

The Meaning in the Folds of the Contemporary Algerian Novel

Dr. Zaoui Mohammed *

Department of Arabic Language and
Literature University of Ghardaia
(Algeria)
zaoui.mohammed@univ-ghardaia.dz

الاستلام: ٢٠٢٥/٠٢/٢٤ القبول: ٢٠٢٥/٠٤/٢٢
النشر: ٢٠٢٥/٠٦/٠٢

Abstract :

The most notable feature of Algerian narrative text can be described as its semantic multiplicity at the level of the uttered text. This is achieved through a direct or indirect interpretation of the signs and clues embedded in the text, which determine the intended meaning of the text. Meaning is inherent in the utterance itself or in the implicit meaning within it. Hence, the meaning in any utterance does not deviate from the original meaning at its origin or the second meaning generated according to the context and the relationship between the speaker and the listener, until the meaning emerges as intended by the author or at least closely resembles it in one way or another. This is done by describing the functions of the composition and deconstruction of the creative text, which are ensured by the act of reading as a necessary and effective condition to reveal the meanings of the text. This includes a description of the journey of meaning and significance in narrative discourse, starting from the initial thresholds of the narrative text, passing through the linguistic expression, then the symbols, and finally the multiple themes.

Keywords: Meaning – Novel – Text – Significance

* Corresponding author:

Introduction:

The literary text necessitates the existence of a deep meaning that lies beneath the words, and we can extract this meaning or these meanings in various ways, starting with the act of reading. It enriches the reader intellectually and makes them employ part of themselves imaginatively. Thus, the value of the text fluctuates between multiple readings of the literary text in interpreting the meanings embedded in its phrases, with the reader alone discovering them.

We can infer the problem of literature, which stems from the very nature of language itself, its literary nature. This works to employ the linguistic mechanism away from its simple conventional meaning towards what is known as exploring the aesthetics of language through metaphor. Metaphor, in general, is a linguistic process within a framework that transcends the dictionary, leading to the contextualization that gives the word an elegance that moves it from the realm of reality to the vastness of metaphor. This allows a single word to serve both an expressive and aesthetic function simultaneously.

Thus, the reader heavily relies on the structure of the text, its internal texture, and all its internal and external relationships to create the necessary general context for understanding the text. Therefore, every new reader brings their own experience, individual culture, values of their time, and concerns, looking at the text through them. This multiplicity of readings reflects the value of the text in an artistic tableau influenced by the general atmosphere of reading.^١

Realism of Narrative and the Vigor of Language:

Our reality today is based on narrative par excellence, where the novel has reached an advanced stage of cognitive awareness, unlike other literary genres. Contemporary novelists strive for a modern and national, Arab, or international distinction through experimentation and the disruption of the narrative structure in meaning, formulation, and design. Due to the influence and fascination with postmodern philosophy and the utilization of structural, semiotic, and deconstructive trends, as well as the aesthetics of reading, contemporary Algerian literature developed under the immense progress in various aspects that shape the foundation of writing. During this period, new developments emerged, reflecting the transformation in the narrative writing style, particularly with respect to the most crucial element of narrative construction: language. Language directs the novel to the reader, who becomes the recipient of the narrative discourse, with additional features such as intentionality and the poetic aesthetics within the novel.

Modern Arabic literature has seen the emergence of multiple narrative forms, including the short story, novella, narrative, autobiography, and so on. Here, we focus on the novel, which deals with a complete topic, filled with the lives of one or more characters. The reader leaves the novel having comprehended the lives of the protagonist(s) through their various stages. The field of the novel offers great space for the writer to uncover the lives of their characters, regardless of how long the events may take. The emergence of the novel in Arabic literature coincided with the beginning of the Renaissance era, and there has been much discussion among critics, both orientalist and Arabs, about its origins, with two main opposing views: one believes the novel is present in Arab heritage, while the other denies any connection between the novel and earlier narrative forms.^٢

Although many researchers have denied the connection between the origins of the Arabic novel and traditional Arab storytelling, this link is strongly present, just as the presence of the novel itself is.^٣

