Hamlet Upside Down: Ian McEwan's *Nutshell* as a Modernization of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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***Abstract*:** *Ian McEwan's Nutshell (2016) as a retelling of William Shakespeare's Hamlet addresses to some of the motifs of the original play but from a completely different approach. Hamlet has been turned here into an anti-hero in quest of his identity whilst the centre of the stage seems to be given to his mother Trudy. A character like Getrude does not find a place in contemporary literature and, consequently, McEwan turns her into Trudy, a rebelling and powerful woman who takes the reins of her life and plots along her lover her husband's murder. Thus, this paper will tackle with identity and gender in Nutshell as juxtaposed to the perspective portrayed in Hamlet, paying especial attention not only to the references and allusions to the aforementioned play but also to the differences in terms of characters.*

Keywords: *contemporary, gender, hypertextuality, Ian McEwan, identity, Shakespeare, unreliability.*

1. Introduction

Hamlet is one of those characters who resist leaving popular culture, one of those timeless characters everyone would recognise. Ian McEwan takes advantage of this situation in his latest novel, *Nutshell* (2016), in which he explores the figure of the Prince of Denmark from a completely new perspective. We had witnessed Hamlet's transformation into a lion,[1] but never before had we listened to his thoughts from within Queen Gertrude's womb.

In addition to that, the plot here is set in contemporary times, which drives the author into making some necessary variations. Apart from the required anticipation of the action –the novel deals with the actual plotting and resolution of Old King Hamlet's (John's) murder–, the story is also in need of some alterations regarding characters, starting with the hero of the original play (1603). In *Nutshell,* the unborn narrator plays the role of Hamlet, but he diverges from the figure of the Prince of Denmark precisely in his conception as the hero of the story. In this paper, McEwan's narrator will be read as an anti-hero, as almost a parody of what Hamlet embodies in Shakespeare's play. Broadly speaking, the anti-hero stands for the ordinary man who no longer cares for the welfare of his people but merely his own. Thus, the figure of the anti-hero can be described as the protagonist of a story who does not possess the features attributed by Aristotle to the classical hero but rather appears as almost a parody of that hero in his/her lack of the "heroic qualities of bravery, courage, morality, and the special ability and desire to achieve for the greater good" [1]. The role of the anti-hero has been gaining importance during the 20th and 21st centuries, with such significant examples as Tom Ripley in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), Ignatius J. Reilly in John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980) or Amy Elliot Dunne in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012).

The Hamlet-like figure is not the only one requiring re-shaping, but the female characters are also in need of a reevaluation. As it will be argued in section IV, the prominence of the story could fall on Trudy, the equivalent to Gertrude in *Hamlet*. Far from the passive woman we encountered in the Shakespearean play,[2] in *Nutshell* McEwan introduces a new Gertrude in a rebelling reading of the classical tale, understanding her as the mastermind of the mortal plan.

[1] Disney's *The Lion King* (1994) has been commonly considered an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
[2] The character of Gertrude has been largely discussed. For further information, see Emily Graf's revealing dissertation *Gertrude's role in* Hamlet (2013), in which she analyses the different motives for Gertrude to behave as she does.

Apart from attending to the rest of references and allusions to *Hamlet* that we come across throughout the whole novel, the rest of the characters will also be read in Hamletian terms, since every character finds its counterpart in the original play, albeit some considerable changes relevant for identity and gender studies.

2. References to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Therefore, the references to *Hamlet* are recurrent in terms of its characters but McEwan goes one step further. In *Nutshell* we come across some winks to the original inspiration of the novel, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and therefore we encounter some references to theatre. To begin with, the whole novel could be considered one big soliloquy, since it is mainly the narrator speaking his mind and recounting to the reader what he witnesses or assumes to be true. The only dialogues we can find are those that he overhears among the rest of the characters, since the narrator cannot interact with any of them for obvious reasons. This is what brings the idea of voyeurism – just as the audience attending a theatrical performance is a mere observant, so is our hero in *Nutshell*. He overtly acknowledges his role as spectator with statements like "[h]ere I am, in the front stalls, awkwardly seated upside down." [2]. Moreover, other references to theatre include the way in which the narrator presents the comings and goings of some characters as if they were asides on a play, such as "Enter Claude. […] Exit Claude" [2].[3] Furthermore, we even find clear references to theatre in a particular dialogue in the novel, which is written as if it were a theatrical scene:

