

Interpretations and English Literature

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Abstract: Literature is not only a source of entertainment but also a source of information as it is inspired by human lives. The characters and events depicted in literature carries special values according to the interpretations of readers. Interpretation of literary works differs from person to person and is linked to one's social, psychological and religious point of views. Various works are understood accordingly through it specific era of publication and reinterpreted by scholars and general readers of other generations with new theories. This article aims to explore the various interpretations of literary works in a nutshell. Literary examples are given with references of critics' views.

Keywords: Interpretation, psychoanalysis, feminism, socialism, philosophy, entertainment

Analysis

Literature, widely known as the mirror of societies of particular ages, is not only a source of entertainment but a wider source of psychoanalysis. It reflects the humane psyche and their diverse activities that allow the readers to delve into the depth of human mentality. Literature depicts human civilizations and highlights their customs, disciplines and the turmoil taking places because of human beings. It turns a great source of pleasure knowing the life-style of an individual, whether it is real or fiction, but apart from delivering rejoices, human mentality is explored. Pasley says "Art answers to the instinct in man to transmute unbearable reality into beautiful illusion, and to become, like the Greeks, 'superficial out of profundity [1]. Here art is obedient to the will to power which is the servant of life" [2]. Every culture and every custom has some boundaries and these boundaries are somehow associated with the deviation of human subjective impulses. Many acknowledge it as a science to judge human personality and many consider it as a research topic to discover humane cognitions:

Regarding disciplines, as everybody knows, there is trouble in every boundary. Take psychoanalysis and literature. If works of psychoanalysis prove that works of literature mean psychoanalysis, or inevitably pass through it on the way to whatever else they may mean, what is the difference? Is psychoanalysis willing to say that literature/psychoanalysis is a science? If it does, will scientists be willing to say ...certain literary critics able to believe themselves in charge of distinctly literary values [3].

When Hamlet says 'To be or not To be', that is interpreted as the tendency of suicide but this very language can be interpreted differently according to the context of the reader. Language, a set of words, has diverse meanings which can differ to the speaker and the listener as it is based on the concept of its coding and decoding. In this case, Derrida says:

Language, however, is only one among those systems of marks that claim this curious tendency as their property: they simultaneously incline toward increasing the reserves of random indetermination as well as the capacity for coding and overcoding or, in other words, for control and self-regulation. Such competition between randomness and code disrupts the very systematicity of the system while it also, however, regulates the restless, unstable interplay of the system. Whatever its singularity in this respect, the linguistic system of these traces or marks would merely be, it seems to me, just a particular example of the law of destabilization [4].

In literature, when a protagonist speaks, it is recommended as the author's dexterity to make those words of intellectuality [5]. Surely, it is but more than that is the dexterous intellectuality that the words itself carries. It is similar to that of Mona Lisa's smile. When one sees it in a happy mood, the smile seems jovial but when one views it with a broken heart, she seems to be crying. Therefore, when 'To be or not to be' is heard, the language is taken into context according to the readers' situation. If we pay a close attention to the romances in Literature, we will find interesting

psychoanalysis of sexuality and love. Reading Shakespearean comedies of cross dressing where the female dresses like a male to secure herself and her desired lover from danger, the readers reacts to the gender identity crisis which the visualization offers them. Knowing that Ganymede is a girl disguised into a boy, the readers feels annoyed seeing her making love to other female characters. The concept of homoeroticism evokes and the question of male and female identity is asked.

If we consider the representations of social institutions, then literature plays a vital role displaying them to readers. For example- when Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is read, the institution of marriage is viewed from various points of views [6]. The decision of Nora to leave Torvald's home and children for the sake of her dignity raises feminist issues as well as provides a sharp blow to traditional concept of marriage. Nora leaves the house of Torvald not only for her respect but also to prove the world that a woman is not bound to be a slave or dependent to a man whom she is married to. Basically, the institute of marriage consist in,

Depending on one's political point of view marriage was seen variously as a patriarchal institution that granted men rights to the sexual, reproductive, and domestic services of a wife, and a bourgeoisie institution founded on a hypocritical morality and the protection of ruling class men's property and inheritance rights [7].

The concept is more strongly represented in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. [8] Hester Prynne is condemned to adultery and humiliated socially by the Puritan priests. What she did was true love and what her lover and her husband did were male chauvinism and cowardice. She has been a victim of the prejudice of matrimonial allowance and thus suffers till her death. In case of G.B.Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the self-mirror concept is critically evaluated as well as feminism is represented under the spectacles of social conventions. Apart from the feminist impulses of the female protagonist, female psychology and male chauvinist attitude are well described under the theory of self-schemata:

Self-schemata are cognitive generalization about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual's social experiences [9].