The novel is considered the most influential and expressive art form in literature. This applies to the search for personal identity within the novelistic art, an identity that harmonizes with the writer and their characters. Through this, the emergence of the novel as a distinct literary genre signifies an advanced stage of cognitive awareness, in contrast to other literary forms.^٤

The novel has become primarily a linguistic phenomenon and a fundamental element of our culture. Alongside other components of narrative discourse—such as narrative perspective, temporal structure, space, characters, description, events, and dialogue—language remains the true distinguishing factor between the novel and other literary genres. Language serves as the expressive and formal material upon which the creative message is built, transmitted by the author to the reader through various forms of sentences: narrative, descriptive, scenic, rhetorical, and literal. Hence, it is highly emphasized, being a medium of communication between the creator and the recipient. It carries the author's intentions, direct and indirect propositions, using fixed expressions, intertextual references, declarative expressions, or metaphorical, shifting, and symbolic techniques. Therefore, any novelist who does not master language and its literal and metaphorical dictionaries, nor knows how to employ it artistically and effectively within communicative and contextual frameworks, will not succeed in being a distinguished novelist. Thus, it can be said that the novel is the depiction of language, the portrayal of the self and reality, based on linguistic structuring.^٥

In the novel, language is experimental and poetic, shaped by multiple authorities: the authority of the writer, who attempts to ride the waves of language and manipulate its words to reach the intended textual meaning with a unique style and distinctive nature, achieving poetic language that blends with stylistics, forming the lyrical quality of the discourse. There is also the authority of the text itself, which implies

strength and the ability to guide its meaning to reach the reader through the revelation of its contents. The authority of the reader or recipient of the narrative discourse primarily focuses on reading mechanisms, ways to enhance them, and their suitability with the narrative proposal. Through these three narrative authorities, the signs that shape the discourse are revealed and appear in the linguistic enrichment of narrative creativity.^٦

Meaning of the Text or Significance of the Text:

Significance or the semantic level is one of the most prominent linguistic issues closely related to style and criticism because the core of linguistic and literary studies revolves around the meaning of words and their impact on the listeners' emotions, as well as the choice of words by the speaker and their intended meaning.^٧

Thus, the relationships within a given field revolve around synonymy, antonymy, inclusion, and implication, or the relationship of the whole to its parts, or contrast.

However, words within a single field do not have equal status. There are basic words and marginal ones. The basic words are those that govern important contrasts within the field. Scholars have provided different criteria to distinguish between the two types, such as:^٨

- A basic word has a single lexical unit.
- A basic word is not limited to a specific or narrow field of use. For example, "blonde" is restricted to describing hair or skin, so it cannot be considered basic, whereas "red" can be used more broadly.
- A basic word is distinct and prominent compared to others in its usage.
- The meaning of a basic word cannot be predicted from its parts, unlike "blue" and "green."
- The meaning of a basic word is not included within another word, except for the primary word covering a range of terms, such as "bottle" or "cup," which are part of the overarching term "container."
- Modern foreign borrowings are often not considered basic words.
- Words that are ambiguous are treated like basic words in distribution.

Therefore, the meanings of words come in the following ways:^٩

١. The literal dictionary meaning, which is the basic meaning of the term.
٢. The metaphorical meaning, where the word is used to signify a new meaning different from its literal one. For example, saying "he is a lion" means bravery, not literally being a lion.
٣. Different meanings depending on the context, such as the word "eye," whose meaning depends on its use in the context.
٤. Relationships between words, such as synonymy, antonymy, and inclusion.

- ٥. Semantic features of the word, where each word has several meanings that distinguish it from others.
- ٦. The social meaning.
- ٧. The emotional meaning.