Elodie: 'And the broody owl is poisonous.'
Trudy: 'Yes, the broody one can kill you.'
Elodie: 'I don't think so. She just makes you sick.'
Trudy: 'I mean, if she gets her claws into your face.' [2]

Finally, the motif of the play-within-a-play that we encounter in *Hamlet* (*The Mousetrap*) may be said to be present here in our understanding of the relationship between the unborn narrator and what happens outside his mother's womb as that of a spectator witnessing a theatrical performance. Just as Hamlet attends a representation of his father's murder, so does the unnamed hero in *Nutshell*. In the first case, Hamlet is unable to impede the murder because it has already happened, whereas in *Nutshell* the narrator's impossibility of action lies in his physical impediment, his not having been born yet.

Consequently, the narrator of *Nutshell* is a parody of Hamlet even if he is not really aware of it. But McEwan takes it to another level and claims that "not only was he Hamlet, but he was also Shakespeare" [3], alluding for instance to the first dream the narrator has which relates to the description of the journey from Stratford to London that Shakespeare would undertake in 1602. This fact adds to the intertextuality of the whole novel, not only in terms of *Hamlet* but also its author.[4]

McEwan introduces the first clue for the reader from the very beginning of the novel, since even its epigraph is a quotation from *Hamlet* alluding to the path that the novel is going to take and making reference as well to the novel's title: "Oh God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space – were it not that I have bad dreams". Just in case the reader does not catch the reference, McEwan makes it clear enough.

The author, nonetheless, does not only leave such clues in the epigraph but also all over the novel, for we can encounter Easter eggs hidden behind trivial comments that Hamletian fans would be able to recognize and relish. Throughout the whole novel we come across allusions, references, and winks to Shakespeare, which might go unnoticed for some readers but will be spotted by many others. For instance, at the very beginning of the novel we encounter statements like "[s]o, getting closer, my idea was *To be*" [2], alluding to the most famous monologue of all English literature; "[m]y immediate neighbourhood will not be palmy Norway" [2], making reference to Prince Fortinbras, who would rule in Denmark after King Claudius's death; or even the mention that

[3] In this particular case, the allusion is highly ironical and even comical, since it refers to sexual intercourse.
[4] Intertextuality appears as a term coined by Julia Kristeva in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Language and Art* (1980) and understood as the common set to references to other texts that we find in another text. Gérard Genette broadened the term in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997), creating the concept of 'hypertextuality', probably more accurate here given the close relationship between *Nutshell* and *Hamlet*, to refer to "any relationship uniting a text B ([…] *hypertext*) to an earlier text A ([…] *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" [4].

Trudy and Claude will have "Danish takeaway" for dinner [2], an ironic reminder of the setting of the original play. Notwithstanding, among the best and least obvious references to Shakespeare are the allusions to wine, which in the play is a poisonous drink intended for Hamlet but drank by Gertrude, causing her death. In *Nutshell*, McEwan ironically points out that Trudy likes "podcast lectures, and self-improving audio books – *Know Your Wine*" [2], and the narrator also comments that he likes "to share a glass [of wine] with my mother" [2]. The author is cunningly leaving winks for the connoisseurs of *Hamlet*, since this particular drink plays a quite important role in the denouement of the story.[5] The final reference to the play occurs in the very last line of the novel: McEwan turns Shakespeare's "the rest is silence" [5] into "The rest is chaos" [2], a final ironic allusion to the new path that the story of the Prince of Denmark has followed in this modern adaptation.

