

Is the meaning of a literary text created by the author, the reader or the text i...

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The meaning of a literary text is one important issue for the studies of literature. How do we know what the text is supposed to mean? There are different ways of approaching this issue: One is to consider meaning is created by the author; while another is that the meaning is contained in the text itself with its formal properties; a third way to look at literary meaning is to think that the meaning of a literary text is also created by the reader himself, by his response to the text. The author as the creator of the meaning

It is difficult to know what the author of a work of literature wanted it to mean when he was writing it. We usually only have the text itself to study its meaning, so we can only speculate about what the author wanted his work to mean. We can approach this problem by reading more works by the same author, by finding out the cultural values of its time, and by knowing the author's life. By knowing the author's life we can begin to understand some part of their works since they usually reflect facts from their own lives in their works.

An example of that could be Daniel Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' where we can see some similarities between Crusoe's life and Defoe's. What Defoe wrote on his book is connected to his life, his family and his friends. All the similarities between their lives can be seen throughout the whole story. One example of this would be this extract at the beginning of the story: "My father, a wise and grave man, gave me serious and excellent counsel against what he foresaw was my design," (Defoe, 2008: 1)

Daniel Defoe was a third child, just like Robinson Crusoe, and was also a rebel who sometimes had problems with his father, just like Crusoe. Daniel Defoe also enjoyed travelling, a taste he gave to Robinson as well. Defoe's father wanted him to become a minister, but instead he chose to become a tradesman so he could travel and visit new and exotic places; we can see there another big similarity with Crusoe's life since Robinson's father wanted him to study law, but he decided to become a sailor in order to travel around the world, just like Defoe.

He told me it was for men of desperate fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring, superior Fortunes on the other, who went abroad upon adventures, to rise by enterprize, and make themselves famous in undertakings of a nature out of the common road; that these things were either too far above me, or too far below me; that mine was the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which he had found by long experience was the best state in the world, the most suited to human Happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and Sufferings of the mechanick part of mankind. (Defoe, 2008: 2) We can see in that extract of the book how his father tried to convince him to study law instead of becoming a sailor, just like Defoe's father did. But Daniel Defoe didn't go much further into Crusoe's relationship with his parents for one reason, his parents became a symbol of how society always tried to prevent the low class people from trying to become richer and more powerful.

Daniel Defoe not only reflected his life on this book but also his ideas and beliefs. In a society that persecuted people because of their political or

religious beliefs, Daniel Defoe believed that religious and political freedom should be two rights that every society should have, and Robinson's island reflects this. Robinson created a society system that proved that a utopian society could be created, even if it only was for one person. It was now that I began sensibly to feel how much more happy this life I now led was, with all its miserable circumstances, than the wicked, cursed, abominable life I led all the past part of my days; and now I changed both my sorrows and my joys; my very desires altered, my affections changed their gusts, and my delights were perfectly new from what they were at my first coming, or, indeed, for the two years past. (Defoe, 2008: 113)"

In this quotation we can see how Robinson is much happier in his island with this 'utopia' he created than in the society he left behind even though he thought this isolation was a punishment from God, proving that Daniel Defoe was reflecting his own beliefs in this book giving it meaning for the readers. ...and now my life began to be so easy that I began to say to myself that could I but have been safe from more savages, I cared not if I was never to remove from the place where I lived (Defoe, 2008: 207).

I lived there...perfectly and completely happy, if any such thing as complete happiness can be formed in a sublunary state (Defoe, 2008: 217). " The island had a great effect on Robinson Crusoe's life. He developed mentally, psychically and spiritually; he lived on that island as a wanderer at first, just trying to survive, but ended up feeling like home there and this island was like the Promised Land for him. We see Defoe's influence there, since one of his biggest influences when writing this book was the Bible.

All this show us how the writer, with his own background, can give meaning to a literary text by merely reflecting his own life, experiences and beliefs in his book. The text as the creator of meaning Some authors believe that the formal properties of a text can give meaning to the text itself. The grammar, the vocabulary or the style the author uses gives meaning to his work and makes it possible for the readers to come to almost the same interpretation of the text.

However, I believe that a text can't actually give meaning since that meaning comes from the traditions and cultural background that each person has. People from different periods or different cultural backgrounds will arrive at really different interpretations of the same text, so we couldn't give an answer to the question of whether a text really means what it means to a reader by just thinking about the meaning that the formal properties of the text give to the text itself.

The reader as the creator of the meaning It is clear that the reader has a really important part in giving meaning to the text. Meaning exists as long as the text means something for someone and a text gives a big variety of responses depending on the reader. The meaning of a text can be seen as 'social' since language and traditions are shared, and that is what makes the reader give meaning to a text. When we are reading a text we are using our background and our culture to understand and give meaning to a text.

That culture is not only ours, it is shared, which may make different people have the same response to a text because they share the same cultural background. Another interpretation of meaning is that it is contextual. We

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can change the context of a text and it will completely change the meaning. For the reader, giving meaning to a text, is not only a matter of reading the text itself, but also of getting to know the context and background that text may have in order to understand what the author was thinking when writing his book. Literature has its own codes and techniques.

All the different styles and ways of writing literature give the text a different meaning so the more we know about those 'codes' the easier it will be to understand them and therefore give meaning to a text. In conclusion, the meaning of a book is the mixture of both what the author wanted his work to mean and the reader's response to it. Both the author's and the reader's backgrounds are important in terms of understanding the meaning of a text, however, it is impossible to say exactly what did the author mean when writing his book since each reader has its own response to it.