

Literature and Dual Reading

*Assist. Lect. Hussein Nassir Jabr al-Obadi
Gifted Students' School in Najaf*

1. Introduction

Language to literature is like greenery to a wood. It is the chief means of literary exposition, the medium in which interactive ideas flourish, and the roaming dreams rest. It is such an organic relationship that it is impossible to separate one from the other.

Language of literature, to a literary critic, is a large spectrum of concepts, ideas, emotions, and excitement fused altogether within the force of motive that works in the mind of the author at the moment of artistic creation so that it would appear in a form that evokes feeling and calls for various interpretations on the part of the reader.

Language to the author is the way by which s/he conveys him- or herself to those awaiting the moment of enunciation, i.e. the moment of the revelation of the literary work. However, it is a carefully selected way of expression. According to Chapman (1973:4), "Literary language has been chosen and manipulated by its user with great care and complexity than the average language user either can or wishes to exercise".

The interaction of language and literature, as Pei (1972:138) states, "is a question that has long agitated linguists, causing them to divide into two more or less well-defined camps. Should language be viewed primarily as a speaking activity, and the written, literary language be considered ancillary to speech?" Clearly, this applies to one type of literature, i.e. the written one. What about the oral one of which early Arabic literature is the best example?

It is well-known throughout Arabic history that interlocutors sometimes speak to one another by means of poetry; they exchange poetic verses to communicate among themselves. If we only had an access to a piece of conversation at those times, we might feel that we were listening to a fine piece of literature whereas to them it could only be an ordinary event of speech. This reflects the importance of

literary language to the people of the pre-Islamic, and equally the Islamic, era.

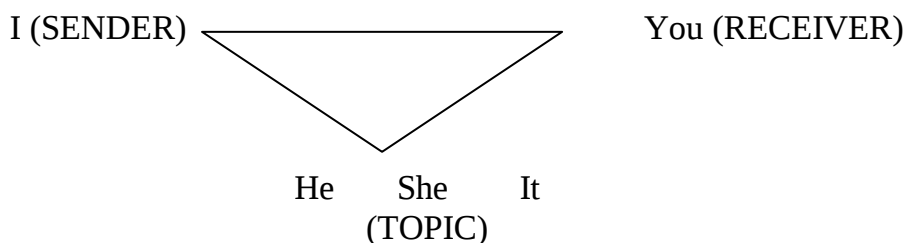
However, the challenging language of literature has always induced critics to try various methods to approach literary texts. Such approaches are usually sophisticated so that they require careful study by specialists to understand. This paper is an attempt to show that reading literature is manageable by all types of readers including critics, and writers when they detach themselves from their works.

2. Literary Communication

2.1 Double Senders

A literary language is a phenomenon of communication, though a particular kind of communication, that must be defined in terms of its own characteristics (see Dijk, 1976).

When we examine the communicative model in its essential outline, we'll have a triangle of three components illustrated as such;



(made in analogy to Buhler's Triangle; cf. Pagnini, 1980:2)

In literary communication, we are faced with a peculiar doubling at the three vertices of the triangle. We have the **author** (the real speaker) and the **speaker of the text**. Again, we have the (real) **addressee** (i.e. the listener, the spectator, or the reader) and the **one in the text** (being a character drawn by the author). In addition, we have the **topic** intended by the author on the one hand, and the **understanding (or inferences)** and **response** of the reader, on the other (cf. Miall and Kuiken, 1994: 389-407). The question, then, is: *Are the two triangles – the real and the textualized- identical, so that one factor can be identified with the other counterpart?* The answer should be not.

2.1.1 The Author and the Text

The relationship between the author and his/her text can be clearly shown by the fact that the author abstracts himself from the text just at the very moment s/he ends up with it, and then starts looking at it as something 'autosufficient'. S/he confers on it absolute authority and thereby deflects readers' questioning of authorial intention. You never expect a poet, for instance, to reveal the intent of the discourse or give you clarification of his expressions because he himself seems interested in the various possible interpretations of the message as if the text were not of his own making (Pagnini, 1980:2-3).