3. Identity

As we have been foreseeing, the most relevant references (and variations, for that matter) to the original play occur in terms of characterization. Ian McEwan seems to have a special interest in peculiar narrators and/or heroes, Briony Tallis in *Atonement* (2000) being one of his most famous ones. And yet, it could be stated that the narrator of *Nutshell* is an even more interesting one for two main reasons. On the one hand, it should be taken into account that the narrator has not been born yet but is a thirty-eight-week-old foetus. Thus, we are forced to pay attention to his thoughts rather than his actions, non-existent for the most part. On the other hand, his story is strongly reminiscent of the plot of Shakespeare's tragedy, *Hamlet*. In other words, the narrator in McEwan's *Nutshell* is a foetus, a human embryo in the later stages of development, who recounts what he hears, feels, or assumes to be happening all around him and who finds himself witness to the murder of his father by the hands of his mother and uncle as he is still within his mother's womb.

It is possible to argue that in Shakespeare's play Hamlet chooses to leave aside his role as Prince of Denmark and would-be ruler of his kingdom in order to become just a son whose purpose in life is to avenge his father. Hamlet is aware of his fate and accepts it, gaining an identity as tragic hero as a result. In McEwan's novel, on the other hand, the issue of identity is also of paramount importance. But can an unborn child be considered to have an identity?[6] In fact, the narrator himself recognises his present lack of self when he fantasises with his future identity, which he considers to be doomed. As the sum of his father and mother's genes, to which he adds those of his uncle, since the latter has been having unprotected sex with his pregnant mother from the very early stages of his conception, the narrator asks himself: "a quarter of my genome […]. What despicable part of myself is Claude and how will I know?" [2]. Thus, to what extent is he in control of his identity? Or put it differently, is biology destiny or are we free to become who we want, regardless of our origins?

Nonetheless, it could be argued that the narrator is, in a way, in charge of his own identity, precisely because he has not been born yet and because he has not been given a name. To that extent, he could be said to be free from the identity constrictions that being named might imply. However, although it is true that this unborn narrator does not have a name yet, the similarities between himself and Hamlet could lead the reader to attribute him the name of his own father, John, or that of Hamlet himself.[7]

So, to what extent is this hero like Hamlet? In his revealing work *Poetics*, Aristotle talked about the goodness and nobility of the tragic hero alongside his perseverance in life. As in Hamlet, it could be said that there is morality and unselfishness in the willingness of the hero in McEwan's novel to sacrifice himself in order to avenge the murder of his father, or to impede it in this case, and his perseverance is seen here in the hero's

[5] After all, it is precisely the fact that Gertrude wants to share Hamlet's cup which drives her to her death.

[6] Interestingly enough, McEwan has pointed out in some interviews that the reception of the novel in the US was quite controversial, since it was introduced in the abortion debate. The fact that we have a fully conscious thirty-eight-week-old foetus arose some questions regarding the morality of abortion in advanced pregnancy. The author has claimed in several occasions that his intention was never to enter that debate and that this perspective was never on his mind when he was shaping the story.

[7] Following *Hamlet*, we could deduce that McEwan's hero would be named John after his father (just as Hamlet is named after Old King Hamlet), but I think it is very unlikely that in this case Trudy names her son after the man she has killed and whose death seems to get her in prison.

resoluteness. But, as we have mentioned, McEwan's is an unborn character who is imprisoned in his mother's womb. Thus, he cannot act properly and he is forced to become a mere witness of the events. In an interview, McEwan claimed that "like Hamlet, [the narrator] lacks agency" [6]. Unlike Hamlet, the only agency he has is the possibility to kick his mom and wake her up in order to listen to the radio, for instance, or to actually get himself born. Thus, the fact that he is bound hand and foot mocks the tragic hero's destiny and fatal flaw – McEwan's character is not a matter of misjudgement but rather of pure science – transforming a hero such as Hamlet into a contemporary anti-hero who, in spite of his failed attempt at suicide, is not willing to sacrifice himself and chooses to be born and to be master of his own identity when he says: "I'll feel, therefore I'll be […]. My identity will be my precious, my only true possession, my access to the only truth" [2].

