



Different approaches to the interpretation of a literary work

Tatiana Victorovna Mazaeva¹, Alsou Mirzayanovna Aydarova²

1 Kazan Federal University, Naberezhnye Chelny Institute, TVMazaeva@gmail.ru

2 Kazan Federal University, Naberezhnye Chelny Institute, aidalmir@yandex.ru

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the problem of approaches to the interpretation of the text. It highlights the viewpoints of both Russian and foreign scholars on the text analysis to promote readers' relevant assessment and interpretation. The authors research the text from the view point of genre, history, context and individual aspects. They maintain that due consideration of the work from different angles is the cornerstone of a comprehensive analysis.

Keyword: interpretation of the text, text, genre, linguistic and cultural aspects



1. INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of a literary work is a complex and multifaceted process comprising not only the theoretical background of the subject but also linguistic and cultural aspects, phraseology, lexicology, stylistics of the language under study as well as the world outlook, life experience and perception of the reader. It's the combination of these factors that makes the interpretation a uniquely individual process as long as it implies interaction and communication between the writer and the reader. Meanwhile it should be noted that the interpretation of the literary work as a whole and the interpretation of the extract of the same literary work could be significantly different in terms of determining the idea, the subject matter, the setting, the narrative methods, the conflict, the character presentation, etc.

2. METHODS

Russian linguists distinguish several approaches to the interpretation of a literary work taking into consideration different components of the comprehension of the situation involved in the interpretation of the text or message. Thus, the text can be considered from the viewpoint of philology of the language it's written in, what is confined only by the boundaries of the intertextual analysis. Obviously, the reader dealing with the text in a foreign language may encounter linguistic peculiarities, clichés or turns of phrase that do not have equivalents in his native language such as phraseological units. This undoubtedly suggests a high level of language proficiency and that is precisely why is considered to be the cutting edge and the final stage of dealing with the text in linguistic colleges and universities. Thus, for example, handling the sentence "He put on a gown, airs and water to boil for coffee" the reader should be familiar with the idiomatic expression "to put on airs" in the meaning "to behave in a way when someone tries to make themselves seem more important than they are" and consequently he should be able to determine zeugma with a hint of humor.

The Russian researches A.S. Grinstein, A.A. Harkovkaya suggest that the text should be considered from the viewpoint of historical background and social environment, significant events that took place at that time, the author and the reader's opinion. The reader is to focus on and analyze the narration, the narrator, narrative methods, plot structure technique, the character presentation, the setting, the subject matter and the



main idea of the literary work and the author's attitude to the characters and current events while interpreting a piece of text.

3. RESULTS

The text can also be viewed as one of the works of a particular author taking into account his biography, creative pursuit, the epoch, the set of values prevalent in that period, everything that could inspire and motivate the author to create the literary work. For example, analyzing the extract of the novel by Harper Lee "To Kill a Mockingbird" the reader is to take on board the notorious historic events, the racial discrimination that was especially acute in the state of Alabama when the book was in the making during the writer's creative stage. This social setting enables the reader to understand the main idea of the work as well as it throws light on the characters' actions and reveals their psychological portrayal and motives.

It stands to reason that the personal experience of the reader, his mindset and world outlook, his intellectual level have a crucial impact on the comprehension and interpretation of the text. Even such factors as the current emotional state and the psychological frame of mind at a certain point could be vital and influence the reader's perception and interpretation of the information. The literary work should fit the boundaries of personal worldviews, resonate with the reader's inner world and spiritual aspirations, correspond to his interests, gender and age peculiarities.

To have a more comprehensive understanding of the text one should deem it necessary to regard viewpoints of several characters, evaluate the situation through different characters' eyes, consider their attitude to the proceedings and circumstances, compare and contrast different types of perception and finally draw relevant conclusions. Thus in the above mentioned work by Harper Lee the narration is given from the viewpoint of a nine-year-old girl, the attorney's daughter. The reader has an opportunity to evaluate the protagonist, members of the jury, the prosecution and the audience through her eyes and perceive the whole situation the way she did, getting a subjective and intimate picture, making the reader the participant of events, allowing the reader to burrow into the character. The assessment of the situation from different angles creates a realistic and multidimensional work, enables to see the whole picture in terms of character presentation. What is more, obtrusive or unobtrusive type of the narrator plays a



significant role and affects the reader's attitude to the characters and understanding of the whole idea.

