



LANGUAGE IN LITERATURE: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

The Role of Language in Ascertaining the Context of the Text

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ABSTRACT

Bearing in mind all the genres of literature, it is an unquestionable fact that language provides the edifice for every sphere of life. There are varieties of English but English literature created by the native speakers or writers has remained imperative, ingenious, and the established form of English. On the other hand teaching English literature and literature written in English by non-indigenous writers also have gained importance and worldwide recognition. This literature has become an important phenomenon of English in current global scenario. The writers of literature use language in their own typical way. Thus every work of literature is the artifact of a specified language and the artistic and moral value of a work of literature certainly depends on the use of language. The writer plays with language to produce an effective piece of literature, for conveying a message that is both evocative and functional to the audience.

New Historicism links literature with the socio-cultural issues. Texts build upon and transform the predestined innate literary and cultural traditions. In my proposed study I wish to dwell upon the impact of literature on the prevalent contemporary aspects which essentially enables us to reflect on the cultural assumptions of a particular place leading to the comprehension of a text in a context.

Key-words: *New Historicism, socio-cultural issues, native speakers or writers, non-indigenous writers.*

The Text of a literature comprises of carefully chosen words in the context of a situation, facilitating the reader's comprehension to the fullest effect. An informed reader who is replete with knowledge and experience understands the nuances in the expressions of an author. Hence the meaning and interpretation of a work, depends largely on our personal



reactions. Context can be defined simply as the circumstances that surround a given text and help to specify its meaning.

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In this context, it is relevant to state that language gives birth to literature. A tiny tot in its early days of learning plays with alphabets unaware of the fact that he is at business, busy uploading the building blocks vital to the language it will espouse as it grows up. Words are used to craft a language meticulously which in turn catalyses the formation of a new compound called 'literature'.

Generally speaking, 'literature' is used to portray anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. Literature, in all its forms, cannot exist outside language. And Language cannot exist without texts and co-texts.

New historicists believe in shaping a text in association with culture and by the contexts of the circumstances of its creation. It is also shaped by what the reader brings to it. Literary texts are not created in a vacuum but are influenced by social context, cultural heritage and historical change.

Michel Foucault's 'The Order of Things' explores Roland Barthes' famous phrase 'the death of the author and nearly reverses the privileging of the reader. The author is an organizing device. We ascribe and ascertain unity and coherence to all the works written by a single author. Interpretation according to Foucault needs to move from the written text back to the author facilitating sub-texts from an individual's life, psychology, intentions, social stand and positions.

New Historicism offers tremendous scope to analyze the artistic output of various artists from varied angles facilitated by parallel readings of related literary and non-literary texts. As a



post modernist approach, New Historicism objects to the privileging of the literary texts, and the subalterning of non- literary texts. All related historical, socio-political documents, diaries, related articles, Commentaries, feedback, cyber literature, related interface, media coverage all validate any scholastic exercise not just as contexts but as co-texts.

Language and literature are complementary to each other in the sense that language is the corner stone on which, literature is shaped, whether they are novels or poems, plays or folktales, etc. Language has been defined as a structure of spoken or written words, which is used by the people of a particular country or area. It is a system for the expression of thoughts, feelings, etc., by the use of spoken words or conventional symbols. Literature, whether oral or written, expresses people's thoughts, feelings, views, culture, etc. Thus, literature cannot exist outside language, since language is the medium of expression; people can only use language to construct poems, stories, plays, etc. In other words, literature involves the exploitation of language for creative purposes. The readers are encouraged to challenge the meaning generated by language and texts, which, it can be argued, is rarely straightforward and unambiguous.

In the 16th and 17th centuries while many people were still uneducated, Shakespeare used an explicit way of writing his language. This was done not only to convey what was happening in the play, but to generate mood and audience reaction. He wrote mostly for the upper class genre of the society who basked in the sunshine of being the privileged and educated.

His language and style were entirely fitting and contemporary to the day and age. It was patterned and distinctive too. This helped the audience to keep track of what was happening and to makes sense of what they were hearing.

An astute playwright that Shakespeare was, he meant his plays to be watched, not read. It is awfully tough to visualize how the play will look when it is being read and not acted. However, it was almost difficult for a layman to understand the vocabulary used by Shakespeare. Today's audience does not look for rhythms and repetitions of words and phrases but for relevant text with an association to the present day. In virtue the style of vocabulary created by Shakespeare set the trend for many writers who either imitated his style or modified it. Eventually, he shaped a literary platform for his successors to work on. This platform has proved to be abounding in textual and contextual promptness.