Nonetheless, despite his having evolved into a contemporary anti-hero, McEwan's protagonist is clearly related to Hamlet in terms of his thoughts and actions. For instance, a feature commonly attributed to the personality of the Prince of Denmark is his suffering from an Oedipus complex.[8] From the very beginning of the novel, the unborn hero claims that he loves his mother, "how could I not?" [2], and this statement would look like innocent filial love were it not for other instances like "[m]y father and I are joined in hopeless love" [2], or "Trudy will be mine, not Claude's" [2], which have a much more possessive tone. These statements mirror Hamlet's obsession with his mother's second marriage and her choice of husband, alongside his own unnatural desire to be Gertrude's spouse. In *Nutshell*, the narrator claims that "[m]y mother has preferred my father's brother, cheated her husband, *ruined her son*" [2, my emphasis]. The highlighted section here alludes to Trudy's damage to her son, since it is worth paying attention to the fact that the narrator believes Trudy's attitude towards her son to be a much higher treason than the actual murder of her husband. He considers that she "cheated her husband" but "ruined her son", suggesting thus that the second is a much higher form of treachery. Even though Trudy is not only unfaithful to her husband but is also planning his murder, the narrator is more concerned with the fact that she cheated on him by sleeping with her brother-in-law. Besides, this rejection of Trudy's cheating is also seen in the narrator's belief that his father was much better than Claude: "My uncle – […] no more like my father than I to Vigil or Montaigne. […] I refuse to say I hate her – but to abandon a poet, any poet, for Claude!" [2]. All this echoes Hamlet once again, who also encountered these dilemmas in the original play.

Hamlet's revenge also has a reflection in the protagonist of *Nutshell*, at least in his intention, since his possibility to take action, as we have seen, is nearly non-existent. He clearly considers wreaking revenge (on his mother or uncle, though?) and seems to be justifying himself, trying to convince himself that he would be forgiven were he to execute his revenge: "Revenge: the impulse is instinctive, powerful – and forgivable. […] no one can resist the allure of vengeful brooding. […] Revenge may be exacted a hundred times over in one sleepless night. The impulse, the dreaming intention, is human, normal, and we should forgive ourselves" [2]. But he goes on: "There'll be no reversion to the status quo ante, no balm, no sweet relief, or none that lasts. Only a second crime. Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves, Confucius said." Thus, he soon realises that he is not going to get anything out of that revenge, that it is not worth it. Hamlet was also aware of the resolution of his revengeful deed, but he accepted his fate and completed his mission. This is not the case in *Nutshell*, where the protagonist finds in this fact the perfect excuse not to take any action, showing in this cowardice his true personality as an anti-hero. Hence, he draws the final conclusion: "I've absolved myself, not of thoughts, but of actions, of avenging his death in this life or in the post-natal next. And I'm absolving myself of cowardice. Claude's elimination won't restore my father. […] No to impetuous action." [2]. This procrastination is taken to the extreme, to the point of not taking any revenge at all.[9]

[8] Following Sigmund Freud, Professor Ernest Jones wrote a study entitled *A Psycho-analytic Study of* Hamlet (1922) in which he analysed Hamlet as the prototype of the Oedipus complex. He claimed that Hamlet did not overcome this phase in his early development, and therefore was still unconsciously in love with the Queen. In fact, Professor Jones argued that Hamlet looked more upset because of his mother's marriage to his uncle rather than his father's death.

[9] In his defense, I should say that his father did not ask for his vengeance, as it was the case in *Hamlet*, therefore he is not as bound to fulfill the mission as Hamlet was.

Nonetheless, he has moments of Hamletian doubt – the "to be or not to be" dilemma means here to be born or to commit suicide, not to stop living, as it was the case in Hamlet, but not being born at all. He claims: "Don't let your incestuous uncle and mother poison your father. Don't waste your precious days idle and inverted. Get born and act!" [2]. The only option he has is to get born (to provoke his own early birth) and to try to appeal to his mother's sense from outside her womb. As McEwan himself puts it, "he's bound to love [Trudy] and he will get her back with a look" [7]. Will she have second thoughts once she has her child on her arms? Too late for that.

