

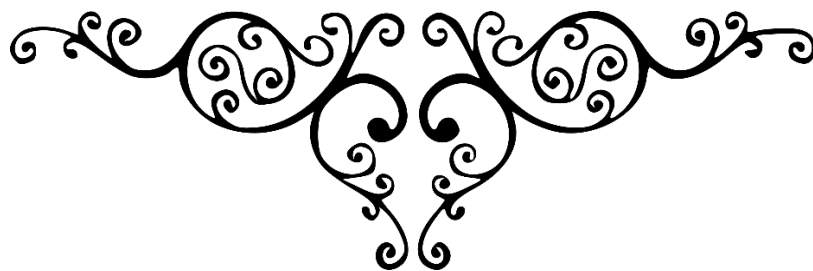
Alice Oswald's poetry: An Intertextual Analysis

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to introduce and analyse an important concept in Alice Oswald's poems, that of intertextuality. After a brief account of the main definitions, classifications and devices of this concept, this research engages with the way in which intertextuality is used in Oswald's poems. The research also focuses on two types of intertextuality in Oswald's poetry, namely: thematic and formic or stylistic. It also presents the reasons behind the use of these two types in the poetess selected poems.

Keywords: Intertextuality, formic, thematic, myths, epiphany and nature.

شعر أليس أوزوالد : تحليل تناصي

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المخلص:

الهدف من هذا البحث هو تقديم وتحليل مفهوم مهم في شعر أليس أوزوالد، ألا وهو التناص. بعد سرد موجز للتعريفات والتصنيفات والوسائل الرئيسية لهذا المفهوم، يتعامل هذا البحث مع الطريقة التي يتم بها استخدام التناص في قصائد أوزوالد المختارة. يركز البحث أيضاً على نوعين للتناص في شعر أوزوالد، وهما: الموضوع والشكل او الاسلوب. كما يعرض البحث الأسباب الكامنة وراء استخدام هذين النوعين من التناص في قصائد الشاعرة المختارة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التناص، الشكلي، الموضوعي، الاساطير، استيعاب والطبيعة.



1. Introduction:

As one of the most important living modern poets who are writing in Britain today, Alice Oswald does the job of re-constructing the literary poetic pattern for the twenty first century. Definitely, she is not sole in this task, but she is in the front rank of a new generation of innovative poets who are not satisfied to work only with what exists already. For them, form, language and content must step forward to produce a new kind of poetry.¹

Intertextuality is at the forefront of the set of tools Oswald employs to fulfill her goal. In its simplest sense, intertextuality is a literary notion which asserts the idea of texts' borrowing words and concepts from each other. Actually, intertextuality, as a practice in literary criticism, has a long history to the extent that some reviewers of this notion trace its roots back to Plato and Aristotle, considering it "at least as old as recorded human society."² However, intertextuality, as a defined literary and theoretical practice, is explicitly admitted in the twentieth century, particularly, in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975).³

Julia Kristeva, a French semiotician, is credited as the one who first articulated the intertextual theory in her seminal work, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in the late 1960s. Kristeva views the literary text as a construction of "a mosaic of quotations," and eventually, "any text is the absorption and transformation of another."⁴ Asserting the intertextual interconnectedness and interdependence among modern literary works, Graham Allen, in his book, *Intertextuality*, writes:

Works of literature, after all, are built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature. The systems, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture in general are also crucial to the meaning of a work of literature. Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual.⁵

According to Mevlüde Zengin, these intertextual links emerge in "diverse forms as: direct quotation, citation, allusion, echo, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected."⁶

Critics of modern time try to sum up the basic types of intertextuality. Gerard Genette, for example, lists three types of it: explicit, non-explicit, and the

implicit. The first introduces the elements of pre-existing texts in a later text, whilst the second is used in the construction of the text in a hidden and unidentified manner. He identifies the third type with text's hints to the elements of previous text/ texts like references and allusions.⁷

Robert S. Miola in his article "Seven Types of Intertextuality" identifies seven types of intertextuality. He dissolves them into three divisions and three points of consideration. The first is the degree of verbal affinities between two texts, the original text and the current one. The second point is the degree to which its impact depends on readers' realization. The third point is the degree to which "the appropriation is eristic."⁸

Charles Bazerman in his essay "Intertextuality: How Texts Rely on other Texts" sets apart two kinds of intertextuality: implicit and explicit intertextuality. The first is the direct reference to the previous text, Whilst the second intertextuality is the reference to other texts without mentioning its source. Here, the reference is indirect, and the intertextuality depends on the aspects of familiarities within the two texts. In other words, the discourses rather than materiality of the texts are indirectly highlighted in the current text.⁹

These types of intertextuality are enacted in the poetry of modern poets within different interactions. This current paper adapts Oswald's poetry as a study case to mediate on the manifestations of poetic intertextuality in contemporary poetry. It distinguishes two layers of intertextuality in Oswald's poetry, particularly: content layer, histoire, termed as Content-Based-Intertextuality, and the layer of form, discours, termed as Form-Based-Intertextuality. This paper examines the manipulation of these layers in Oswald's selected poems.

2.1. Content-Based–Intertextuality:

Content–Based–Intertextuality asserts the view that, in S.R. Goldman's words, "intertextual connections can simultaneously take place on the surface layer, the meaning layer."¹⁰ It demonstrates the way in which the interrelations among texts outline a text's meaning, and how the reiterations of other texts compile layers of meaning to a text.

