

# Intertextuality in Bradbury's "Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby's Is a Friend of Mine":

Is intertextuality contributing to the construction of meaning or resisting it?

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## Abstract

Intertextuality—the property by which multiple texts interact within a single text—may be perceived as recalcitrance (a disruptive force resisting meaning construction) in Ray Bradbury's short story "Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby's Is a Friend of Mine." Since the short story possesses multiple instances in which the text interacts with works by Charles Dickens, biblical stories, and references to works by other authors, a number of readers might become confused or they may feel unable to understand Bradbury's short story. Equalizing intertextuality to recalcitrance, however, is the result of viewing the story's intertextuality from a rather superficial angle. In reality, the interaction of multiple texts in the short story not only enables meaning production but it also enhances it by establishing parallelisms, recalling past events, and influencing the reader's perception of the atmosphere in Bradbury's work.

**Key words:** Ray Bradbury, intertextuality, recalcitrance, meaning production, Charles Dickens

## Resumen

La intertextualidad—la propiedad mediante la cual varios textos interactúan dentro de otro texto—puede percibirse como recalcitrancia (una fuerza disruptiva que obstaculiza la construcción de significado) en la historia "Cualquier amigo de Nicholas Nickleby es mi amigo", de Ray Bradbury. Debido a que la historia posee una serie de casos en los que el texto interactúa con obras de Charles Dickens, historias bíblicas, y referencias a obras de otros autores, algunos lectores pueden confundirse o pensar que no comprenden la historia de Bradbury. Equiparar la intertextualidad con la recalcitrancia, no obstante, resulta de una visión superficial de la intertextualidad. En realidad, la interacción de los múltiples textos en la historia no solamente permite la construcción del significado, sino que también lo potencia al establecer paralelismos, recordar eventos pasados e influir en la percepción que tiene el lector de la atmósfera en la historia de Bradbury.

**Palabras claves:** Ray Bradbury, intertextualidad, recalcitrancia, producción de significado, Charles Dickens

The short story “Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby’s Is a Friend of Mine,” by Ray Bradbury, exemplifies the potential of intertextuality for meaning production, even when intertextual elements are initially perceived as recalcitrant. Bradbury’s work narrates the story of Ralph, a boy who helps his grandparents run a guest house in a rural town named Green Town, in Illinois. The boy also works for Mr. Wyneski, the barber, sweeping the floor of his barber shop everyday. Intertextuality becomes evident when a stranger arrives to the town and, introducing himself as Charles Dickens, stays at the guest house. He changes Ralph’s name to Pip, and hires him as his secretary to help him write his new novel: *A Tale of Two Cities*. The devotion of the boy to the stranger makes the barber so furious that he threatens the newcomer and urges him to leave town. When the visitor is leaving, the boy leads him to the library, where the stranger meets the librarian, whom he calls Emily Dickinson. Interestingly, while no character in the short story is named “Nicholas Nickleby”, the name is mentioned when the protagonist introduces the newcomer to his grandfather (Bradbury 206).

In Bradbury’s short story, the names Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, Pip, Emily Dickinson, and the novel *A Tale of Two Cities* are not the product of coincidence. These recognizable names work as links that relate Bradbury’s short story to real writers (Dickens, Dickinson) and to their works (Pip, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, *A Tale of Two Cities*). Similarly, the short story is full of connections with other texts,

like biblical narrations or even to novels like *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Once readers interact with Bradbury’s short story, the former phenomenon leads to questioning the role of these textual links or references: Do they somehow contribute to meaning creation or do they actually become obstacles, slowing down and hindering the process of building meaning when reading Bradbury’s work?