Each word has a primary meaning, its dictionary meaning, also known as the literal or semantic meaning. This meaning is realized when the word is used according to its semantic features. For example, "The boy drank the water," here each word is used according to its semantic features. Breaking the rules of semantic features shifts the word from its basic meaning to a metaphorical one. Metaphors and figurative language occur when a word is used outside its primary meaning by breaking the usual horizontal sequence.^{١٠}

William Ray said: "The true mechanism of reading involves uncovering within each unit of the text the threads of meaning supported by various codes—understanding in this context that the code is not a fixed structure for deciphering a riddle but a perspective of citation examples, or a mirage of structures." These meaning shadows help derive new examples from the meanings they reveal through their continuity and repetition in the reading process.^{١١}

The Singular Meaning in Light of the Normative Reading of the Text:

By the normative reading, we mean the explanatory reading that does not go beyond explaining difficult words, or one that does not dare to touch the deeper structure on which the text as a whole is built. This goes alongside the contextual reading, which confines the text and narrows its broad spaces and vast domains.^{١٢}

It is said that the act of reading does not end when the reader closes the covers of their book, but continues to be active and influential in their life. If reading is an experience, it is because the text impacts the reader in one way or another. In general, we can distinguish between two types of literary texts. Some work on the reader in a tangible way, reinforcing their previous intellectual convictions and their actual behavior or modifying them in a noticeable way. Other literary texts merely provide entertainment and bring joy to the reader's heart. We should not overlook many literary texts that, at first glance, we classify according to their type, title, or the surrounding context into one of these two groups, while they actually belong, according to their deeper aims, to the second group.^{١٣}

The explanatory reading has enriched the fields of knowledge adjacent to literature by using the text as a laboratory to conduct its scientific investigations. These investigations grow stronger and more intense, and their judgments surpass their original scope to become literary judgments, under the weight of which literary criticism struggles, burdening it with strange verdicts that are inherited in writings,

making them critical foundations that influence people's tastes and shape their understanding of literature.^{١٤}

The issue becomes complicated when the text takes on other dimensions that the contextual reading could not grasp when it reveals the "discourse" between utterance and writing in the material manifestations of the text through the duality: message/material. At that point, the text has a new genesis, a space for writing: "It consists of a dominant text that, in turn, contains the text or texts—according to the recipient's interpretation—in contradiction and conflict with it." The direct meaning (SENS DENOTATIF) woven by the words in their syntagmatic sequence includes connotative meanings (CONNATIF) that contain a semantic field (CHAMP SIMIQUE) which the reader will only grasp if they pause at the connotative field, comprehending all its implications by linking the semantic field of each word with the semantic fields of other words in the text. However, the creative text does not only convey its unknown meaning through the semantic field but also through the agreements formed by the recurrence of its words and the structure and sequence of its sentences. It may also contribute to this the way writing occupies the blank space—by using punctuation marks and leaving empty spaces. The text's layering has created a mysterious dilemma in modern criticism, causing scholars to return to the question of the text's essence: What is the text? Responses poured in from every direction, offering different perspectives that may narrow or expand. If they narrow, they reduce it to a linguistic and semantic manifestation, but if they broaden, they make it a classed accumulation, with layers stacked upon one another, ruled by the passage of time, as though all texts are one massive text, and excerpts are taken from it to present to the reader based on motives and needs. Understanding those excerpts is possible only by referring them back to the primary structure in a "sectional" scene that reveals its overall layering.^{١٥}

That is the "text" that the normative contextual reading has obscured with its floating meaning, for it can only be shaped in the end through its presence as a "signifier," since the presence of the "signified" in it: "represents a possibility of absent reading, established by the reader based on the conventions of the literary genre and the great contexts of its meanings. These meanings transcend the explicit meaning of the text, intertwining as an implicit possibility carried by the text, like an eternal fetus that always exists in the womb. It is a mythical fetus that the text endlessly carries in its womb, remaining fresh, never aging nor fading." Thus, the reader misses the chance to dive into the worlds uncovered by the research, which reveals the layering of the semantic and aesthetic aspects. The semantic aspect, or material, is considered the message as a result of a group of elements gathered according to certain possible appearances extracted from the distribution list of general symbols and their laws, which are recognizable by members of a human group determined by language or convention. The aesthetic aspect, on the other hand, relies on variations that are not standardized or regulated in a set of games carried out freely by the message using

these symbols, on the condition that these variations are recognized and accepted in some form.^{١٦}