Not only the protagonist, but also the rest of characters have their own Hamletian counterparts. Alluding to the clues that McEwan leaves throughout the novel for the reader to identify the narrative as a reinterpretation of *Hamlet*, he also adapts (and modernises?) the names of the characters. Gertrude, no longer the Queen of Denmark and therefore free from protocol, becomes Trudy, a woman in her late twenties who has decided to take action. King Claudius is Claude here, "a Renaissance man, a Machiavel, an old-school villain who believes he can get away with murder" [2]. However, McEwan depicts Claude as if he were already the King of Denmark, in the sense that he is a much more important figure than John, who, if we continue with the Shakespearean links, should be the king in the story, Old King Hamlet. John is not a successful figure, though – "he is a poet without recognition and yet he persists. […] he owns and runs an impoverished publishing house […]. He has less money than Trudy and far less than Claude" [2]. All this notwithstanding, he is still the King of the Castle, the owner of the house where the action is taking place. Elsinor here is John's mansion, the house that Trudy and Claude want to claim for themselves (the castle that Claudius and Gertrude want to rule).

4. Gender

McEwan's revision of the characters in *Hamlet* goes much further than a mere modernisation of names. Especially significant is the rewriting of the roles women have in the novel, which contrast with those female characters were seen to perform in *Hamlet*.

First of all, it should be highlighted that the most interesting aspect of *Nutshell* is the fact that we are reading a story narrated by someone who is inside a woman. Thus, we know that the perspective on women is going to be unlike any other. Trudy is the woman whose womb acts as both nourishing space and binding prison for the narrator. Undoubtedly, then, Trudy is the character that is going to attract all the attention. Although we can also find other female characters in the novel, it is clear that Trudy is going to be in the constant spotlight. The narrator describes her in the following terms:

> "the gravidly ripe twenty-eight-year-old, youngly slumped […] across the table, blonde and braided like a Saxon warrior, beautiful beyond realism's reach, slender but for me, near naked, sunnily pink on the upper arms […]. I try to see her and love her as I must, then imagine her burdens: the villain she's taken for a lover, the saint she's leaving behind, the deed she's spoken for, the darling child she'll abandon to strangers. Still love her? If not, then you never did. But I did, I did. I do. [2]"

This description provides us with quite relevant information about Trudy's character and about the narrator's position towards her. We get an exaggerated portrayal of her physical appearance, which could be taken as another instance of the oedipal elements of the protagonist we were mentioning in section III, which can be added to his declaration of unconditional love. The description also points to the unreliability of the narrator, for how is he able to discern whether her hair is braided or not?[10] Besides, the comparison of Trudy to a "Saxon warrior", which alludes to her powerful nature, as I will discuss next in this section, is worth mentioning. Finally, if we analyse "her burdens", the fact that, for the protagonist, the first shameful element seems to be "the villain she's taken for a lover", rather than the murder she is about to commit, should be highlighted once again because,

[10] Wayne Booth understands the unreliable narrator as "a profoundly confused, basically self-deceived, or even wrong-headed or vicious reflector" [8]. In the case of *Nutshell*, the unreliability of the narrator is debatable given, on the one hand, the non-existence of any previous belief, turning him into a *tabula rasa* whose point of view is not biased by any prior experience, and, on the other hand, his physical condition that prevents him from being completely reliable. Siddhartha Mukherjee talks in his review of the novel in *The New York Times* about an "*over*-reliable narrator" [9], since he is completely aware of every single detail of the murder. Nonetheless, the fact that the foetus is slightly drunk in some instances might also add to his unreliability.

as I argued in section III, for the narrator Trudy's main dishonourable trait is the fact that she has taken a lover, that she has abandoned his father for a much less worthy man.