### Intertextuality, Frames Gaps, and Recalcitrance

Ray Bradbury’s short story “Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby’s Is a Friend of Mine” presents a great number of instances where the text, either by allusion or by relation of content, interacts with other texts. This interaction is deeply related to meaning construction for some theoreticians: “All texts refer readers to other texts. Meaning can therefore be expressed only through this shared system of relations, not in the author’s stated intentions or the reader’s private or public experiences” (Bressler 95). This particular characteristic of texts—which has been called “intertextuality” by critics like Ian Reed—is highly important, for it influences the reader’s production of frames and may be perceived from opposing angles. According to Reed, frames may be divided into several categories, among which he includes intertextual frames: “I shall label these as circumtextual, intratextual, intertextual, and extratextual frames” (300). Intertextuality permits the reader to activate frames responding to the relationship between the text that is being read and the text

acting or interacting within that text. From this perspective, intertextuality becomes a factor contributing to the production of meanings, for it widens the reader's scope of perception so that he or she may be able to connect elements between the actual text being read and the other texts interacting with that one.

Intertextuality, on the other hand, may also be perceived as a hindering factor for meaning construction. According to Reed, frames depend on the reader: "Frames, in other words, are in the eye of the beholder" (299). This leads to the conclusion that a reader might be unable to perceive the interaction between the texts and, as a result, instead of activating the "widening" frames, he or she will experience a sense of rupture in his or her story processing. Austin M. Wright has labeled this interruption within the short story *recalcitrance*: "In every short story—indeed, in every formed work of fiction—two opposing forces are visible: the force of a shaping form and the resistance of the shaped materials. Let us consider the resisting force. I call it *recalcitrance* or, as it resists the form, *formal recalcitrance*" (115). This second perspective of intertextuality may act more strongly among readers who are unaware of the multiple texts in action within a given work of fiction, particularly Bradbury's, for his stories usually present multiple connections with other stories or works.

### **Recalcitrance:**

#### **The Link between Bradbury and Dickens**

From a surface level, intertextual elements in Bradbury's short story

may seem to be forces that, by joining different works to produce meaning, actually hinder meaning construction for some readers. For example, those who are not familiar with the "external" texts may run into problems when faced with the interaction of such texts with Bradbury's work and, as a result, they may perceive intertextuality as an obstacle to "understanding" the main text. Perhaps the most evident example of the former idea is the title of Bradbury's short story. If a reader is not acquainted with Charles Dickens or his literary production, the title "Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby's Is a Friend of Mine" will be taken as loosely bound to the body of the story or, more extremely, as an element that is totally irrelevant to the rest of the work.

The same is true for the moment in which the boy introduces the visitor to his grandfather, for the man uses the expression in the title of the short story to greet the newcomer (Bradbury 206). In reality, the expression "any friend of Nicholas Nickleby's is a friend of mine" establishes a strong link between Dickens's work and Bradbury's. Dickens's novel *Nicholas Nickleby* presents two instances in which similar expressions are used under conditions that closely resemble Bradbury's work. The first one is when Mr. Pluck talks to Mrs. Nickleby, Nicholas's mother: "Any friend of Sir Mulberry Hawk's requires no better introduction to me," observed Mrs. Nickleby, graciously" (Dickens 340). The second one is when Nicholas introduces his friend Smike to his mother and she replies: "I am sure any friend of yours has, as indeed he naturally ought to have, and must have, of course, you know, a great claim upon me, and of course, it is a very great

pleasure to me to be introduced to anybody you take an interest in. There can be no doubt about that; none at all; not the least in the world” (Dickens 438). Although Dickens’s novel and Bradbury’s work are deeply interrelated, the old man’s reply in Bradbury’s short story represents the only connection between the story and the title, which a reader who does not know about Charles Dickens will see as somewhat disconnected from the event that is taking place. In this light, intertextuality may indeed seem recalcitrant.