At that point, the critic/reader's task is no longer to uncover the message outright and stop at the single intention but rather: "Their task lies in revealing the possibility of multiple meanings in one text, an acknowledgment of the limitless impact and its openness, and also its affirmation of 'interpretation.' Indeed, revealing the multiplicity of meanings depends on the circumstances of the critic, who enters the text into their system without bias." Thus, the new understanding of the text's essence requires surpassing the contextual reading and the old critic, renewing their role according to the nature of the text. This means replacing the interpretative reading with the hermeneutic reading, which proposes possibilities before tipping the scales toward one of them without claiming it as absolute truth, as "interpretation" is also subject to circumstances that play their part in it.^{١٧}

The Multiplicity of Meaning in Light of the Creative Literary Reading:

The aesthetic hermeneutic reading seeks to smooth out these obstacles after laying them bare, allowing the reader to sense their gravity in the reading act. The goal is not merely to detect the reflection of reality in the text but to create this reality from the text, even if its traits and faces vary. By moving beyond the given context (historical, social, psychological), it does not neglect the internal context, which is the overall artistic result of the creative values of the literary genre formed by the literary conventions that distinguish each genre from another, as it replaces the "external" with the "internal" that is separate from the text as "evidence" even if it intertwines with it as a "signifier."^{١٨}

For a reading to be valid, it must adhere to what we can call the principle of internal coherence. In other words, the objectivity of criticism does not lie in choosing the key to reading or selecting the angle of interpretation, but in strictly applying the chosen interpretive model to the entire text being read.

There are also criteria for preferring one reading over another.^{١٩}

However, the most convincing answer to the question of interpretation and the multiplicity of readings is the answer that arises from the study of semantics in understanding the literary text. This answer is based on the following fact: the text largely programs how it will be received. In other words, the reader cannot do with the text whatever they wish nor interpret it as they please. They must adhere to linguistic obligations that are unavoidable. They must discover, in the best possible way, the instructions left by the writer scattered here and there within the text. If they miss any or most of them or fail to observe them, it may lead to incorrect or unacceptable interpretations.^{٢٠}

Thus, not all readings are legitimate. There is a fundamental difference between a reading that uses the text to force it to say something and a reading that interprets the text, responding to what it programs.^{٢١}

The literary text is always rich with many meanings, and we can interpret it in many ways. Literary reading, more than any other kind of reading, is characterized by its subjective nature. It enriches the reader intellectually and makes them use part of their own self imaginatively.^{٢٢}

Another danger in the reading process lies in what the reader imposes on the text from themselves and what they employ in it. It may happen that the connection between us and one of the novel's characters is so strong and profound that we are only concerned with their fate, regardless of other considerations. The literary text appeals to our ability to feel, and thus our critical sense may slip, and we lose the necessary critical distance between ourselves and the text. The writer can make us like and adorn a character so much that, if it were to manifest as a real person, we would detest it with all our being.^{٢٣}

The impact of reading on the reader's life is much greater than we usually imagine.

Perhaps this formed in Arab heritage the hallmark of multiple readings of the same text. Reading takes known paths to the text: a grammatical reading, another literary, a rhetorical one... and perhaps within each category, there are sub-categories leading to the literary truth. In the studied text: "Reading is the reproduction of what is read; it is the most legitimate manifestation of intertextuality. The distinctive reading is, therefore, a form of productive intertextuality. A reading that does not evoke reading is a dead or null reading." This is why we find intellectual continuity among critics, starting with "Al-Asma'i," who instilled in "Ibn Salam" the notion of "virility" and "Al-Amidi," "Al-Jurjani," and "Abd al-Qahir," presenting the image of the specialized critic.^{٢٤}

Conclusion:

The meaning in a written novel is of greater value than the reality of the action, meaning that it is liberated from the incidental nature that distinguishes oral speech, where the word comes from the lips and disappears forever. Although it is difficult to impose a single interpretation on any text, there are, truth be told, criteria that confirm the legitimacy or illegitimacy of an interpretation. While the text may allow for many readings, it does not permit us to read however we wish or according to our whims. If we were allowed to read as we pleased, all texts would be the same, and their boundaries would disappear. We know from experience that this is not the case.