Moreover, the concept of identification as a matter of vital social recognition is well explained in that work of literature. In case of R. Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* [10], when Leo finds out that his ancestors belong to a medieval lineage, he goes in search of it with Horace Holly and discovers the mysterious Ayesha and her dynasty. Here, the

importance of identification is associated with the sherd that highlights that, identification is the original form of emotional tie with an object ... it may arise with any new perception of a common quality shared with some person who is not the subject of sexual instinct. The more important this common quality is, the more successful may this partial identity become, and it may does represent the beginning of a new tie [11]. After the expedition of Leo and Holly, they were refreshed and enriched with new knowledge of history as well as new experiences of life. Moreover, the psychological empowerment which they achieved by experiencing love and death through Ayesha's mission of reincarnation of Kallikratus through Leo displays psycho-analytic concepts:

Psychoanalysis was designed by Freud to be psychology of love. Yet it has had more to say about the childish precursors of what is called-rather reductionistically – mature genitality than about eros in adult life. Not all sexuality is infantile sexuality, after all, though our analytic literature makes it seem so.

Thus it can be said that “the perspective therefore decides the character of the appearance” [12]. Especially when the author reflects his philosophical assumptions through his characters, more critical things are explored but the importance of the characters sometimes are replaced with the powerful words they utter. Similarly White says:

Literary characters are exhausted by the statements that confirm them in the narratives in which they occur: they are in fact nothing more than is said of them, just as they are also nothing else. The same holds for the human beings: no person remains beyond the totality of its experiences and actions [[13].

In case of Victorian interpretation of Literature, Suzy Anger's book *Victorian Interpretation* pays good contribution [14]. Anger investigates the relationship of Victorian interpretation to the ways in which literary criticism is accomplished. Her maincenter is literary interpretation, but she also considers fields such as legal theory, psychology, history, and the natural sciences in order to establish the pervasiveness of hermeneutic thought in Victorian culture. Anger's book displays that much existing thoughts on interpretation has its antecedents in the Victorians, who were already deeply engaged with the problems of understanding.

Anger traces the development and transformation of interpretive theory from a religious to a secular (and particularly literary) context. She argues that even as hermeneutic theory was secularized in literary interpretation it carried in its practice some of the religious implications with which the tradition

began. She further maintains that, for the Victorians, theories of interpretation are often connected to ethical principles and suggests that all theories of interpretation may ultimately be grounded in ethical theories. Beginning with an examination of Victorian biblical exegesis, in the work of figures such as Benjamin Jowett, John Henry Newman, and Matthew Arnold, the book moves to studies of Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, and Oscar Wilde. Emphasizing the extent to which these important writers are preoccupied with hermeneutics, Anger also shows that consideration of their thought brings to light questions and qualifications of some of the assumptions of contemporary criticism.

If this is the case, then why Shakespearean characters are acknowledged for their philosophical dialogues. We cannot overlook the world famous philosophy of Hamlet in act five emphasizing the psychological dilemma of choosing the right one from several options in life. The theories are presented under a certain context but it can be interpreted diversely from varied point of views of readers own perspectives and thus make them more critical and complex: the composition of simple ideas to make complex ones is another operation of our mind. This may be taken to cover the faculty of enlarging ideas by putting together several of the same kind, as in forming a dozen out of several units [15].

Moreover, regarding the technical representations of stylistics provides effects on readers and their perception is garnished. It all depends how effectively readers are using their imagination and how forcefully they believe the imaginative realm created by the author. Sometimes, readers surrender their power of reasoning and start believing the unreal concept only for the aim of entertainment. If such practice of imagination is not followed, the taste of literary creativity will not be perceived:

Even a real ghost, as in Oscar Wilde's *Canterville Ghost*, [16] loses all power of at least arousing gruesome feelings in us as soon as the author begins to assume himself by being ironical about it, and allows liberties to be taken with it...the point is the same Freud made about Mark Twain's *A Tramp Abroad* some fifteen pages earlier, that a humorous tone can reverse potentially uncanny effects [17].