As for foreign scholars, Denis Delaney, Ciaran Ward, Carla Rho Fiorina in their renowned work on the text interpretation "Fields of Vision" suggest analyzing the text from the same angles the Russian researches do and highlight plot, narrator and narrative techniques, conflict, characters, symbols, imagery, etc. However, the terms they introduce might differ from those the Russian linguists propose. For example the theme of the literary work stands for the idea, the subject denotes the theme; a limited omniscient narrator is synonymous to an observer in the terminology of some Russian scholars, etc. Yet, there is no striking discrepancy between what they propose and the treatment of the issue by the Russian linguists, which gives every reason to believe they consolidate their efforts in this field. Even the title "Fields of Vision" suggests itself and resembles implication calling for thorough consideration of different viewpoints.

The text can also be interpreted from the perspective of genre peculiarities to help the reader to grasp the artistic conception and aesthetic values. The researcher Puidokhus stresses that understanding of the genre of the literary work gives the incentive to the acquisition of the artistic idea and helps to make a step from the understanding of the contents to the understanding of the meaning and intention. [Puidokhus 2012:25].

4. DISCUSSION

Genres differ from each other in their peculiarities of compositional structure of the text, narrative methods, the nature of space-time continuum, the size of the work, stylistic devices and the principles of arrangement of linguistic means.

The genre analysis in their historical development enables to discover major directions of evolution of the literary process. It may be possible, as long as coming a long way, genre manifestations "preserve their dominating characteristic devices" (B.V. Tomashevsky), which are time-resistant. Among these dominating features certain devices of word usage and the use of grammar and syntactical constructions play a crucial part.

Genre form is the result of interaction of literary and non-literary genres in the literary process: thus, when the prose was under way the aesthetic transformation of such forms as autobiography, letter, chronicle determines the origin of belles-letters novels and short stories, autobiographical novels, short stories and novellas, chronicle novels.



Consequently, the genre form is in the first place the form of non-literary genre formation (the original genre) that the author focuses on, transforming it while creating a literary work. The distinction between original genres such as a regular letter, a regular short story, etc and the derivative genres like novel, drama that were formed in circumstances of difficult historical and cultural interaction which thereafter assimilated and processed the original genres, is vital for the linguistic analysis of the text.

Genre form, like genre, is historically changeable. Its development reflects the evolution of styles and changes in the character of the literary process. In every epoch “the genre form has its own compositional laws of cohesion of word rows, its own norms of lexical fluctuations, its own tendencies of internal word dynamics, idiosyncrasies of semantics and syntax. [<http://www.proza.ru/2011/05/07/1451>]. One of the tasks of the linguistic analysis is to detect them, “determine the precise boundaries and fundamental divisions among different spheres of speech of literary works and to show mixed borderline cases and their linguistic merits in terms of literature and different contexts of “social dialectics”. [<http://www.proza.ru/2011/05/07/1451>] Genre form and genre serve as a particular model which might have a number of definite manifestations or implementations. It possesses the character of a relatively closed structure that resembles a network of relations in a definite image arranged by linguistic means. Performing a genre-building function these means have varied character and could be loosely integrated into three groups on the grounds of their performing function. They can participate in:

- 1) The formation of semantic and thematic aspect of the text;
- 2) The formation of narrative structure and building a definite communicative situation;
- 3) The arrangement of text composition.

For example, interpreting the text or an extract of detective genre one could express the main idea with the help of the English proverbs “The truth will out” or “Crime doesn’t pay”, the idea upon that will not vary greatly.

During the interpretation one should take into consideration cultural and historical environment. The historical background doesn’t only create realistic ambience but reveals the atmosphere, characterizes heroes indirectly, helps to determine the conflict (local/multiple) and understand the characters’ motivations, as well as grasp the



message of the whole work. In historical works the historical and cultural setting plays the key role and serves as the foundation for the analysis.