Along with the title of Bradbury’s short story, the reason behind the change of name from Ralph to Pip becomes another potentially recalcitrant issue for readers who are unaware of the interaction of Bradbury’s story with the works of Charles Dickens. On the surface, the name-changing episode creates a series of unsolvable questions in the mind of a number of readers: Why did the visitor choose the name “Pip” and why was the protagonist so delighted upon being called that name? Who is the original Pip and why did the boy grow so attached to the newcomer? Again while reading the body of the text, these textual gaps may be experienced as destructive forces making meaning creation harder.

Recalcitrance is not only present at the beginning or in the middle of the story; it is also part of the conclusion of Bradbury’s short story. At the end, the visitor calls the librarian “Emily Dickinson”. Later in the story, the woman explains to the boy that Emily Dickinson was a great poet, which eases the disruptive effect of introducing the “new name” of the librarian because she also writes poems. Still, readers may question the

relevance of such episode for the story altogether. Is it only a case of individuals who are losing contact with reality or do these happenings possess a deeper meaning that has become inaccessible to these readers?

It is important to highlight that while it may be true that Bradbury’s multiple intertextual connections tend to confuse some readers and to “obscure” their meaning creation, this perspective only takes intertextuality from the surface. On a deeper level, the interaction of multiple texts in Bradbury’s story does not hinder the process of meaning construction and it actually helps the reader perceive certain elements that enrich his or her frames while reading. The intertextuality present in Bradbury’s “Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby’s Is a Friend of Mine” actually contributes to the production of meaning by establishing parallelisms, recalling past events, influencing the atmosphere, and manifesting the attitudes of characters in the story.

### **Intertextuality as a Catalyst of Parallelism**

The story’s intertextuality helps the reader to produce meaning by establishing parallelisms. When Ralph’s grandfather explains the problem with the barber to his grandson, he uses a parable that the child does not understand: “‘We are not in church, Grandpa.’ ‘Cut the Parables, huh?’ ‘In simple words, Ralph, you used to sweep the hair off that man’s shop floor . . . A man with no family needs someone somewhere in the world’” (Bradbury 213). Since the boy mentions the word

“church” and the word “parables” is capitalized, the reader from a Christian tradition associates the scene with Jesus and his disciples. This enables the reader to make connections that result in perceiving the grandfather as a wise man who instructs others through love and patience and who seeks their improvement in life. Consciously or not, readers who have been in contact with Christianity equate the old man’s position to that of Jesus among his listeners. They perceive wisdom and love in the old man, but these elements are mediated by the image of Jesus so that their impact becomes greater. Moreover, this intertextual instance does not become a challenge to readers who are not familiar with Christianity. Indeed, the frame of a holy teacher who guides those who listen is common in other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. As a result of this frame activation, the reader does not question if the old man is right and he or she does not ask himself or herself how Ralph’s grandfather knew the origin of the problem with so much certainty. Frames encircling the Parables are also activated; the reader expects a problem to be disclosed, a lesson to be taught, and a change of attitude resulting from that lesson. These parallelisms with the biblical teachings of Jesus make the reader expect the boy to reconsider his behavior and hints at a possible solution to the problem.

According to Wright, recalcitrance “includes resistance to both the author’s creating process and the reader’s recreating one” (116). Intertextuality is not functioning in either of these ways in this passage, for it is actually providing the reader “tools” for constructing meaning. Because of the compelling

influence of the reader’s own mental frames to construct meaning, the influence of the frames activated by biblical scenes of Jesus add meaning to the short story even if readers are not familiar with Christianity. Suzanne Hunter Brown affirms that “once people have activated a particular framework for meaning, they are more likely to apprehend following material if it is intelligible within the frame (218). In the case of “Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby’s Is a Friend of Mine,” although many of its intertextual instances are directly related to Christianity, these textual elements also share several aspects with other religions. For example, a common ground among religions is the fact that they promote certain normative behaviors such as resisting evil and searching “the truth.” This is visible when the barber is praying at the table before dining. He says: “Give me strength to resist the cries of Fraud, Thief, Fool, and Bunk Artists which rise in my mouth.” (Bradbury 212). Thus, non-Christian readers and even those who have not been in contact with Christianity will find no obstacles to process this textual piece. Another similarity between Christian religions and others is their ideal of seeking justice, which is also present as an intertextual example in the barber’s prayer: “I ask, Lord, not mercy for the mean, but simple justice for the malignant.” (Bradbury 212). Any reader, regardless of his or her religious background, will be able to process these intertextual instances and relate them to the intentions of the barber. Christianity has become a parallel text that, moving along with Bradbury’s short story, contributes to the creation of meaning for Christian and non-Christian readers alike.