In this type of intertextuality, the writer exploits previous texts as a content frame for his/her text. However, the exploitation of the preceding texts is not a matter of blind imitation. Rather, the writer validates what is called "intertextual space", "the area being traversed from text to text,"¹¹ as B.Hatim and Ian Mason describe, in the process of travelling from the source text to his/her text.



Oswald invigorates such “intertextual space” to form the content of her poems. It endows her a kind of flexibility to give the content of her texts new qualities associated with the need of the social realities and the poetics of her time. Multiple devices, motifs, themes and topics can be traced in Oswald’s poetry as a manifestation of intertextuality on the essentials of content. Obviously, they are allusions and the theme nature, which are chosen by this research to be examined in this section.

Allusions are one major form of content-based-intertextuality in Oswald’s poetry. They are usually made to significant events, places, texts or people who have very well-known qualities that Oswald wishes to highlight in her text. Instances of these allusions are manifested in her *Memorial*. The poem celebrates many classical and mythical allusions to the wider narrative of Homer’s *Iliad*. Oswald sub-titled her poem as an *Excavation of the Iliad*, a title that “suggests bringing to light those elements of the *Iliad* that have been overlooked or ignored.”¹² Oswald veered from the classical myth, offering “a more nuanced reading than one that simply glorifies war and nation.”¹³

Oswald makes many mythic and historic allusions to the fighters who die in the *Iliad*, from Protesilaus, who is killed as he leaps from his ship:

The first to die was PROTESILAUS
A focused man who hurried to darkness
With forty black ships leaving the land behind
Men sailed with him from those flower-lit cliffs.¹⁴ (L.1-4)

Then, Oswald alludes to Hector, whose life is lost in a single combat with Achilles:

And HECTOR died like everyone else

He was in charge of the Trojans

But a spear found out the little patch of white

Between his collarbone and his throat.¹⁵ (L.68-71)

Oswald inserts further allusion to the talented craftsman Phereclus who “built the curse fleet of pairs/little knowing it was his death boat.”¹⁶ (L.19-20), an allusion that shows a clear intertextual association with Homer’s account on Phereclus, in Book 5 of the *Iliad*, who “ships to pairs un wittingly setting in a

disaster for the Trojans and for himself.”¹⁷ Furthermore, Oswald alludes to Iphidamas who died “Far from his wife all that money wasted / A hundred cattle he gave her / A thousand sheep and goats / All that hard work feeding them wasted.”¹⁸(L.37-42) With in her extensive allusions of mortal death, Oswald intertextually weaves further allusion to the Iliad’s gods. Oswald re-designed the origin aim of these allusions. Hers are intertextually manipulated to asserts the waste brought about by war and the inability of these divine agents to stop it: Hephaestus cannot intervene to “save Phegeus and Idaeus,”¹⁹(L.17) Artimes cannot save “Scamandrius from death”¹⁷(L.18), and even Srpodon, the son of Zeus, cannot “buy or steal or borrow back his own last breathe.”²⁰ (L.61)

The accumulation of these intertextual allusions, inevitably, advocates mental links in the reader’s mind among those who are long dead and those who lost their lives in the modern. However, these intertextual allusion are not indicators of heroism and nobility, as they are in the *Iliad*: they are obviously designed as reminders of the waste and futility of modern war.

Oswald’s second collection *Dart*, a multi-voice poem of a British river, is one more example of intertextual allusions. The poem is housed with various sorts of allusions: literary, historical and mythical. In relation to literary allusions. In this respect, Rees-Jones writes:

Oswald’s second collection, *Dart* (2000), is a book-length poem in which, at first glance, the ghosts of Eliot’s *Waste Land* meet Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood*, where the modernist chorus of emergent subjectivity of Woolf’s *The Waves* intermingles with voices garnered from a project not a mile away from the mass observation exercises of the 1930s.²¹

Readers of *Dart* are intertextually stirred to associate it with the bleakness of the world which Eliot advocates in *The Waste Land*. This is explicitly articulated in the voices of dairy workers, thieves, housewives, and the other voices in the poem, who escape into dreams to soothe the pressure, waste and negligence of everyday living:

Tillworkers, thieves and housewives, all enshrined
in sleep, unable to look round; night vagrants,
prisoners on dream-bail, children without parents,
free-trading, changing, disembodied, blind



dreamers of every kind;²² (L.423-26)

Fiona Sampson proposes that *Dart* alludes to Thomas's "play for voices", *Under Milk Wood*.²³ The variety of voices in poem is admitted as an allusion to that of Thomas's above mentioned play. However, Oswald adds her own alternation to the source. The imaginary life models come to be real in Oswald's *Dart*, referring to "real people or fixed fiction."²⁴ Oswald intertextualizes Woolf's in fragments of voices that she presents in *Dart*, which necessarily perceived as an allusion to her Woolf's, *The Waves*.

The exchange of these voices Oswald draws on a series of allusions to the national history and myths. Most of which she draw from the *Metamorphoses*, a mythical epic by the Roman writer Ovid. Oswald finds in the Ovidian myths a fertile soil to implant her theme of coquetting time and death, and hence offering an integration of man into an eternal nature, natural order.

