However, this thesis will concern about the application of intertextuality as a device to create Déjà Vu phenomenon since seldom of scholars have ever have a touch in this field. Base on the textual analysis of *Nettles*, the art of intertextuality will be demonstrated.

#### 1. Introduction of intertextuality and Déjà Vu

Generally speaking, intertextuality is the shaping of texts' meanings by other texts and can refer to an author's borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. Intertextuality is a term first introduced by French semiotician Julia Kristeva in the late sixties. In her essay—*Word, Dialogue, and Novel*, Kristeva broke with traditional notions of the author's “influences” and the text's “sources,” positing that all signifying systems, from table settings to poems, are constituted by the manner in which they transform earlier signifying systems. A literary work, then, is not simply the product of a single author, but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself. “Any text,” she argues, “is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” Intertexts need not be simply “literary”—historical and social determinants are themselves signifying practices which transform and inflect literary practices. Moreover, a text is constituted. Thus the reader's own previous readings, experiences and position within the cultural formation also form crucial intertexts—it requires the readers' involvements. From this textual analysis readers can get a better understanding of intertextuality and furthermore get the essence of the art.

As to the phenomenon of Déjà Vu, sometimes, the employment of the technique of intertextuality can help to cause such feeling. Déjà Vu originates from French, meaning “have already seen”, is a universal phenomenon that something occurred to people in the past that was somewhat similar to what recently happened, or something reminded people of something that happened in the past. There's also the possibility that people have traveled back in time and have very faint memory of what happened, and there's the part that it's merely a feeling. Déjà Vu phenomenon still remains as a mystery even though many experts is trying to find reasonable explanations. Recently, this mysterious phenomenon has been answered by a team of neuroscientists at MIT's Picower Institute for Learning and Memory. Researcher Thomas McHugh and several colleagues have uncovered a specific memory circuit in the brains of mice that is probably the

cause of this weird sensation, which turns out to be a sort of memory-based analogue of an optical illusion. Although neuroscientists have realized for some time that memory is made up of many different components—long and short term, episodic (that is to say, memories of events) and fact based, and that it takes place in different parts of the brain—McHugh’s research, first reported in the online edition of *Science*, adds another intriguing clue to the phenomenon.

They think that, “the pattern-separation circuit misfires and a new experience that’s merely similar to an older one seems identical.” “It doesn’t happen very often to most people,” one of the researchers Thomas McHugh says, “Epileptic seizures involve random firing of neurons in the temporal lobes, which include the hippocampus. Intriguingly, some people with epilepsy have this experience all the time.”

As far as this thesis concerns that déjà vu is about the employment and recreation of former knowledge, experiences and images under some circumstance. And the following analysis will picture this understanding.

In the story of *Nettles*, from time to time, we definitely have the feeling of having seen those scenes before and something are so familiar to us, no matter in real life or merely in our imaginations coined by ourselves. For example the scene which referred to the sleepless night of the narrator when she lies on the bed and sheet that are belong to Mike with a lot of lustful thoughts and a romantic phantasm that Mike would come to her, and they will have a romantic and unforgettable night. When come to this scene, most of the different readers may lose in their memories in order to search for this familiar feeling, and thus the readers are unconsciously being a part of the heroine themselves. This is the magic power of déjà vu which was caused by the art of intertextuality. The following part will make a further discussion about it.

## 2. Textual analysis of *Nettles* on intertextuality

At the beginning of the story, the narrator says, “In the summer of 1979, I walked into the kitchen of my friend Sunny’s house, and saw a man standing at the counter, making himself a ketchup sandwich.” This paragraph tells readers that the following story may be related to this man, and it arouses readers’ interest in going through the whole story with suspense and all their previous knowledge of men, relations between women and men, and the same scene which they have encounter before no matter in real life or in the movies. In the middle of the story, the narrator gives the identity of this man, “...We walked into the kitchen, where Mike McCallum was spreading ketchup on a piece of bread.” Then we know that the man in the kitchen is Mike McCallum, the man the narrator loved. The narrative sequence of the story makes this simple plot more attractive, arouses readers’ interests to go further into this story. This is the technique of rhetorical or literary presupposition of intertextuality.

When the narrator and Mike recall their childhood memories, she says, “the things Mike remembered were different from the things I remembered,” which reminds readers of the gender differences of men and women in remembering things. Then readers may apply their knowledge of gender differences to understand the descriptions of how different the things they remembered. Because women are more emotionally expressive, more emotionally responsive, more emphatic and more sensitive to others’ feelings, so it is quite easy for readers to get the smooth feeling of the narrator’s affection towards Mike. “There was a keen alarm when the cry came, a wire zinging through your body, a fanatic feeling of devotion...” Why she thinks Mike has a “sweet and vulnerable belly button”—because she likes Mike, and she remembers the details between Mike and her.