### Intertextuality as a Link to Past Events

Besides parallelisms, intertextuality contributes to meaning formation by recalling past events. When the barber is talking to Ralph's Grandfather about the boy's idea of changing his name, the old man mentions several names coming from books: "Dick. That was Dead-Eye Dick. And John. That was for Long John Silver. Then, Hyde. That was for the other half of Jekyll—" (Bradbury 208). Although this kind of intertextuality is superficial in the sense that it is only a reference to other texts, it has a two-fold effect. First, it recalls the old man's past—he reveals the heroes of his childhood, which were all negative characters, pointing out both to the inexperience of children and to the desire of adventure, for all those characters were equally adventurous and exciting—and creates a link between him and the reader, for readers are drawn to recall their own past as well. Since all the names belong to negative characters, the reader remembers some of his or her own ideas that were great during childhood times but which he or she is ashamed of during adulthood. This produces empathy towards the boy's idea of changing his name rather than becoming an obstacle between the reader and the text. From Wright's point of view, recalcitrance produces rupture; "recalcitrance is amply appreciated by contemporary critics under the name of discontinuity or disruption" (117). The reference to the books stated by Ralph's grandfather makes the situation appear normal and prevents any possible tension resulting from the reader's questioning of the child's action of changing his name, which is contrary to recalcitrance.

### Intertextuality as an Influence on the Atmosphere

Another way in which the story's intertextuality opposes the idea of recalcitrance—and at the same time widens the possibilities for constructing meaning—is by influencing the atmosphere of particular moments. Reed has stated that "intertextuality comprises devices by which a text signals how its very structure of meaning depends on both its similarity to and its difference from certain other texts or text types" (304). This dependence becomes clear when Ralph's grandfather is describing the barber's anger: "Brooding's the word. Saw him kick the rose bush, kick the green ferns by the porch, decide against kicking the apple tree . . . Oh, oh. Here he comes, Moses crossing a Black Sea of bile" (Bradbury 211). By comparing the barber's anger to Moses crossing the Red Sea, the text is increasing the reader's perception of the barber's anger to a point where it is impossible to refrain, for the reader remembers that even the Pharaoh was unable to stop Moses. He or she also links the word "sea" to the problem, which results in perceiving the barber's anger as vast and destructive—for the Red Sea destroyed all the Egyptian army. The difference of the colors also influences the reader's perception of the atmosphere in that moment, for "black" suggests evil and negativity in this particular context. The barber's anger is, therefore, a dark and negative force surrounding him and threatening to submerge anything into its black waters. The atmosphere is in turn one of danger and potential chaos.

Along with the previous example, another instance in which intertextuality influences the atmosphere that readers

perceive is when Charles Dickens (the one in Bradbury's short story) meets the librarian. In that moment, he quotes a poem by Emily Dickinson: "'Because I could not stop for Death—' Charlie, eyes shut, quoted from memory'" (Bradbury 224). By quoting Dickinson, this Charles Dickens is hinting at the idea that he is going to call the woman "Emily" and he is also determined to continue writing. His confidence, energy, and inspiration are conveyed by the words of the poem written by Dickinson. This brief insertion of Dickinson's poetry in the short story works as a catalyst for the feelings that the man experiences at that very moment. He is caught in the spirit of that very poem and feels its power: a power that not even death can challenge. The atmosphere, thus, becomes lively and intense. Readers are induced to expect something equally intense to occur in the next instant. This expectation is not defeated: an encounter with the poet occurs. This meeting, which might have been trivial otherwise, has been enhanced by intertextuality. From the surface, the encounter is a regular one but thanks to intertextuality, it has become a moment that is almost magical: two writers who should not exist in that place and time are meeting each other and love is blossoming between them.