The author always chooses to remain absent from the text; otherwise, the text will be dull and inert. This absence is the author's condition of his particular communicability which is based on the ambiguity the text is founded on. Here, it should be pointed out that one of the artistic modes poets usually take in writing their literary texts is the aspect of 'defamiliarization' (see Miall and Kuiken, 1994: 342). They deliberately use novel grouping of words and unexpected phrasing benefitting from the various techniques of poetry so that a special form will be rendered. Hence, the author never hopes to be clarified by verbal clarification of **intent** but only through solitary interpretative processes carried out by readers. Thus, literature is a message 'at a distance' even for oral transmission of the text by its author who acts not as normal sender but as '**a physical transmission channel**'(ibid;3).

2.1.2 Senders as Diverse Agents

In consequence, it appears that the sender at the moment of enunciation is distinguished from the sender of the message at the moment of creation of the literary work. In fact, they are diverse entities, the one being the real one whose nature is shaped by individual impulse and cultural control, the other is the literary sender which founds the way of the discourse and assures its function within the linguistic code. Actually, we have two persons, one is real, and the other is disguised in linguistic items. If we call them **agents**, borrowing the term from Chomsky's Theta-theory, we'll have an **empirical** agent and a **grammatical** (or semantic, in the broader meaning of grammar) agent (*cf.* Benveniste, 1966: 5). In this respect,

Boothe (1961:73) provides the concept of the 'implicit author' as a structural element which can hardly be identified with the writer.

Literary criticism, therefore, distinguishes between the **subject-agent** that manifests itself in the text and the **one** that lies behind the text (*cf.* Pagnini, 1980:10).

2.2 Double Receivers

Similarly, according to Schmidt (1976), there in opposition to the doubling of senders is the doubling of the internal and external receivers. The author not only elects his/ her representative within the text but also presupposes the image of the reader who will receive the text (cited in van Dijk,1976).

However, it appears not to be always the case. Not all writers have to assume their readers at the act of writing. Poets, for instance, at the moment of enunciation, think only unconsciously of readers, when they choose to write in a particular language. In fact, they write in response to an internal motivation so that they are taken up altogether by the trance of the moment, looking just for self-satisfaction, no matter whether or not they will be appreciated for it. Nevertheless, they may tend to their texts with revision and refining, trying to affect their readers. Only then, they are taken to be thinking seriously of the type of their readers.

3. Readers' Response

3.1 Duality of Reading

Sartre (1948: 92), states that "all works of the spirit contain within themselves the image of the reader whom they are addressed". Thus, it is the nature of the text that identifies its reader. However, *Do readers respond similarly to any piece of literature they are faced with ?*

The answer to this question is not a simple one, but one that requires some sort of a theory. Many scholars and critics have suggested different models of analysis of literary texts. In this study, out of practical experience in the field of writing poetry, a new model will be devised to approach a literary text from the point of view of the reader. In spite of the fact that a literary text requires more one reading to be understood, and among the various levels of reading one may have to practice in facing a text (see el-Ibadi, 2006: 110-3), two

major distinctions can be made here: **meaning-chasing** reading and **aesthetically-stimulating** one. In short, they can be put under a more general label, i.e. the **Dual Reading**.

3.1.1 Meaning-Chasing Reading

In view of the first type, the reader is entangled in the syntactico-semantic representation of the text so that s/he would look for the meaning of almost every item in the play, nothing is supposed to be redundant or out of place, referring them to the constructional form of the text hoping to derive one version (or sub-reading) of meaning. Simultaneously, the whole text would be checked against the whole knowledge and assumptions the reader has about language and the world (see *ibid*: 116). Only then, some version of meaning is maintained. Nevertheless, repeating this process several times may result in some extension of the previously- inferred meaning. Here, one may ask, what are the ways and methods one should follow in approaching the meaning of a literary text? According to al-Ibadi (2006: 103),

one looks for the meaning implied in a piece of work by: first, describing the language forms employed and the creative linguistic framework of the text, and secondly, identifying the interpretative value of such forms and structures, i.e. how much they contribute to reveal the authorial intentions implied in the text.

However, meaning is generally not a trustworthy element in analyzing a poem which, by its very nature, calls for more than one version of meaning that is as numerous as the number of its readers. To quote al-Ibadi, (*ibid*: 111-2) again, "ambiguity, which is caused by linguistic deviation, queer images, unfamiliar associations of lexical terms and ideas, as well as the variety of contexts, is generally the source of multiplicity of meanings assigned to a text". There can never be a single interpretation of a poem.