In literature, language is manipulated for the expression of people's culture. While language is the medium used in expressing people's culture, literature is the reflection of this culture. Literature itself has been described as a pack of material, oral or written, which reflects how people live their lives.



Apart from using language to express culture or text to express a context, we may be called upon to ponder over Biblical Language which transcends beyond cultural, racial and linguistic boundaries. The Language used in the Bible expresses a way of life whose distinguishing feature is faith in Christ and His sacrifice and gospel of salvation – a way of life that is common to the body of believers regardless of their individual race, language or nationality. The message of the Bible transcends the boundaries of human languages and cultures. In fact, the language of Bible-based literature has assumed a universal status: it is a language characterized by Biblical concepts and their equivalents in whatever language is used as a medium of communication.

While it is irrefutable that literature is the manipulation of language for creative purposes, it must be noted that the utility of literature to the human society depends largely on how the writer uses language. Like a house whose constitution and worth depend on the quality of materials used by the engineer as well as his or her expertise in the use of these materials, the value of a work of literature also depends on the writer's choice of language as well as his or her ability to use language creatively and in a manner that is beneficial to the human society.

To produce a good work of literature, the writer must be able to manipulate language for the purpose of conveying a message that is both meaningful and useful to the audience.

What can be deduced is that every work of literature is the product of a given language and that the aesthetic and moral value of a work of literature certainly depends on the use of language.

Language reports the feelings and attributes of the writer and evokes powerful feelings in the reader. Language functions through Literature and is expressive in its function. The best way to evoke feelings in the reader is through poetry. It clearly executes the job of interweaving language and literature and thus contextualizing a text aptly so as to spell out the denotations of a situation. If you consider the Waste Land by T.S.Eliot, it is seen that it is full of creative images, representing the society then.

The poem begins with a section entitled "The Burial of the Dead." In it, the narrator -- perhaps a representation of Eliot himself -- describes the seasons. Spring brings "memory and desire," and so the narrator's memory drifts back to times in Munich, to childhood sled rides, and to a possible romance with a "hyacinth girl." The memories only go so far, however. The narrator is now surrounded by a desolate land full of "stony rubbish."

"A Game of Chess," shifts the reader abruptly from the streets of London to a gilded drawing room, in which sits a rich, jewel-bedecked lady who complains about her nerves and wonders what to do. The poem drifts again, this time to a pub at closing time in which two Cockney women gossip. Within a few stanzas, we have moved from the upper crust of society to



London's low-life. Here words are interwoven into a beautifully scripted language, representing the hows, whys and whats of the society. Texts and contexts are the only two factors centrifuging into the heart of the waste land. Text complements the context and context complements the text.

Since Language is the most powerful medium of literature it is imperative to understand the peculiarity of the vocabulary carefully chosen by different writers of different times.

The particular words with which the text was created accounts for the literature produced in a particular context. It is up to the reader to create his own finality in the endings of works of literature. Though the text is purely the work of the author, the contextual inferences can vary from one reader to another. Like the language of the text and the language of the reader, the culture of the text and the culture of the reader are in a reciprocal relationship.

Literature can act as a window to the existing culture of a place. Apart from this, knowledge of a language helps us to understand the literature of that culture.

Language is used as a ploy to procure literature. Thus both Language & Literature is intended for understanding the intricacies of contemporary contexts.

Moreover, the study of texts produced by a language is vital to the present day culture and it Introduces the readers to a range of texts from different periods, approaches and genres. And it eventually caters to the following needs of the unconfined student community.

- It inculcates in students the ability to engage in close, comprehensive analysis of individual texts and make relevant connections to the contexts.
- It stimulates students' powers of expression, both in oral and written communication.
- It encourages students to be acquainted with the importance of the contexts in which texts are written and received.
- It instills in the students, an appreciation of the different perspectives of people from other cultures, and how these perspectives reassemble the textual meaning.
- It creates in the students the space to understand a text from his or her perspective.
- It makes the readers believe that there can be different readings of the same text in a different context of reception.

Thus the elements of style and structure is ascertained by the careful weaving of language which eventually formulates into a complete text. Language acts like the DNA of a text which builds up literature slowly, steadily and surely.



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