The first appears in the form of resembling the river to water nymph. Oswald intertextualizes the legendary figure of the nymph from the two Ovidian myth. This is utilized in personifying the river to a water nymph who plays with her hair in a seductive manner. Such portrayal intertextually alludes to the myth of the beautiful Hylas whom the nymph seduced, and succeeds in withdrawing him down into the pond, so that he is never seen again.²⁵ He is unified with the fountain and, hence, becomes immortal like the water-nymphs. Oswald portrays this through the wood man's speech with the river:

woodman working into the twilight

you should see me in the moonlight

comb the cataract of my hair,

at work all night on my desire

oh I could sing a song of Hylas,

how the water wooed him senseless ,

I could sing the welded kiss

continuous of Salmacis...²⁶

(L.186-94)

At another point in the poem, Oswald resembles Dart to many other legendary figures of the Metamorphosis. For instance, the rush of the river along the stones is likened a poet with a super-human musical talent, an allusion to the Orpheus a poet whose story appears in the Metamorphosis. In the original myth, Orpheus's body is torn into piece and his body parts are casted into the river, whilst "his head continued to sing his unending song." Oswald writes:

Glico of the Running Streams named varieties of water

named varieties of water

and Spio of the Boulders-Encaved-In-The-River's Edges

and all other named varieties of Water

such as Loops and Swirls in their specific dialects

clucking and clapping

Cymene and Semaia, sweeping a plectrum along the stones

and the stones' hollows hooting back at them

off-beat, as if luck should play the flute

can you hear them at all,

muted and plucked,

muttering something that can only be expressed as

hitting a series of small bells just under the level of your listening? ²⁷
(L.254-65)

Undeniably, Oswald's intertextual allusions to myths in *Dart* propose a continuity between the practical attitudes of the domestic river-workers to water and the mythical background that attaches them to the rest of the land. When listening to the existence of the past in the river, the poem is, simultaneously, listening into the miscellaneous unity of those patterns of life and immortality.

A vivid instance of intertextual allusion can be detected in Oswald's "Tithonus," The poem is an allusion to the Greek myth of Tithonus, a man who



falls in love with the goddess of Dawn, Eos. Eos requests Zeus to endow Tithonus immortal life, but not eternal youth:

It is said that the dawn fell in love with Tithonus
and asked Zeus to make him immortal, but forgot
to ask that he should not grow old. Unable to die,
he grew older and older until at last the dawn
locked him in a room where he still sits babbling to himself
and waiting night after night for her
appearance.²⁸

Oswald does not hide behind the mask of classical allusion. Rather, she intertextually uses a distinctive approach to this myth, inhabiting it with her own consciousness, to grasp the scenery that she sees with her own eyes, locating within its ovulary the eternal qualities of the elusive moment she sets out to record.

The frail and barely conscious Tithonus comes round every morning to meet Dawn, babbling to himself about what he has seen so many times before, his obvious dependence on the recurrence of things brings repetition to the point of absurdity, a point which, literary, can be viewed as a fleeting intertextual allusion to Samuel Beckett's theatre of absurdity. The repetitive and monotonous meeting between Tithonus and the Dawn, for instance, intertextually recalls the repetitive actions of "Waiting for Godo," and many other plays that belongs to Beckett's theatre of abusurdity.

To terminate, allusions are intertextually exploited in Oswald's poems to build up the content of her poems. Urgently, they demonstrate Oswald's awareness of the past, in relation to literature, history and myths. Instead of quoting them, Oswald re-construct these allusions in a way that makes them seem new. Her foremost desire is to highlight the overlooked aspects of these allusions: narrowing the gap between the past world of these allusions and her contemporary world, and hence suggesting a remedy to the latter's crises in the light of the former.

Nature is another intertextual frame from which Oswald draws the content of her writings. Poems of Romanticism, Homers' and Ted Hughes's are viewed among the main intertextual sources for her natural theme. The former, to illustrate, inspires much of her nature poems. Oswald intertextually revisits and transforms the traditional Romantic perspectives on nature into her poetry. Her first collection, *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*, for example, revisits the scenarios of the romantic poems, that of a speaker contemplating a landscape. In "April", a poem from the previous mentioned collection, Oswald pays a reverence to the natural world and its seasons. Her method to do so traces its lineage back to the legacy of Romantics. The poem exalts nature as a place of beautiful forms and integrity:

The sheer grip and push of it – growth gets
 A footledge in the loosest stems, it takes
 The litterings of weeds and clocks them round:
 Your eyeballs bud and alter and you can't
 Step twice in the same foot – I know a road
 The curve throws it one way and another.²⁹ (L,1-6)

Notwithstanding, many of Oswald's poems deviates from the established romantic tents and speaks of nature through multiple and contemporary linguistic registrations and diversified textual configurations. That is to say, Oswald poetry does not romanticize the natural elements in the same manner of the romantic poets. Her poetry breaks with the traditional Romantic view of advocating the English countryside as area of gentle trail and homogeneous beauty. Her poems are found to be saturated with natural images of death and decay. In "wood etc.", a poem in a collection of the same title, Oswald exhibits darker imagery in her characterization of the natural:

I remember walking once into increasing
 Woods, my hearing like a widening wound.
 first your voice and then the rustling ceasing.
 the last glow of dead rain on the ground.³⁰ (L.5-8)



In "Head of a Dandelion", a poem from the same collection, Oswald resembles nature to a savage god before a sanctuary:

This is the dandelion with its thousand faculties
like an old woman taken by the neck
and shaken to pieces.