In case of Pre-Raphaelite movement in literature, feminist views took a diversified turn. They strongly believed that "artistic beauty reveals absolute truth through perception. He holds that the best art conveys metaphysical knowledge by revealing, through sense perception, what is unconditionally true" [18]. Apart from this, the theme of the woman destroyed by love -- betrayed by unrequited love, seduced by false ideals or false lovers or victimized by tragic love -- dominated Pre-Raphaelite, as well as Victorian,

paintings and poems of the nineteenth century. Bound with the Victorian idea of feminine weakness, the Pre-Raphaelite concept of the woman as a victim stems from themes of medieval romance. However, there always remains an element of unfulfilled desire or denial of the true sweetness of romantic love. The Pre-Raphaelites re-interpret this idea and focus on the sensuality and sexual frustration or punishment of the female -- ideas that were met with both fear and fascination by most Victorians. Classification related to women types are associated with various theories linked their sex and socialism. Indian theories worked a lot in such concepts marking women typologies as: padmini, chitrini, shankhini, hastini, slesa, pitta.

Classifying personality typologies, Vatsyayana proclaims 'sex appetite is as essential as food is for the proper growth and maintenance of body. Overeating may cause indigestion, even to forgo food altogether is beyond good reason because some food must be there to live by... therefore, contends Vatsyayana, the way out is to gratify your passion all right, but at the same time avoid excesses. It must be remembered that for a balanced man gratification of sex-appetite is as essential as is the pursuit of religion or wealth [19]. The Pre-Raphaelites depicted the woman destroyed by various forms of love, whether unrequited, tragic or adulterous, by highlighting not only her mental destruction but also focusing on her sexual frustration or punishment. The Victorians believed passion to be deviant; thoughts of sexuality would cause insanity and thus repression was necessary. With the strong societal enforcement of these beliefs, many Victorians lived with great shame, guilt, and fear of damnation (Walkowitz). Pre-Raphaelite works with themes of sexual morality often emphasized the woman's sexual frustration or her punishment, which stemmed from her sexually deviant behavior; for it was often considered unthinkable that a woman would have sexual thoughts or desires.

Eventually destroyed by unrequited love, Mariana, the disconsolate heroine of Tennyson's lyric "Mariana," waits in vain for her lover. In his painting of the same title, John Everett Millais introduces *Mariana* (1851) in a sensuous stretching pose, which breaks from the typical pose of the woman inwardly expressing her grief [20]. "The Defence of Guenevere," William Morris reinterprets the Arthurian legend of Guenevere, a popular source of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood work. In a speech resembling the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, Morris creates a realistic drama confronting the illicit romantic passion between the Queen and Sir Launcelot [21].

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem "Jenny" (1870) [22] features the prostitute, commonly referred to as the "great social evil" in the Victorian period. According to Judy Walkowitz, at least 80,000 prostitutes worked in central London in the last quarter of the 19th century

(Walkowitz) [23]. Rossetti's "Jenny" highlights the sexual asymmetry inherent to her profession. In lines 1-9, the narrator describes: Lazy laughing languid Jenny, Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea ...Fair Jenny mine, the thoughtless queen Of kisses which the blush between Could hardly make much daintier.

If one trusts the speaker with his description, "languid" and "thoughtless" Jenny does not appear bothered by her own circumstances. While she remains a symbol of a ruined woman, seduced by the physical, Jenny also becomes a desiring sexual subject in her own right. While the speaker condemns her for being impure, he wrestles with his simultaneous compassion for the prostitute and passion for the woman. Less about the fate of the young prostitute than about the inner life of the narrator, "Jenny" reveals the character of the prostitute who does not see the error in her ways and perhaps even enjoys her sexual freedom. Therefore, the interpretation of any work of literature highly depends on readers' understanding:

If understanding in general is to be viewed as the faculty of rules, judgment will be the faculty of subsuming under rules; that is, of distinguishing whether something does or does not stand under given rule. Concepts are rules; the subsumption of particulars under concepts is either empirical or a priori and, in either case, the rules are supplied by the understanding, or by the understanding and sensibility combined [24]. Moreover, in case of reasoning, Beck states that "in every system of [philosophy], which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning" [25] and it happens only because writers want readers to connect themselves with the personalities depicted in the text and after that start imagining themselves in those positions. If a reader does not do that, he will fail to evaluate the characters. This is also harmful if the reader fails to detach himself from the imaginary character and turn toward the real world. Many readers do not do that and apply the philosophies in actual lives that sometimes create disputes but it is also appreciable that some philosophies do open new ways of solutions. Interpretation any work of literature in highly associated with readers' contextual and social conventions. The sense of right and wrong differs from person to person and so does the interpretation.

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