Although Trudy is the Gertrude-like character in *Nutshell*, she plays a different role from that of the Shakespearean Queen. At the beginning of the novel, her resemblance to Gertrude is made evident in the submissive part the latter seems to play in the story.[11] In fact, it is Claude that seems to be in charge of the bloody operation, with Trudy merely playing a supporting role. Trudy is actually described as Claude's "own darling mouse" [2], suggesting that her position with regard to Claude is that of a pet, with the sense of ownership that that implies.[12]

Nonetheless, Trudy refuses to be merely following her lover's orders and decides to turn the tables: "His mouse! What humiliation. In the palm of his hand. Pet. Powerless. Fearful. Contemptible. Disposable. Oh to be his mouse! […] Is she a woman or a mouse?" [2]. This observation marks the ending of the chapter and the beginning of a new Trudy, who realises the fault she has committed and the villain she has between the sheets. Trudy is willing now to take action, to take the reins of her own life and turn against Claude, even if absolving herself implies condemning him: "What a distance she's travelled, treating him like a child, when just now she was his pet" [2]. This new Trudy is miles away from the Shakespearean Queen but resembles the Gertrude found in Margaret Atwood's short story, "Gertrude Talks Back" (1992), in which she admits her role as mastermind of the whole operation.

The other two female characters that encountered in the novel are Elodie and Chief Inspector Clare Allison. The former is a tool John uses to make Trudy believe that he has a lover, in an attempt to win Trudy back by trying "to make [Trudy] jealous" [2]. In this sense, Elodie can be read as the modern counterpart of Shakespeare's Ophelia in her role of the woman who is used to provoke some jealousy on the Gertrude-like figure. Although Elodie proves to be just a friend of John's and a fan of his poetry, Trudy feels jealous of her but she also feels superior to her. Trudy's aggressive and hostile attitude towards her proves that John knows her well but far from getting her love back, Trudy's jealousy ultimately accelerates his own death. Besides, Elodie's role is also significantly different from Ophelia's. Whereas Ophelia ends up committing suicide, Elodie helps the police to trick the murderers. Elodie is thus an active character in that she manages to take revenge on the murdering couple by snaring them and sending them to prison.

The inspector of the murder case, on the other hand, appears as a threat to Trudy from the start. She is powerful enough to send her to prison, and she shows this superiority in the way she behaves in the family mansion "as if the house were hers" [2]. Besides, the narrator points out that he imagines Trudy "thinking that she might more easily mislead a man" [2], as she did with her husband.

Although Trudy is clearly the main female protagonist in the story, the other two female characters also have their share in the action, no matter whether we constantly hear Trudy's opinion of them or read about her attitude towards them (once again, as interpreted by the narrator-foetus). I believe that Trudy sees herself as threatened by both of them and reacts to them as a result in different ways: on the one hand, hostile towards her ex-husband's younger lover who might be able to snatch the mansion out of her, and cautious towards the woman capable of exposing her murderous nature, on the other.

5. Conclusion

Ian McEwan acknowledges the challenge that adapting such a well-known and loved literary text represents, and manages to succeed. Creating a contemporary Hamlet implies dealing with a new Hamlet, with revised purposes and goals. In the case of *Nutshell*, as we have seen, McEwan faces the task with the creation of an anti-

[11] The plotting of her husband's murder is only hinted at in passing in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet himself accuses his mother of being involved in the plot. Despite the Ghost's advice to Hamlet not to trouble his mother ("Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught", [5]), he accuses her of murder: "A bloody deed – almost as bad, good Mother, / As kill a king and marry with his brother." [5]. Gertrude, astonished, dismisses the accusation and it is not mentioned again which, along with the Ghost's words, seem to prove her innocence.

[12] The choice of the mouse also refers to *Hamlet*, not only in terms of *The Mousetrap* but also of the bedchamber scene in which Hamlet advises Gertrude to "let the bloat king […] call you his mouse" [2].

hero whose views on revenge are different from those of the Prince of Denmark, even if he shares with him some of his most famous features, such as the Oedipus complex or the dilemmas regarding his identity.

In this case, the unborn narrator seems to be in love with his mother Trudy, a contemporary revision of Queen Gertrude. Hence, the author suggests that the alleged passiveness of characters like Gertrude would not find a place in contemporary times, where we would be in need of rebelling and powerful female characters. As we have seen, Trudy is indeed in the spotlight of the whole story, even if almost the only voice we hear is that of the foetus, who turns here into a Doctor Watson for a Sherlock Holmes. The rest of the female characters, nonetheless, are also given more importance than their counterparts had in the original play, which points out once again to the increasing prominence of powerful and strong female figures in contemporary literature.