This is the dust-flower flitting away.

This is the flower of amnesia.

It has opened its head to the wind,

all havoc and weakness,

as if a wooden man should stroll through fire...³¹ (L.1-8)

Whereas, her *Dart* manifests the discordance and aggressiveness, tension of species and struggles for existence, found in the natural world:

round streamlined creatures born into vanishing

between golden hide-outs, trout at the mercy of rush

quiver to keep still always

swimming up through the hiding

freshwater shrimps driven flat in this struggle against

haste pitching through stones³² (L.172-177)

In *Memorial*, Oswald intertextually manipulates Homer's similes that are drawn heavily upon nature imagery, especially: wind, sea and ambiguous earth, to reveal "the violence and numinous in nature."³³ A vivid image of this is deployed around the time of the deaths of those who killed Achilles rampage:

Like little campfire stars lit round the moon

No wind at all

Under an upturned glass of air
Exact black rocks show clear
And the world simplifies into cliffs and clefts
On nights like this
Light is unspeakable it is breaking out of heaven
And every star openly admits to god
Making the shepherd glad.³⁴ (L.186-94)

Raising such matters, Oswald inherits the Romantic worries of the disappearances of natural world. In “Wood Not Yet Out”, from *Wood*, Oswald puts herself in the place of a tree chopper, portraying the taking down of trees and the near vanishing of the red squirrel as a consequence:

once in, you hardly notice as you move,
the wood keeps lifting up its hope, I love
to stand among the last trees listening down
to the releasing branches where I've been -
the rain, thinking I've gone, crackles the air
and calls by name the leaves that aren't yet there.³⁵ (L.1-6)

Similarly, in *Dart*, Oswald encompasses the environmental damage inflicted on the river by human activity. The first incident of the poem clarifies human work on nature presented in the act of the mermaid who comes “unlocking every morning with her peach-soap hands.”³⁶(L,113)The reference to peach, in this environment, prolongs to the mermaid attempting to eliminate nature altogether from the hotel. Her words are rudely, efficiently, interposed: “Brush them away, squirt everything, bleach and vac and rubber glove them into a bin-bag.”³⁷ (L.119-20)

Oswald’s subtle condemnation of the acts of environmental violence and destruction, intertextually, adapts and adopts the romantic model. Her revelation



of the natural crises of her contemporary natural world intertextually echoes the romantic evocation of the negative environmental change, instigated by the industrial revolution in the closing years of the 18th century. By way of contrast, Oswald departs the romantic lamenting and nostalgic view toward nature. She does not mourn the fading of the natural world or directly calls for the protection of the environment.

Hughesian nature poems, especially his animal poems, offer a more clearly apparent intertextual influence on Oswald's nature poetry. Asserting an intertextual connection between Hughes and Oswald, Jeanette Winterson writes: "Oswald is Hughes's rightful heir. She is a Nature poet, a spiritual poet, with the wildness of Hughes" ³⁸ Considering the body of her poems, Oswald nature poems recalls Hughesian ones in two main poles: observational mode, giving attention to the energetic qualities of the natural world, and the animals of her lyrics, which "she sketchily and then reduced to emblems." ³⁹

Paying attention to the grandeur of the natural world, Oswald's "Apple Shed" intertextually transposes Hughes's natural concerns which are typical of his observational mode:

It suddenly thunders and the blue cloud

Cracks run for the sheds

in the clap of time

when it flashes and flashes and the tin sky flickers. ⁴⁰ (L.1-4)

The lines evocate an astonishment as a tribute to grandeur of the diverse phenomena of the natural world. The speaker is "struck stiff" by "the grandeur of thunder." The poem intertextually recalls the embodiment of nature's lordly grandeur in Hughes' *Season song*.

The intertextual impact of Hughes on Oswald is more obvious in particular poems from the years contemporary to her work on the *Bestiary*, a selection of some of Hughes's animal poems. Her "Fox" from her collection *Falling Awake*, to consider as an instance, writes back to Hughes's "The Thought-Fox". Hughes's poem is an analogy for an act of conjuring and composing poetry. It bears a detailed concentration on the fox's tentative, cautious and concentrated motion that is also an analogy for composing poetry. Intertextually, Oswald recalls

Hughes's impression of the poem's ambiguity, describing the creature in rapid succession as both a fox and not a fox, "a fox and a spirit, and a real fox."

Oswald's fox-poem retains and yet dissolves these energies. It is more artlessly titled, focusing the animal in the real life and not the double one-half-creature created in the mind, i.e. "Fox" rather than "The Thought-Fox". It is a revelation of a nocturnal confrontation with a vixen, whose bark awakens the narrator. The poem starts with a cough that is heard "as if a thief was there /outside my sleep/a sharp intake of air."⁴¹(L.3-4)

The abrupt and odd stepping of the vixen in Oswald's poem is intertextually likened to Hughes's fox. The encounter is presented in Oswald's poem in terms that intertextually signal the form and content of Hughes's poem. Her contravention on her animal subject matter is manifested in more provisional terms. She echoes Hughes in attempting to interlink animals and human experience and intertextually alters the poetic recalling such natural interlinks.