Despite the reader's active role in the literary text, the creative process consists of the writer, the text, and the reader, with their interaction being integral without

separating one from the other. The reader is the ultimate goal in the author's intent when they begin to write. Therefore, the task of literary criticism is to show how the studied book organizes and directs the reader's way of reading in order to achieve the desired effect, and then to show the individual reader's reaction in their cognitive faculties to the various paths suggested by the text.

Every new reader brings their own experience, individual culture, the values of their era, and their concerns, looking at the text through these lenses. The integration of the reader into the world of the text can take different forms, highly dependent on the historical distance between the reader and the time of the text's writing. When the reader is contemporary to the text, reading can renew their feelings and perhaps change their way of seeing the world and understanding things.

The importance of the literary text lies precisely in the fact that we cannot accept one reading over another or declare one interpretation legitimate while rejecting others.

References:

١. Ibn Manzur (Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Makram); *Lisan al-Arab*; Dar Sader; Unspecified Edition; Beirut, ١٩٦٨; Entry (N-S-S); ٧/٩٨.
٢. Al-Farahidi (Khalil ibn Ahmad); *Kitab al-'Ayn*, edited by Dr. Mahdi al-Makhzumi and Dr. Ibrahim al-Samarrai, Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiyyah, Baghdad, ١٩٨٤, Entry (N-S-S); ٧/٨٦-٨٧.
٣. Ibn Manzur: Entry (N-S-S); ٧/٩٧.
٤. Al-Farahidi: Entry (N-S-S); ٧/٨٦-٨٧.
٥. Same source: Entry (N-S-S); ٧/٨٧.
٦. Al-Azhari (Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn Ahmad), *Tahdhib al-Lugha*, edited and supervised by Muhammad Awad Mur'ib and others, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-Arabi, ١st Edition, Beirut, ٢٠٠١; ١٢/٨٣.
٧. Al-Farahidi: Entry (N-S-S); ٧/٨٧.
٨. Ibn Manzur: Entry (N-S-S); ٧/٩٧.
٩. Al-Azhari: ١٢/١١٧.
١٠. Al-Azhari: ١٢/١١٦.
١١. Al-Zamakhshari (Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar); *Asas al-Balagha*; Dar wa Matabi' al-Sha'b; Unspecified Edition; Cairo, ١٩٦٠; ٩٦٢.
١٢. Thalab (Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn Yahya); *Majalis Thalab*; edited by Abd al-Salam Muhammad Harun; Dar al-Ma'arif; Unspecified Edition; Egypt, ١٩٦٩; ١/٩٠.
١٣. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/١٥٦٥٦٢٥٦> Reading theories, literary texts and their issues

١٤. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/١٥٦٥٦٢٥٦> Reading theories, literary texts and their issues
١٥. Abu Zayd (Nasr Hamid); *Al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqiqa*; Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-Arabi; ١st Edition; Casablanca, ١٩٩٥; ١٥١.
١٦. Al-Jurjani (Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ali); *Al-Ta'rifat*; edited by Dr. Ibrahim al-Abyari; Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi; ١st Edition; Beirut, ١٩٨٥; ٣٠٩.
١٧. Al-Shafi'i (Muhammad ibn Idris); *Al-Risala*, edited and explained by Ahmad Muhammad Shakir; Al-Maktaba al-'Ilmiyya; Unspecified Edition; No Date; ١٤.
١٨. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/١٥٦٥٦٢٥٦> Reading theories, literary texts and their issues
١٩. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/١٥٦٥٦٢٥٦> Reading theories, literary texts and their issues
٢٠. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/١٥٦٥٦٢٥٦> Reading theories, literary texts and their issues
٢١. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/١٥٦٥٦٢٥٦> Reading theories, literary texts and their issues
٢٢. Abu Zayd (Nasr Hamid); *Al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqiqa*; Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-Arabi; ١st Edition; Casablanca, ١٩٩٥; ١٥٢
٢٣. Al-Azhari: ١٢/١١٨.
٢٤. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/١٥٦٥٦٢٥٦> Reading theories, literary texts and their issues