3.1.2 Aesthetically-Stimulating Reading

One may notice that grasping meaning is not the sole and ultimate end of reading a literary text. So frequently, a reader can enjoy a poem, for instance, without really understanding it or reaching a conclusion about the intention of its author. There are many

elements in a poem that can appeal to a reader, i.e. the melodious nature of the poem, unfamiliar associations, queer imagery, specific constructions, far-fetched metaphors, etc. All these are aesthetic aspects instantiated in a poem through the poet's creative manipulation of language. Hence, they are only achieved through attentive reading of the poem.

It might be that you do not know the meaning of a literary text, yet, you would not waste your time if you read it merely for self-enjoyment. You might find yourself excited and your feeling moved only by the particular rhythm and vocalization of the poem; you might be taken altogether by its surprising metaphors and astounding structuring.

Viewed differently, despite the variety of meaning that characterizes literary texts, readers' reaction can, noticeably, be homogeneous. They may reflect joy or sadness, interest or disinterest, etc, regardless of any individual understanding of the text.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that a reader (of any piece of literature) should carry out a **dual** task: looking for meaning and enjoying its aesthetic aspects even though they are not so distinct from one another. That is to say, the reader performs what is called in this study the **Dual Reading**.

One who seems not to be sure of the meaning of a text might have formulated his (or her) own version of its meaning via intuition and expectation, satisfied with what s/he has got, and leaving things to the critic to derive meaning which is necessary to establish relationship between linguistic elements and literary techniques combined in a text.

Bibliography

Al-Ibadi, H. N. Jabr, (2006) "The Hierarchical Organisation of Sentence Meaning in Selected English Literary Texts". Unpublished thesis. The University of Mustansiriya. Baghdad.

- Benveniste, Emile. (1966) Problems de linguistique Generale. Paris: Gallimard; English trans. Problrms in General Linguistics . USA, Miami: University of Miami, 1970).
- Boothe, Waynce, C. (1961) The Rhetoric of Fiction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chapman, R. (1973) Linguistics and Literature: An Introduction to Literary Stylistics . Sydney: Edward Arnold(Australia) Pty. Ltd.
- Dijk, Teun A. van, ED. (1976) Pragmatics of language and literature. Amsterdam: North Holland P.C.
- Miall, D.S. & and Kuiken, D.(1994) Foregrounding, Defamaliriazation, affect; Response to a Short Story. Poetics, 22.
- Pagnini, Marcello. (1987). The Pragmatics of Literature. English trans, by Nancy Jones-Henry. USA. Indiana University Press.
- Pei, Mario. (1972) The Story of the English Language. Murray Printing Company.
- Sartre, J. P. (1984) Qu'est-ce-que la lattarature? Paris: Gallimard; English trans. What is Literature? London: Methuen, 1950.
- Schmidt, Siegfried.(1976) Towards a pragmatic Interpretation of Fictionality, in van, Dijk, ed., 1976.

الخلاصة

في هذه الدراسة وانطلاقاً من التجربة الشخصية في ميدان الكتابة الشعرية تم التوصل إلى نمط جديد للتعاطي مع النص من وجهة نظر القارئ، فعلى الرغم من أن النص يتطلب أكثر من قراءة واحدة لغرض تحقيق الفهم ومن بين المستويات المتعددة للقراءة التي يخبرها القارئ في مواجهة النص تشخص أمامنا قراءتان، الأولى: القراءة المتعقبة للمعنى والثانية تلك المحفزة جمالياً إذ يمكن وضعهما تحت عنوان أعم هو القراءة المزدوجة للنص. وقد يحدث أحياناً أن القارئ لا يتوصل إلى معنى للنص بالمرّة نتيجة للتلاعب الماكر للكاتب باللغة وتوظيفه لإمكانياتها الكامنة، وهنا يمكن القول أن القارئ لا يخسر من وقته لو قرأ النص مستمتعاً بإيقاعه مثلاً أو بموسيقاه أو بالتشكيلات اللغوية المدهشة غير المتوقعة التي قد يكون لها من الأثر ما يفضي به إلى تداعيات وانثيالات جمالية تسمو به إلى مستويات ذهنية رفيعة.