Oswald intertextually manipulates Hughes's ambiguities of agency in the natural world in a more complicated manner.⁴² For example, her *Dart* works on the idea of agency via concentrating on the affinities between the fisherman and the fish under the water's surface. The fisherman conceives the salmon, hiding under the Dart's boulders; the salmon stirs the water to move with its tail; and the water urges the fly to move, whilst, the fisherman allows nature to do its acts:

but when you're onto a salmon,
a big one hiding under a rock, you can see his tail
making the water move,
you let the current work your fly⁴³ (L.223-26)

Oswald's focus on the natural agency in fishing. She intertextually urges the reader to associate it with Hughes's "Pike. Hughes's "Pike", provokes the ambiguity of agency in fishing, a matter which Hughes asserts through repeating the verb "move". To a large extent, Oswald's *Dart* intertextualizes Hughes in this respect, the verb "move" is again repeated to portray the act of fishing for a salmon. Nevertheless, *Dart* does not offer a double-way encounter to dissolve agency of Man and Nature. Instead, Oswald indicates the limits in the fisherman's vision and awareness, stirring him to move and "let the current work" his "fly".



To sum up, in the light of intertextuality, the thematic frame in Oswald's poems are built around a set of associations that grow up from pre-existing literary texts. Allusions and nature as a theme are among the main thematic instances of these intertextual associations in poetess poems. Their intertextual weaving within her poems are skillfully designed to confront two main crises of her contemporary world: spiritual holocaust of human psyche, and ecological catastrophe, as either global warning or climatic change of the natural world. Oswald offers a remedy to the first, mainly, via alluding to the old ways of viewing the world and, partly, through her nature theme which offers her a potential to dwell upon the spiritual emptiness of human spirit in a nuclear, post-war and Jungian world. Whilst, the second is tackled mainly through her natural theme which she intertextualizes from poems of Romanticism and Hughes's poems.

2.2 Form-based-Intertextuality:

In poetry, Form-based-intertextuality is perceived when a current poetic text shows a strategic use of poetic form, style, genre or internal structure of a previous text or texts. Indeed, the term covers a wide range of linguistic, formulaic and stylistic literary modes, such as: pastiche, translation, parody, paraphrases, travesty, epiphany and the like. In this type of intertextuality, the poet inserts his/her own intertextual modifications on the literary forms of previous texts to re-invent them, a case which some modern critics assimilate to "revisionist poetic style."⁴⁵ For the shortage of space, this paper highlights three modes of form-based-intertextuality, namely: epiphany, translation, and Acoustic-Oral style in Oswald's selected poems.

Epiphany is viewed as one type of form-based-intertextuality in Oswald's poetry. In its traditional sense, epiphany is defined, in Paul de Man's words, as a "rediscovery of a permanent presence"⁴⁶ that results in a new awareness. Oswald's poetic epiphany demonstrates intertextual associations with that of Gerald Manley Hopkins and the Romantics. Mary Jacobus claims that Oswald's poems dwell on things "that sound, float, or fall ... things both visible and invisible; seen and unseen, felt and unfeeling."⁴⁵ These are, in Morris Baja's definition, components of epiphany, "an unusual form of vision that does not rely upon a metaphysical mechanics of perception."⁴⁷

An evidence of this can be realized in Oswald's "Ideogram for Green". Oswald starts her poem with epiphany:

In the invisible places
Where the first leaves start
Green breathes growth Simultaneously dreaming into position what

impinges on its edges
So that grasses of different kinds should appear in the world
Green hides roots, lights flowers.⁴⁸ (L.1-6)

The poem examines what is unseen to advocate a symbol or a token for the green colour. Forcing eyes beyond the seen, Oswald defies the reader's perception of green, offering a manifestation of what green does, rather than what it is, a stylistic strategy which intertextually re-invite the epiphany of Hopkins and the romantics. Nevertheless, the poem's concluding simile challenges the teleological paradigm of epiphany. It likens green to "a rush" that "wedged in a narrow place."⁴⁹ This simile suggests that green is perhaps hidden again, and hence the reader can no longer see its essence to gain a new awareness, the desirable goal of traditional epiphany.

Similarly, Oswald's sonnet "Leaf" can be examined in the light of intertextual epiphany. It describes the gestation and birth of a child through a close observation of the leaf's act of opening, an intense attention regular of the epiphanic mode:

the leaf that now lies being made
in its shell of scale, the hush of things
unseen inside, the heartbeat of dead wood.
the slow through-flow that feeds⁵⁰ (L.1-4)

Via imagining the sound of "the hush of things" as sight, Oswald's intertextually re-tells the conventional Romantic paradigm of epiphany. Asheton Nichols suggests that this technique is employed because epiphanies "strive to go beyond the categories imposed by the five senses,"⁵¹ and "mingle senses that are ordinarily distinct."⁵² However, Oswald moves beyond the Romantic paradigms of epiphany. In the penultimate stanza, the poem is overwhelmed into an unsettling epiphany:

into that hand the entire
object of the self being coldly placed,
the provisional, the inexplicable I
in mid-air, meeting the wind and dancing⁵³ (L.11-14)