Along with the former example, another moment in which the atmosphere is manifested more precisely thanks to intertextuality is when the newcomer calls Ralph "Pip" for the first time. It is important to notice that the general atmosphere at the beginning of the story was extremely quiet and passive:

... boys just lay gummed to dogs, dogs used boys for pillows under the trees

that lazed with leaves which whispered in despair: Nothing Will Ever Happen Again.

The only motion anywhere was the cool water dripping from the coffin-sized ice block in the hardware store window. (Bradbury 201)

In this overwhelming passivity, the boy hears the train approaching the town and tells the barber "... something's coming ... ." (Bradbury 201). He even insists when his listener does not believe him and instead disregards the topic that is so important for the boy. Then, Ralph comes up with the idea of changing his name because he thinks that it is dumb and some time later, a stranger comes to town. At this point, readers do not perceive anything new in the general atmosphere, but that changes when they learn that this man's name is Charles Dickens. This intertextual element causes surprise in the boy and in readers alike. How can this writer be alive in the 1920s? Later, when the young protagonist waits for the newcomer to tell him where to place his luggage, the man says: "Anywhere will do, Pip. Oh, you don't mind I call you Pip, eh?" (Bradbury 206). The reaction of the boy continues to shake the sense of normality and calmness that was set at the beginning of the story: "Pip?!" My cheeks burned, my face glowed with astonishing happiness. 'Oh, no, sir. Pip's *fine!*'" (Bradbury 206). Although the name "Pip" becomes another evident disruption in the previous atmosphere, readers do not find it troublesome to process the story. They may ask themselves why the boy acted so cheerfully, but this gap will not hinder meaning by any means because, according to Jonathan

Culler, “readers, when given a chance, will somehow make sense out of the most bizarre text” (qtd. in Bressler 99). In this light, readers infer that the new name has a special meaning for the boy and that will explain in turn the change in the atmosphere. Intertextuality offers a deeper explanation. Pip is the name of the main character in a novel by Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*. The name of the novel becomes a link between the boy’s new name and the atmosphere of the small town. Now, the air is filled with great expectations because a famous writer—who is dead—has arrived. The previous sense of normality in the story is utterly defeated by its intertextuality.

### **Intertextuality as a Discloser of Attitudes**

Besides influencing the reader’s perception of the atmosphere, the multiple examples of intertextuality help the production of meaning by manifesting the characters’ attitudes. According to Reed, intertextuality “is a matter of what a semiotician would call the passage from one sign system to another” (305). In this sense, intertextuality implies a convergence of texts in terms of meanings, for otherwise it would be impossible to move from one sign system to another. This converging point is perceived in the mood of the characters. When Ralph’s grandfather meets the man named Charles Dickens, the old man effusively says “Any friend of Nicholas Nickleby’s is a friend of mine!” (Bradbury 206). This allusion to Nicholas Nickleby, the character (and also a book) by Charles Dickens permits the reader to work with two texts at the

same time, for he or she infers Nicholas Nickleby’s character from this unusual greeting. In fact Nicholas Nickleby is a charismatic and humble young man who is able to earn other people’s respect and confidence, as this becomes evident when Smike begs Nicholas to take him with him:

The form moved, rose, advanced, and dropped upon its knees at his feet. It was Smike indeed.

‘Why do you kneel to me?’ said Nicholas, hastily raising him.

‘To go with you—anywhere—everywhere—to the world’s end—to the churchyard grave,’ replied Smike, clinging to his hand. ‘Let me, oh do let me. You are my home—my kind friend—take me with you, pray.’