Ippolit Ten considered that art is shaped by three factors – race, environment, historical setting. From his perspective the race factor was connected with the conception of the national character stressing that northern people were slow enough, while southern people were temperamental and emotional. As an illustrative example he compared and contrasted the English people and the Italians. The conception of national character from his standpoint could account for the impact one culture had on another: the affinity between the Italian and French people as the Italian Renaissance dates back to Romanesque (French) troubadour poetry. Dante defined the impact of the French poetry as ‘a new delightful style’.

As far as the environment factor was concerned, Ten uncovered it through the conception of natural environment and justified the harmonious ancient art by harmonious Mediterranean climate. The national character and surroundings could have cultural consequences and find expression in art. Conventionally Literature adopted this impact in the form of literary style or genre form since the European literature was more ancient and more developed. However, adopting the literary model writers gave volumes of new meaning to it that resulted in the lack of language barriers in the 19-the beginning of the 20th century.

Any literary phenomenon is connected with a particular historical setting that creates cultural and historical context. The third factor of cultural and historical aspect influenced the formation of social study of literature.

The new in art is not necessarily always flawless. Ten asserted that every historical period in literature should be interpreted within the boundaries of those traditions that existed during that time span. That accounts for the complexity of understanding of the literary process. For instance, the medieval poetry cannot get a poorer assessment than contemporary poetry; Nekhrasov’s poetry used to take precedence over Pushkin’s poetry in the contemporaries’ opinion, which was afterwards accepted as a historic fact, the hallmark of the period. The greatest achievement of the historical and cultural method is that this phenomenon determined criteria for national idiosyncrasy [<http://www.proza.ru/2011/05/07/1451>].

5. CONCLUSIONS



In conclusion one might infer that a sound comprehensive text analysis needs consideration from different perspectives to yield relevant and appropriate outcome, since one or a few criteria will give the reader incomplete, incorrect or distorted ideas and will fail to be multidimensional. As for the perception of the foreign text, its comprehension is directly connected with the fact how well the participants of communication have mastered the language they communicate in and how well they manage their psychological and emotional state, how well they make use of relevant social norms and attitudes common among these members of the culture what makes the success in intercultural communication impossible.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

7. REFERENCES

- Bakhtin M.M. Aesthetics of verbal creativity. S.S. Averintseva, S.G. Bocharova. 2nd ed. M.: Art, 1986. 444 p.
- Cultural-historical method in literary criticism. Available at:
<http://www.proza.ru/2011/05/07/1451>, open access.
- Dontcheva-Navratilova O., Povolná R. Discourse Interpretation: Approaches and Applications. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2012. Available at:
<http://www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/58551>, open access.
- Denis D., Ciaran W., Carla Rho F. Fields of Vision. Volume 1. Longman, 2009. 464 p.
- Garzone G. Textual analysis and interpreting research. Available at:
<https://www.openstarts.units.it/dspace/bitstream/10077/2449/1/04.pdf>, open access.
- Ivanova T.M. Art text in the lessons of Russian as a foreign language as a way of interpreting artistic concepts // Interpretation of the text: linguistic, literary and methodological aspects: III International Scientific Conference. Chita, 2010. P. 250-253.
- Lee H. To Kill a Mockingbird. Available at: <http://cleveracademy.vn/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird.pdf>, open access.



- Mantzavinos C. Text Interpretation as a Scientific Activity. Available at:
<http://www.mantzavinos.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Text-Interpretation-as-a-Scientific-Activity-JGPS-Website-Final.pdf>, open access.
- Pervukhina S.V. Approaches to understanding and interpreting the artistic text // Interpretation of the text: linguistic, literary and methodological aspects: III International Scientific Conference. Chita, 2010. P. 75-69.
- Puidokhus Y.Y. Variety of types of text interpretation as the basis of professional culture of students of the Foreign Languages faculty // Pedagogical and psychological sciences: past, present and future: international correspondence scientific-practical conference, Novosibirsk, 2012.
- Simpson P. Stylistics. Available at: <http://www.twirpx.com/file/160300/>, open access.
- Vasilyeva V.V. Interpretation of text in education. Perm, 1997. 168 p.
- Vinogradov V.V. About the language of artistic prose. M., 1980. P. 73.
- Wales K. A Dictionary of Stylistics. Available at:
<http://www.ebook777.com/dictionary-stylistics-3rd-edition/>, open access.