Ted Hughes's observational mode offers one more intertextual referent for Oswald epiphany. Her "Walking past a Rose this June Morning" from *Wood* intertextualizes Hughes in its epiphany. At the opening of poem, the reader joins a speaker who grapples with a series of comparisons in an attempt to comprehend the core substance of her heart. The speaker reaches a potential epiphany, Oswald writes:

is my heart a rose? how unspeakable
is my heart a rose? how unspeakable
is my heart folded to dismantle? how unspeakable



is a rose folded in its nerves? how unspeakable.⁵⁴ (L.1-4)

The question and answer structure of this poem, along with the repetition of “unspeakable”, re-awakens Hughes’ “Examination at the Womb-Door” from *Crow*. On the edge of his birth, Crow answers a sequences of interrogations about his origin before he is freed into this world: “Who owns these scrawny little feet? Death / Who owns this bristly scorched-looking face? Death/Who owns these still-working lungs? *Death*.”⁵⁵(L,1-3) However, Oswald’s epiphany is more problematic. Instead of the expected “yes” or “no”, Oswald’s terminating questions prepare the reader for an unspeakable answer, and thence nothing is resolved. A sense of lack, or absence, signed by the prevalence of the “un” prefix, prevails this epiphanic experience: the speaker’s confrontation with the rose is “unspeakable”, “unbreathable”, “unthinkable”, “unworkable”, and finally “unbearable”.

Chronically, The Greek belief of “language as a veil which protects us from the brightness of things”⁵⁶ is an earlier impact on Oswald’s intertextual epiphany. She declares that “poetry is a tear in that veil.”⁵⁷ Intertextualizing the Greeks, Oswald proposes that poetry can convey the “brightness” of natural world: its “realness” or “inscape”. In “Field”, Oswald encapsulates such temporary limitlessness, a “tear in the veil”, which uncovers the speaker’s world:

and for a moment, this high field unhorizoned
hung upon nothing, barking for its owner
burial, widowed, moonless, seeping
docks, grasses, small windflowers, weepoles, wires⁵⁸ (L.11-4)

Oswald uses stanza’s breaks to create discontinuances in the poetic lines that enable meaning to be suspended. The reader is urged to look for links, and as Robert Langbaum suggests, to “produce the epiphany in him.”⁵⁹ Oswald tends to employ adjectives and verbs which are intractable to connect with the preceding ones, a tendency which intertextually echoes Freudian psychology of trying to capture consciousness: a “tear in the veil” that, unlike traditional epiphany, focuses on the strangeness of the familiar bark.

All in all, Oswald’s epiphany draws on a series of intertextual associations with the pre-existed models of this formic and stylistic device. However, Oswald does not stick to the pre-designed epiphanic models. Rather, she goes beyond the traditional epiphanic paradigms, embracing uses of language and forms of experience that are undefined, uncertain, and suspicious.

Translation is one more form-based-intertextual technique in Oswald’s poetry. Generally, many literary theorists set translation amongst intertextual phenomena. Marko Juvan finds that “translation starts to become obviously intertextual,”⁶⁰ because “the literary system into which it is transplanted is not

simply a substitute for the source, but it takes on a life as a version.”⁶¹Contemporary critics term such process as Modern-styled translation.

Oswald is one of those modern styled “feminist translators,”⁶² as Sherry Simon claims, who under the influence of the cultural dialog of the 1970s and 1980s, deals with translation as a “process of negotiation and reactivation of cultural meaning.”⁶³She liberates herself from the outmoded conception of fidelity and becomes able to flexibly decide what elements to retain and what elements to give up during translation, and hence approaching literary works from her own social, cultural, and personal biases and belief systems in an attempt to re-invent the originals and making sense of them in her present-day world.

Homer’s epic, the *Iliad*, is admitted as a major intertextual source of translation in Oswald’s poetry. She translates these epics from their Greek origin to create poems for her contemporary world. Depicting her intertextual approach to translation, Oswald claims that her translation does not try to carry on the words over into English. Rather, she uses the Greek words “as openings through which to see what Homer was looking at.”⁶⁴ She writes “through the Greek, not from it, aiming for translucence rather than translation.”⁶⁵

Oswald’s titled her translated version of Homer’s *Iliad* as *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad*. In the prefatory note to her poem, Oswald confesses that what her version seeks is a “translation of the *Iliad*’s atmosphere, not its story.”⁶⁶ In a mere one-eighth of the original *Iliad*, Oswald avoids regulative translating the narrative content of source epic.

Oswald’s translation intertextually transfers the moral concern of the original epic from the wrath of Achilles and the death of Hector to a registry of the dead. She abandons the nobility of the world’s greatest war story in favour of conveying what ancient critics called “enargeia,” or “bright unbearable reality.”⁶⁷The result is a darkly atmospheric poem which advocates a new coherence through “series of memories and similes laid side by side : an antiphonal account of man in his world.”⁶⁸

Oswald claims that her “similes are translations,” while her “obituaries, biographical sketches of the dead warriors, are paraphrases.”⁶⁹ Yet, she plays fast and loose with both. The following lines are vivid sample of her similes which Oswald confesses that they intertextually a translation of Homer’s similes:

Like tribes of summer bees



Coming up from the underworld out of a crack in a rock

A billion factory women flying to their flower work

Being born and reborn and shimmering over fields.⁷⁰ (L.76-79)

