

Are we overanalysing literature?

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We've all been there before- sat in an English class teetering on the last dregs of our will to live as our teacher demands to know what exactly the colour of Heathcliff's coattails symbolises. Growing up, I always used to feel that people should just accept that maybe writers wrote simply to paint a vivid picture in our heads and let that be the end of it. The almost pedantic analyses we were subjected to made me want to gouge my eyeballs out with melon-ballers and stopper my ears with them. I was convinced that my sacred duty on earth was to reclaim reading as a form of escapism and leave behind the drudgery of "stylistic devices" and "metaphors" and "motifs." As I've matured as a reader, however, my viewpoint has taken a 180 degree turn.

In my art class the other day, the teacher mentioned the concept of "1+1=3," the idea that the meeting of two things creates something new. I was floored by how perfectly this concept could be applied to literary analysis. To illustrate my points, I turn, as I often do in times of need, to the Sound of Music. In the musical, Maria sings: "A bell is no bell 'til you ring it, A song is no song 'til you sing it, And love in your heart Wasn't put there to stay - Love isn't love 'Til you give it away." Similarly, a book isn't much of a book until it's been read.

And the beautiful thing about reading is that it's a collaborative experience. An author can write whatever he or she wants, but 50% of the reading experience is up to the reader. A book can be read at many different levels and through many different lenses. When I read a book, I can decide what the author meant! It might not be what they meant at all, they might balk at my interpretation, but guess what? I don't care. Obviously, there are

parameters- I can't just throw my copy of " Wuthering Heights" in the air screaming " HEATHCLIFF IS A TRANSMAN" just for the heck of it (well, I could, but that would be completely unrelated to literary analysis). I believe that as long as one's opinions about a work of literature can be properly supported by textual or contextual evidence, they are valid.

If an author plays his or her cards right, he or she should be able to convey a message well enough without having to spell it out for the reader. An equally skilled author can leave a story as open to interpretation as he or she likes. It's what's so exciting about books- while you're reading one, the text belongs to you as much as to the author, and if you believe that the " Under the Greenwood Tree" song in " As You Like It" is a metaphor for Shakespeare's subversion of the idealised perception of peasantry by the wealthy people of his day, far be it from me to stop you! Analysis for me is a wonderfully creative process that ties straight back to $1+1= 3$. The author presents the reader with a text in all it's glory, and the way the reader interprets that text fashions it into something new entirely. The idea that I can work with Emily Bronte or William Shakespeare from my own bed thrills me to the core, and it doesn't stop there.

Everyone on the planet is different, and that means that everyone's interpretation of a book is different. Let's say then that at a wild guess, 10 million people in the world have read " Wuthering Heights " since its publication. Therefore there are 10 million different interpretations of Wuthering Heights around. Let me reiterate- there are 10 million different versions of Wuthering Heights in the world, simply by virtue of it having been read and interpreted by 10 million different people. And when these people

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come together to discuss and exchange ideas about the book, that creates even more versions. Good versions, bad versions, scary versions, sad versions... the possibilities are endless and that excites me more than I can possibly express! Of course I'm not saying everyone has to deeply analyse everything they read- I'm definitely not above curling up with a beaten-up Neil Gaiman novel with the soul purpose of losing myself in a story.

Some people will always believe that details in literature are overanalysed, and others will believe that the same details aren't delved into enough. And everyone is right. Reading belongs to the reader, and as such, the reader has the right to read in any way he or she sees fit.