

PROSPECTS OF LITERATURE AS SEEN BY WESTERN POST-MODERNIST CRITICS

First Author*

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ABSTRACT: *It was not until the 1960s that literature became taught as an independent discipline to underpin the Eurocentric thought and Western tradition. However, with the spread of postcolonial literature, there was the question of what literary texts are written in neutral language, since literature has most of the time been presented with biased concepts to serve the Westerners and to perpetuate their ideas (Snell-Hornby,1984K; Kühnhardt and Mayer, 2019). Nowadays, learners must be encouraged to develop their own interpretive opinions. The traditional idea that the teacher is the “doctor who knows” has become outdated and is no longer valid. According to modern critics, plurality of meaning leads to recognition of the others, their culture and their way of life; and the vast array of meanings turn our personal ideas into a part of constructive divergence (Coyle et al., 1988).*

KEYWORDS: criticism, respond, identity, others, weigh, learners, meaning

آفاق الأدب

ما بعد الحداثة في نظر النقاد الغربيين

ملخص:

الى حدود الستينيات من القرن الماضي كان الأدب الغربي يدرس كمادة مستقلة داعمة للفكر الأوروبي والتقاليد الغربية. لكن ظهور الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار وانتشاره برزت إشكالية كيفية تمييز النصوص الأدبية المحايدة عن غيرها لأن الأدب إيديولوجياتهم وانتشار أفكارهم (سنيل آنذاك كان غالبا ما يقدم مفاهيم متحيزة في خدمة الغربيين والحفاظ على هورني، 1984؛ كونهاردت وماير، 2019) أما في وقتنا الحاضر وبحسب النقاد المعاصرين، إن الفكرة التقليدية المؤمنة بأن الأفكار الغربية تعد صالحة لما سواهم لم تعد مقبولة. كما هو الحال بالمسبة للمعلم الذي لم يعد "الطبيب الذي يعرف كل شيء". إن تعدد المعاني بات يؤدي إلى الاعتراف بالآخرين وثقافتهم وأسلوب حياتهم، كما صارت أفكارنا الشخصية جزء من مجموعة واسعة من المعاني مكونة خليط غير متجانس لكن بناء (كويل وآخرون، 1988).

الكلمات المفتاحية: النقاد المعاصرين ، الاستجابة، الهوية، الآخرين ، المتعلمون، المعاني

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INTRODUCTION

The prevailing trend in language teaching focuses on the importance of reading about other peoples in the world, especially when these people are native speakers in the case of learning a foreign language. Most linguists and language practitioners agree that knowing others' literature opens a window on their culture. However, both teachers and learners of a foreign language are faced with the problem of finding the literary texts that are suitable for learning. The choice of the kind of text depends on what objective teachers intend to reach in teaching a foreign language.

For centuries literature was taught as an "interdiscipline" course in Literary Studies and Translation Studies. During the 1st half of the 20 century, literature became taught as an independent discipline for a colonial educational purpose.

The Colonial View

In the past, language was not taught as an independent discipline at schools. A course in language would be a part of the teaching of philology, classics, rhetoric language; therefore, the origins of teaching literature came from those studies that have shaped its contents and pedagogy (Chambers and Gregory, 2006).