Oswald's translated similes are intertextually re-contextualized, offering a new coherence of the adapted source. Her translated similes are not subordinated to the obituaries as they are in Homer's *Iliad*. They are not a unified whole; rather, they are juxtaposed in a non-hierarchical manner, offering a serious challenge to the reader. The following is an obituary which accounts for Protesilaus's death:

The first to die was PROTESILAUS

A focused man who hurried to darkness

With forty black ships leaving the land behind

Men sailed with him from those flower-lit cliffs

Where the grass gives growth to everything

Pyrasus Iton Pteleus Antron

He died in mid-air jumping to be first ashore⁷¹ (L.28-34)

Oswald follows the above obituary with a double simile, she writes:

Like a wind-murmur

Begins a rumour of waves

One long note getting louder

The water breathes a deep sigh

Like a land-ripple

When the west wind runs through a field

Wishing and searching

Nothing to be found⁷² (L.35-42)

The double simile of the above lines which denotes the trumped warriors are attached to obituary of the first dead victim in the Trojan war. Unlike Homer's *Iliad*, Oswald translation shifts the focus of the lines from the trumped to the prey.

To sum up, translation is an important intertextual frame on which Oswald relies on in forming her poems. Her translations do not depend on context: readers are not forced to lean on the source to make sense of them. Oswald's *Memorial* is the most well-known example in this direction. It maintains many intertextual echoes that can be viewed as a translation of Homer's *Iliad*. Yet, Oswald's translation is perceived as an inventory one. It transcends its source, creating a communal memorial for the casualties, not as Greeks and Trojans, but as human beings, urging her audience to be part of the similes, mourning the ancient dead and themselves for their own personal sorrows, and, in a wider term, bringing back the traditional past to life to produce a new kind of poetry that goes in resonance with the modern psychological and political realities of her time, with no disrespect for the original text.

Acoustic-Oral style is another form-based-intertextual device in Oswald's poems. She writes with a mind for sounds, syllables and the patterns of speech, informed and inspired by oral storytelling traditions. Oswald declares that the creation of "an oral poem in a literary oral tradition has been one of my driving impulses."⁷³

Oswald's *Dart* is a manifestation of this intertextual style. The poem combines the sounds of those who work and live on Dart. In writing her poem, Oswald manifests a stone wall style, the poem's interconnecting of prose and poetry which results from the an extended oral census of Dart's inhabitants over a period of three years. The interviews with the people on Dart are utilized as raw materials for the poem, instigating an acoustic bricolage, making do with whatever at hand, and interlinking their voices into a sound-map of Dart.

Oswald skillfully selects and arranges the acoustic materials of *Dart*. She declares that an "oral poet . . . works in chorus with his predecessors, learning from them a repertoire of rhythmical phrases that enable him to compose spontaneously in meter."⁷⁴ For her, oral poetry, resembling any dry-stone structure, is constructed from pre-existing verbal materials which is freshly assembled rather than made up of scratch by an singular poet. The oral poet is urged to work in chorus with in the glistening and formed rhythmical phrases of a long history of composition. The out coming form is, in Oswald's word, "like a cairn,"⁷⁵ dry stone monument to the oral heritage.



In her introduction to *Dart*, Oswald confesses that the poem's "voices should be read as the river's muttering"⁷⁶ rather than hers. Among the voices that flow through the poem are that of a worker at a woolen mill, a forester, a dairy worker, a water abstractor, a sewage worker, a boat builder and notably a stonewaller. Oswald constructs the poetic of her poem in chorus with the local inhabitants on the river. She relies on their voices as supplement of the poem's rhythm and dwelling structure.

Oswald's "sound-map of the river, a songline from the source to the sea,"⁷⁷ uses a stone-wall-style, a poetic style arose out of a prolonged oral census of the river over a period of three years. Oswald's records in this poem are admitted as life-models from which to sketch out a series of characters. The poem's various play for voices are indicated in the margin, as in the transition from the voice of a naturalist to an eel-watcher:

Going through holes, I love that, the last thing through here was an otter

two places I've seen eels, bright whips of flow by the bridge, an
eel watcher

like stopper waves the rivercurve slides through

trampling around at first you just make out

the elver movement of the running sunlight⁷⁸ (L,162-66)

Oswald's *Memorial* is another intertextual manifestation of literary oral tradition or voiced-text style. Viewing it as a vocative poem, Oswald's *Memorial* cites the antiphonal lament of Homeric funerary rites as an impact upon her recitation of the *Iliad*. Nevertheless, Oswald's oral re-performance of Homer's *Iliad* sketches on very distinct patterns of performance and spectatorship, arousing a tension between old and modern patterns of memorialisation, and altering the relationships between the poet and her audience.