Also with this gender knowledge, readers can also sense the meticulous feeling revealed in many other scenes. For example, in the scene when they are in the garden watching the stars, the narrator hoping to touch Mike, “I want to brush against him—just lightly and accidentally against his arm or shoulders. Then if he didn’t stir away out of courtesy, taking my touch for a genuine accident?—I want to lay a finger against his bare neck.”—she longs to, struggles to and finally fails to touch him. On the other hand, men control their feelings, restrain from expressing their feelings, and insensitive to details. For example, Mike remember the “clay cannonballs and the war”, but fails to remember more details of their childhood, at least fewer than the female one does. It seems that Mike fails to catch the implication of narrator’s words, her behaviors and her emotional changes. These are due to the gender differences in people’s behaviors. Readers can sense the complex feeling with their previous knowledge. By using the technique of intertextuality, the author involves readers into the world she created to experience the same things the characters experienced.

When concerns with the absorption and transformation of other works, in this work, intertextuality remain its value. “Lying in the same sheets did not make for a peaceful night.” This scene happens when “I” sleep in the bed which belongs to Mike, “I” have a struggle and longing for Mike. Then reader will think why it is not a peaceful night. Therefore, a lot of images which they have meet either in films or in novels how the female one lying in bed sleepless looking at the door again and again hoping the male one who sleeps right outside the sofa in the living room would break the door and come to her appear to the readers.

When going back to the title “nettles”, readers get the first impression of this kind of plant—a kind of wild plant with rough leaves that sting you. With the first knowledge, readers may go further to get the implicature of nettles. Then they know that the plants that sting them are not nettles, just like the love between “I” and Mike is not “nettles” either, and it is inflective love which produces no results.

From above, we can see that borrowing materials from other media is quite an effective way to achieve certain purpose because readers may quickly occur in their mind the same experience they have already experienced or seem to experience before. With the trans-moving from the text and their thoughts, readers lose themselves in the fancy travel of déjà vu. The text become unique to them, for different reader may have different experience and thus has different journey in the world of déjà vu. So it is easier for each of them to obtain unique understanding of this story.

With the application of intertextuality, the author creates a good communication between readers and herself, thus achieves her novel by enhancing the feeling of déjà vu with a result of striking readers with simple plot but deeper meaning.

### 3. Lost in Déjà Vu

From the above textual analysis of *Nettles*, these scenes, characteristics, objects or even places are so familiar to us, as if once upon a time we have met them in some other places or occasions. This story is just like a plate of chop-souxy (Chao-fan) which mixes up almost all those that seem familiar to us. This effect is achieved by the employment of intertextuality, which is far more complex than we could image. In the world of intertextuality, readers sometimes can not tell where they really are, whether they are brought to the world created by the story narrator or they are just trapped in the distant familiar memories that fascinate them so much. The readers transported from the reality to the imaginations or from the previous memories to the text. All of these are art of déjà vu produced by the device of intertextuality.

The moment when readers involve themselves into the story, they begin the journey of losing themselves in the trans-communication between the text itself and their memories. As for the gender differences which have already been discussed in the former part, we have the general image of what different attitudes and emotion reflections man and women show towards things. While readers read these parts related to gender differences in the story, the journey of losing in Déjà Vu starts. They may think of the passing days when they argue with their opposite-sex parent about a certain issue and finally with a feeling of frustration or upset that causes them to complain on misunderstanding or on gap. And also readers may remind themselves of the situations when girls and boys sitting around doing group works talking about their ideal soul-made half while the boys finally get the results that are quite different from what girls expect them to be. Just as what happen in the story, Mike and the narrator treat their relationship differently. For the narrator, she still has a romantic ideal of love towards Mike after long time of separation. However, Mike may have changed the puppy love into friendship. From the point of gender roles played by men and women, they have quite different sense towards love, since if Mike plays a role of female, he may easily sense that “I” has affection towards him for “my” words and body language may unconsciously betray “my” feeling. With the previous knowledge of gender differences, we understand why Mike as a man, usually insensitive, fails to catch “my” feeling. Therefore, here comes déjà vu because in our lives we once have had this feeling of miss something due to gender differences.

All these images and interpretations are the products of the usage of in intertextuality, which as a result, cause readers losing themselves in Déjà Vu. But it on the other hand contributes to the beauty of this story.

### 4. Conclusion

From the above analysis of the application of intertextuality and the phenomenon of Déjà Vu produced by it, we may have a touch of how the art of intertextuality helps us to understand this novel. The phenomenon of Déjà Vu is universal familiar to us, and with the knowledge of it, we can discover another aspect of beauty of the story. In this sense, the application of intertextuality provides us a new way to appreciate a story, a novel, a drama, a film even a piece of music or a land of constructions.

In fact, a world of a story is half created by the author by the information he or she reflected from his or her words, structures, the way she or he treats things and also the strategies and devices she or he employs in the text. However the other half is composed by the readers themselves. It is said that one thousand readers may interpret one thousand Hamlets, so this half of the world closer the world of story and the worlds of readers, for different reader with different understanding of one object according to his or her own experiences and knowledge immortal the work. In this sense, the device of intertextuality has its own significance and value in its way.

To sum up, with a touch of knowledge of this story by employing intertextuality, we should bear in mind intertextuality awareness when we going through a story, a film, an advertisement or a piece of news since it may greatly help to better understand the works.

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