‘I am a friend who can do little for you,’ said Nicholas, kindly. ‘How came you here?’ (Dickens 160-161)

Even without reading the book by Dickens entitled *Nicholas Nickleby*, the reader relates the old man’s will to be a friend of any person who likes that character with the character’s personality. Nicholas Nickleby, as a result, is seen in the mind of the reader as a friendly character who is to be respected and admired. These characteristics, at the same time, become the description of the old man’s attitude: he is envisioned as a man who is friendly to newcomers and a person who treats them kindly. In this sense, the two texts converge.

A similar convergence of texts, albeit negative, is seen when the barber is praying. Both his attitude and that of Delilah are expressed as analogously: “I shall like Delilah, with malice, shear the black lamb and fry his

mutton-cop whiskers for twilight dinners and late midnight snacks” (Bradbury 212). If readers are not familiar with Delilah, the appearance of her name in Bradbury’s story may pose a challenge and thus promote recalcitrance. However, Bradbury’s short story has provided a solution to that potential problem, for it adds an explanation serving as a link between itself and Delilah as a text: the words “with malice.” Readers who do not know the story of Delilah become aware, thanks to this short explanation, that her overall attitude was censurable. This in turn serves to increase the effect of the barber’s attitude in the eyes of the reader. He will not just act malignantly but also his attitude will be comparable to that of a woman who is known for her malice.

Although the previous instance presented intertextuality as a simile to manifest the attitude of the barber, other intertextual instances become almost metaphorical when disclosing other characters’ attitudes and also the barber’s. When the writer and the boy are writing *A Tale of Two Cities*, the descriptions of the characters in the novel merge with the attitude of the people around the boy. One of these instances is when the text uses the novel by Dickens to disclose the peaceful attitude of Ralph’s grandmother: “Madame Defarge, oh how she sat and knitted, knitted, sat—’ I looked up to find Grandma knitting in the window” (Bradbury 210). The same is more evident in regard to the boy’s grandfather: “Sidney Carton, what and who was he? A man of sensibility, a reading man of gentle thought and capable action . . .’ Grandpa strolled by mowing the grass” (Bradbury 210-11). It is important to notice that by blending both texts,

intertextuality provides a richer description of the old man’s attitude than by just providing adjectives to describe it. Bradbury’s short story takes advantage of this intertextual function to enrich the description of the barber’s attitude as well: “Drums sounded beyond the hills with guns; a summer storm cracked and dropped unseen walls . . . Mr. Wyneski?” (211). In this last instance, the revolution in the novel by Dickens becomes one with the summer in Green Town to disclose the rage of the barber. All these examples manifest the concept of meaning creation through intertextuality: “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes). Intertextual elements, in consequence, do not obstaculize meaning creation but promote it instead.

## Conclusions

Although intertextuality in the story “Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby’s Is a Friend of Mine” by Ray Bradbury may be perceived as recalcitrance at a superficial level, after a deeper analysis level it actually contributes to the process of meaning production. It establishes parallelisms, recalls past events, influences the reader’s perception of the atmosphere, and manifests the attitudes of characters in the short story. The parallelisms established by the short story’s intertextuality become guidelines for the reader’s creation of frames because they provide information that directs his or her perception

towards intention of the characters. They also become elements preventing the reader from perceiving possible recalcitrant elements within the story. The recollection of past events creates a sense of identification between the reader and the characters that enables him or her to incorporate his or her own experience into the context of narration. Along with the former examples, the influence that intertextual elements exert upon the reader's perception of the atmosphere makes him or her experience more intensity in the text. The characters' attitudes are also affected by intertextual instances because they are enhanced by the reader's connections resulting from the interaction of the diverse texts. In this light, intertextuality in Bradbury's short story is an element providing important material for the construction of meaning, highlighting and confirming the fact that "the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes).

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