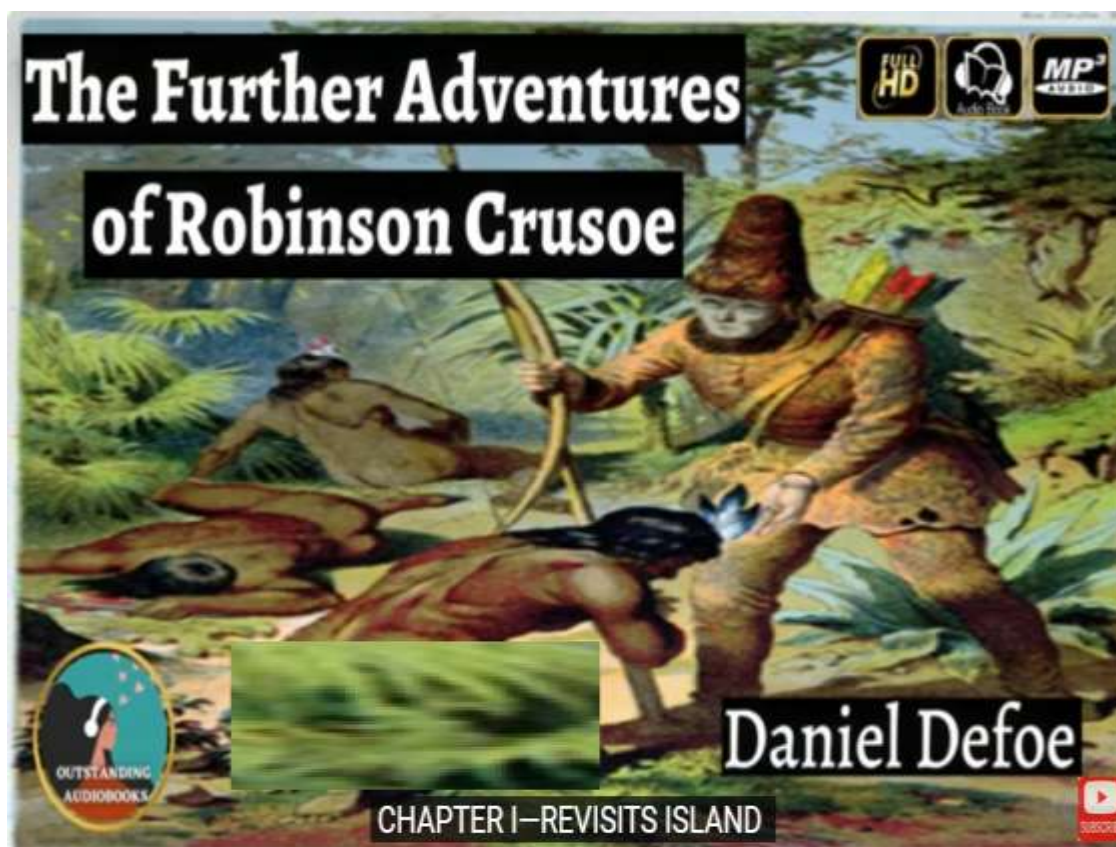
Similarly literature was taught as an "interdiscipline" course in Literary Studies and Translation Studies. It was not until the 1960s that literature became taught as an independent discipline to underpin the Eurocentric thought and Western tradition. However, with the spread of postcolonial literature, there was the question of what literary texts are written in neutral language, since literature has most of the time been presented with biased concepts to serve the Westerners and to perpetuate their ideas (Kühnhardt and Mayer, 2019; Snell-Hornby, 1984).

The British colonial possessions spread around the world encompassing 20% of the land area of the Earth and 23% of its population (The Sun Never Sets on the Empire). As a consequence to the British control of the world, the novel, as an effective medium of expression, was used by the British instructors to disseminate the Western thought that the other societies outside Europe in Asia and Africa were primitive and to inculcate the idea that the colonised subjects were too much far behind the civilized Europeans (Hetherington, 1978).

Literature became a tool to serve the Westerners and to perpetuate their ideas (Kühnhardt & Mayer, 2019; Snell-Hornby 1984). A simple reading of Daniel

Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* presents the novel as a historical fiction describing an adventure in the woods of Africa

A post-colonial reading of *Robinson Crusoe* reveals that Defoe intentionally undiscovered the depth of the Western ideology. The intention of Defoe as a propagandist of colonisation was to distort the history and culture of Africa by creating a new set of values and traditions for Africans. When using his gun to protect Friday from his captors, Crusoe, the 'Master' began a programme of imperialism on the island. Culturally, he started by imposing himself on others, the 'natives', when naming his servant Friday without giving the least importance to what his name had been. Also under the threat of the gun, Crusoe was able to enslave 'the poor savage' and to put himself to the rank of a 'master'. Defoe wanted to implant the idea that the white man was more powerful than the whites' others and to make this prevailing thought in Europe spread in the world (Kehindi, 2009).



Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, 1719



A European observing African daily life.

A post-colonial reading of Robinson Crusoe reveals that Defoe intentionally undiscovered the depth of the Western ideology. The intention of Defoe as a propagandist.

The poor savage... was trembling as if he had been taken prisoner, and had just been to be killed... I smiled at him and looked pleasantly and beckoned to him to come still nearer; at length he came close to me, and then he kneeled down again, kissed the ground, and laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head; this, it seems, was in token of swearing to be my slave forever... I began to speak to him and teach him to speak to me; and first, I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life... I likewise taught him to say "Master". (Defoe, p 169)



When using his gun to protect Friday from his captors, Crusoe, the 'Master' began a programme of imperialism on the island. Culturally, he started by imposing himself on others, the 'natives', when naming his servant Friday without giving the least importance to what his name had been.

Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, students in literature classes were still taught what was thought to be 'correctness', concerning tenses, inflection, interpretations and meanings. The right interpretations and meanings were not those of the student's, reflecting his own 'opinion', but the ideas were those the instructor would agree on and would reward learners for taking them in.

The Oriental View

A Chinese proverb says: 'to know the road ahead, ask those coming back' (Woolf, 2005). This means that as long as man is a social being, man has to benefit from the experience of his predecessors and contemporary experts. The ideal view is that humans are equipped with innate capacities and faculty; we must admit that our thoughts are insufficient and our minds need to complement one another. Therefore, linguists, pedagogues and postmodern critics, nowadays, reject any view bearing an intention to expel the others' thoughts.

The Post-modern View

According to Foucault, humans have reached the point where their intelligibility comes from what was for many centuries thought of as stupid and nonsense. This willingness to accept others' norms of life is known as the ability to 'decentre'. It is a progress in our way of thinking derived from our persuasion that human values, beliefs and conducts are not absolute.

Reader-response / Hermeneutic theory

Barthes believes that the relation between the author and the reader is the commitment between them both. While the former exhibits ideas, the latter calls upon them and his comments may rise to the level of 'criticism'.

Sartre backs the view that there is a mutual relationship between an author and a reader, or else, literature is an exchange between a writer and a reader. The former expects the reader to be authentic in his free reading and getting his own understanding, instead of getting a biased meaning.

The learner develops skills of interpreting and relating the various thoughts and items constituting a literary text (*savoir comprendre*), i.e., the ability to interpret a document or event from a culture different from his, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from his own.

For Holmes, “A word is not crystal, transparent and unchanged; it is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in colour and content according to the circumstances and the time in which it is used” (Geist, 1970, p.77)

Conclusion

From what has been stated above we understand that the post-structuralist, reader-response or hermeneutic theory adopts the notion of multiple meaning, i.e., they are in favour of ‘plurality of text’ for the purpose of elevating the literary text aesthetic value. There is a focus on the individual literary work in isolation from. The learner’s modest experience cannot be overlooked and therefore he is expected to add layers of depth to a text, depending on his prior knowledge and understanding. Meaning changes from a society to another and from a learner to another because meaning belongs to all people everywhere, not to a particular class or country. Consequently, the Algerian student must be aware of: firstly of his own identity constituents that certainly shape his personality, and secondly of the various cultural currents and views that either to add necessary knowledge to the learner’s education or might endanger his life as a righteous citizen, and therefore; he must resist. The inclusion of literature was necessary. A miscellaneous of literary items makes up sections of the secondary school textbook. These refer to our historical background, the role Algeria in the geopolitical sphere and our national, cultural heritage.

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in the literature. Particularly as Algerian teachers, we have got to set ourselves and equip our students with the tools to develop their critical mind, ‘positively’.

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