The frailty that Hamlet attributed to women in the Shakespearean play has been left aside here, showing that literature mirrors reality once more. Consequently, *Nutshell* tackles with contemporary worries on gender and identity by means of the reevaluation of the male protagonist and his peculiar relationship with the female characters, who find in contemporary terms their place to shine.

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Comprehending 'Thirukkural' in Kannada Literary Culture

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Abstract: *'Thirukkural' is a Tamil Classical Text.It is believed to have been composed from 2 nd AD to 4 th A.D. Nothing much is known about the literature written in Kannada during this period. The first available Kannada Inscription dates back to 5 th century. The first available Kannada Text 'Kavirajamarga' was written in the 9 th century. There are references to the earlier Kannada poets, but the texts are not found. Therefore the classicality of the 'Thirukkural' is treated with love and honour in Kannada literary tradition. The present paper titled Comprehending 'Thirukkural' in Kannada Literature attempts to look at the presence of Thirukkural in Kannada literary culture from the classical times to the present.*

Keywords: *Classical Text, Kannada Culture, Classicism, Modern Literature*

1. Introduction

'Thirukkural' is a Tamil Classical Text. It is believed to have been composed from 2nd AD to 4th A.D. Nothing much is known about the literature written in Kannada during this period. The first available Kannada Inscription1 dates back to 5th century. The first available KannadaText 'Kavirajamarga'2 was written in the 9th century. There are references to the earlier Kannada poets, but the texts are not found. Therefore the classicality of the 'Thirukkural' is treated with love and honour in Kannada literary tradition.

This text with total 1330 moral poems is divided into three parts as Dharma-Artha-Kaama. The poet Thiruvalluvar is Tamilian's adorable poet. It is translated into various languages of the world including Kannada. The history of Kannada translation of 'Thirukkural' goes like this; more than ten versions of Kannada translation of 'Thirukkural' are avaialable. 'Thirukkural' is one of the texts which is translated more often among all other Indian texts in Kannada. The next place goes to Rabindranath Tagore's 'Geetanjali'. The efforts of translating 'Thirukkural' into Kannada were attempted 108 years before. In 1898 Kannada literary historian and great scholar R.Narasimachar translated it into Kannada as 'Neethi Manjari'. It has 38 chapters. In 1911 he translated some more chapters and published the second part. For which he used Kannada 'Kandapadya'3. 'Thirukkural' is written in original Tamil two lines called 'Venba' metre. Most of the old Kannada literary texts effectively used 'Kandapadya' metre. R.Narasimacharya who edited classical Kannada texts has found this metre more effective. The 'KhyatakarnatakaVratta'4 was not to be used, because of its compexitiy. Therefore the language of classical period and classical metre are used here. This translated text was republished in 1928. The credit of introducing 'Thirukkural' to Kannada goes to R.Narasimacharya. Another great scholar B.M.Shrikantayya has also translated with the title 'Tamilkattu'. It is sad that the original text was eaten by the termites. With the translation of English poems 'English Geetegalu'5 he has contributed to the new spirit of Kannada poetry. Indeed, one could assume that his translation of 'Thirukkural' would have given new spirit to Kannada. His two translations of plays6 have opened the new ways of thinking in Kannada literary culture.

In 1952 L.Gundappa has translated the Dharma a part of 'Thirukkural'. This translation is in verse form with two lines and sometime three lines couplets. In verse form there is also a paraphrase. For his interpretation of 'Thirukkural' he used Parimelalagar text7. This text is more popular among the Kannada readers.

The above cited translations have done only a few chapters. The full book was translated by P.S.Shrinivas. He completed this work from 1972 to 1976. But, it was published in 1982. It contains first Tamil form, the meaning of Tamil words in Kannada and Kannada paraphrase of the poetry. Translation is in simple and lively style. After L.Gundappa's this is well received version in Kannada. In 1985 N. Muniswamy translated and