Admittedly, Oswald describes *Memorial* as: "a kind of oral cementary in the aftermath of the Trojan war, an attempt to remember people's names and lives without the use of writing."⁷⁹ The poem deeply engaged with intricate literary interplay of silence and sound that can be elevated or transformed in live oral act. "A moment's of silence,"⁸⁰ as Philip Womack notes, marked by "a sudden expanse of blank paper, is identified as a symptom of war's de-humanising effects and a concomitant of violent death."⁸¹ *Memorial*'s protagonists are repetitively

compelled into defiance with the deficiency of their own vocal performance, or afford severe concussion to the sites of breath and speech. Pendarus is an example of such casualty, who:

Felt the hot shock in his neck of Meges' spear

Unswallowable sore throat of metal in his mouth

Right through his teeth

He died biting down on the spearhead⁸² (L.187-90)

The blow that murders Pandarus "Splintered his teeth cut through his tongue broke off his jaw,"⁸³(L.191) recalling futile his words of what he will do returns back home. Such deaths are recurrently signified by "a dull clang" or the sound of "metal banging on the ground," the technologies of killing, and repeatedly subsuming human speech into clattering wordlessness. In the *Iliad*, this identification of the sites of breath and speech with violence is explicitly and pragmatically marked, as when Achilles considers where best to attack Hector:

This process is explicitly enacted in the death of Agelaos:

And AGELAOS in the act of turning

Noticed the death cloud Diomedes towering towards him

He was heaving his horses round swearing

When a spearshot pushed through his shout and out through his chest

He fell made of metal banging on the ground⁸⁴ (L.716-21)

Oswald's voicing of *Memorial* is perceived as a unique recitation of an exclusively-authored poetic text, a magical work of individual memory, creativity and concentricity. *Memorial*'s texture and mood may be incited by traditions of antiphonal mourning, but the poem's performance and composition obviously parallel the poem with one half of lament's equation, violating the traditional lamentation of weep and sing with a live audience. To illustrate, through entextualizations, Oswald's poem re-created the collective, participatory performance of bemoaning. Her audience are appointed as auditors, dignified listeners rather than participators. Oswald's talented recitation highlights the ancient *Iliad*'s status as an oral text formed for performance, proposing new



perspectives for examining the sophisticated dynamics and mechanics of Homeric epic's after-life in contemporary re-performance.

No less importance than *Dart* and *Memorial* in the oral tradition is Oswald's "Tithonus". The poem appears in the second half of her collection *Falling Awake*. It is firmly settled in the oral convention of poetry. The poem is written to be read as "a sound of one's own repeated actions."⁸⁵ In a long performance, Oswald reveals the sound of Tithonus encountering the Dawn at midsummer. This type of meticulous attention, once again, highlights Oswald's classical influence in the oral convention of Homer, whose poems were completely spoken-word. She writes:

To be someone who can only be rendered as a sound of one's own repeated actions. To be someone who perpetually meets the lover he has known for eons. To be someone who is wholly devoted to a transitive and always-dying time of day, the shoreline between day and night. To be someone whose story can best be told during a particularly anticipatory shoreline that precedes the year's longest glare.⁸⁶

Actually, Oswald initiates "Tithonus" with silence, marked in inscription by a page mostly stuffed with blank space. Nearly, two-thirds of the way down the page, that space is disrupted by a dotted line located about an inch-and-a-half apart from the page's left margin. The line moves on vertically, and employs the repeating modality of five small dots followed by a limited line, extremely like the signaling on a ruler. The line continues throughout the poem. Most of the poem's text is on the right portion of this line, like the opening phrase that violates the silence: "as soon as dawn appears."⁸⁷ But, "now and again, on the left side of the line appears a single word: 'Music'."⁸⁸

Seemingly, Oswald's interest in the oral tradition is linked to the philosophy of forgetting. She urges her audience to "forget the fixed text,"⁸⁹ in favour of speaking by heart. She reveals that "what keeps the poems a live is a little forgetting,"⁹⁰ an impression that anything could occur because the poet might not remember. Such philosophy has affinities with stylistic intertextuality which enables Oswald to produce a unique and an unrepeatable version of the ancient oral tradition. She creatively merges the modern models and intuitions in the field of oral poetics with classical oral poetics of performance.

To conclude, besides thematic intertextuality, Oswald poetry engages with a set of formic and stylistic associations with many preceding literary texts. Translation, epiphany and acoustic-oral style are the most vivid strategies of this

kind of intertextuality. Oswald skillfully weaves these intertextual strategies into her poems. Her foremost desire out of this type of intertextuality is to re-create the pre-existing poetic forms and styles in an innovative way that keeps to her poetry its depth, originality and newness, and hence adapting it to satisfy the renewed desire of her contemporary readers.

3. Conclusion:

The concept of intertextuality finds a wide spread in modern and contemporary poetry. In its core, intertextuality asserts the idea of connectedness and dependence among literary texts. The poetry of Alice Oswald is a vivid manifestation of this concept. Oswald uses it as a frame to formulate the content and form or style of her poems. The former, content-based-intertextuality, is admitted through set of associations among the content of her texts and pre-existing ones. Allusions and nature as a theme offer best manifestations of this intertextual type. The latter, form-based-intertextuality, is reflected in Oswald's use of a wide range of linguistic and stylistics associations with previous texts. Translation, epiphany and Acoustic-orality are admitted among the main strategies to mediate on this type of intertextuality in Oswald's selected poem.

Regardless of its own type, intertextuality is manipulated in Oswald's poems as a mean to fulfill three main points. First, it endows her poetry a literary depth in terms of content and style. Second, it narrows the gap between the past and present, allowing an examination of present poetic themes and styles in the light of the past ones. Third, it enables the form and content of her poems to cope with the needs and social realities of her contemporary world.



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- 25- Much of what we know about classical myths comes from the Roman poet Ovid. His epic poem *Metamorphoses* retells around 250 myths
- 26- Oswald, *Dart*, p.18.

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