
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Theoretical Insights of History, Morality, and Society as the Literary Trio of the Author-Reader Relationship.

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| ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to examine the relationship between the author and the reader by polarizing history, morality, and society as a selected triad of theoretical interpretation. The study mainly focuses on the theoretical insights of these relationships in order to give proper clues for delving deep into the technical and thematic peculiarities of different literary genres. Therefore, it follows a qualitative approach to some fictional works, particularly novels, to demonstrate how the authorial perspective intersects with the reader's ability to grasp the latent textual messages projected by authors in the course of the plots. The relationship between the author and the reader will be limited to three related topics, namely, history, morality, and society. As for history, the study sheds light on the postcolonial attributes of literature to reveal the function of liberal humanism in bridging the gap between the colonized people and the colonizers. Morality, on the other hand, will be discussed to explore the relative view of morality by authors and how the reader might conceptualize it according to his/her cultural background. Lastly, the discussion of society will be limited to the social customs and norms approached by authors to deliver a comprehensive depiction of the social reality in which the reader lives his/her true life.

| KEYWORDS

History, Literary Theme, Literary Theory, Morality, Society.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The emergence of literary theory has been reinforced by several critical states regarding the way by which the reader might perceive a literary work via various meanings and literary insights. Critics pinpoint the reader's ability to infer the latent messages of literary works in several ways. The author-reader relationship, however, has been questioned because the interpretation of any text has to undergo the detachment between the author and reader. Such interpretation could be grasped via the thematic insights of the text, which reinforces its vigor and significance to the receptive audience. Being so, the core conceptual meaning of the theoretical aspects of themes turns into concrete textual clues for the reader in order to reach the ultimate points employed by authors because literary themes "are the essential parts of storytelling that are found in almost all types of literary and narrative writing" (Changder, 2024, p.10). In this sense, the text provides the reader with the essential theoretical factors needed to get a comprehensive impression of the text's cultural, social, and historical background. The theoretical insights of literary themes comprise the essential notions aimed by authors to sustain their works with appropriate literary factors and techniques because the "literary text should expose the actuality of the text and reveal the writer's ideology as well as his/her worldview" (Besbes, 2011, p.243).

The significance of literary theory, furthermore, lies in the exploration of the social context of the text. As a rule of thumb, authors delve deep into the inherent nuances of the text in order to provide the receptive reader with concrete proof of the social circumferences tackled in the course of diverse literary descriptions. The social peculiarities are approached vis-à-vis the thematic qualities of the text for the sake of offering an objective view of the society due to the fact that the targeted “social context could be imagined and formed from the annals of time and archaeology of the mind and spirit, as these entries had been confined to obscurity and irrelevance” (Chandrapaty, 2024, p.XIII). Being so, the amalgamation of the theoretical elements with the social aspects of the texts would lead to a tangible exploration of the key impetus lurking behind writing the text per se. As a result, the text would be a mixture of different interrelated social-cultural factors, producing a new meaning grasped by the reader. One of these factors would be, for example, the historical background of fictional attributes of the plot. Hence, the historical factor is of paramount importance since it results in cogent reflection of reality within the broad demarcation of the world since the utmost point of historical fiction is to address “themes related to love, death, morality, and other common human experiences” (Bober and Newland, 2024, p.8). In this respect, the historical factor is very important for discovering the temporal background of the text, whereby authors could deal with intricate matters related to literature as a means of expressing human perception of reality engulfing the primary textual elements. The purpose of this essay is to highlight the theoretical author-reader relationship related to three integrated subjects, namely, history, society, and morality, linked to a selection of a number of literary works reflecting such relationship.

2. Discussion

2.1 History

The core conceptual implication of liberal humanism is the opposing dimensions and perceptions concerning a certain culture. In essence, liberal humanism exemplifies a cultural duality representing the colonized other’s dichotomy of identity, including “ethical as well as a historical dimension” (Good, 2014, p.96). That is, it is the meticulous incarnation of the consistent fluctuation between one ethnic identity and its exact opposite. It embodies the simultaneous binary opposition of attraction and repulsion. Postcolonial critical insights render liberal humanism a specific implication regarding such binary opposition. Homi Bhabha is considered the milestone theorist of liberal humanism since he postulates discursive claims on liberal humanism and its involvement of other pertinent conceptions, chief among them being mimicry, mockery, and hybridity. Such liberal humanism could be found in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* when the ethnic clash occurs between the Igbo’s natives and the European missionaries. Here, both the colonizers’ people and the colonizers cope with each other on the grounds of liberal humanism due to the presence of “the anthropological proponents of finding, identifying, allocating, inspecting and appraising a growing body of knowledge on indigenous identity” (Abu Jweid, 2016, p.532). In this sense, Achebe’s authorial concern with liberating Igboland could be interpreted by the reader through the theme of liberal humanism, taking into consideration Bhabha’s concept of self-other relationships.

In its broadest sense, liberal humanism encompasses the intricate ethnic mixture of the colonizer and the colonized subjects. In this respect, the colonized subjects are sometimes complicit and sometimes resistant. Such fluctuation exemplifies the essential existence of colonial liberal humanism. At this point, Englishness describes concomitant affinity with the colonized subject since it could be exploitive and nurturing. Consequently, Bhabha’s (1991) conceptualization of liberal humanism is merely a disruption of the hegemonic colonial authority, and colonial domination deforms the relationship between the colonized subject and the colonizers. The critical point here is that colonial Englishness does not welcome liberal humanism as it is detested by the colonizers who strive for superiority and domination over the colonized subjects. Again, Achebe perceives liberal humanism via a postcolonial lens, whereby the natives could hardly find any possible ethnic path to cope with their English counterparts. In other words, they attempt to cope with the Englishness of the missionaries. Yet, native people could not aptly live together with the missionaries. This is because the missionaries come from different backgrounds, which, in turn, leads to difficult living conditions in Igboland. As a result, the protagonist, Okonkwo, commits suicide at the end of the novel. Hence, this fatal decision implies the cultural differences between the Igbo natives and the advent of the English missionaries that brought with them new faith, customs, traditions, and mentalities. They do represent the Englishness of the postcolonial world in Igboland.

Englishness, therefore, attempts to produce docile, compliant colonized subjects that might reproduce its integral assumptions, values, and habits, i.e., imitation of the colonizers. The reason behind this imitation lies in the possibility of creating cultural equilibrium between the colonized subjects and their colonizers. The crucial vitality of the ideological construction of Englishness relates to its construction of liberal humanism; Bhabha (1991) comments: “The Englishness of mimicry is constructed around liberal humanism” (p.126). Such Englishness is the core of the duality wavering between margin and center. Therefore, the ideological construction of Englishness, to some extent, resembles mockery. Yet, Bhabha (1991), has discrepant views of colonial Englishness. However, both of them disturb the domination of colonial Englishness. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe approaches the duality of the English culture and the native Igbo culture by means of liberal humanism. In this case, the reader might discover liberal humanism as a cultural channel between the colonized natives and the colonizers. Consequently, the reader would interpret this

colonial encounter as a connective point between two different cultures to mitigate the ethnic tension created by colonial events before the advent of the missionaries in Igboland.

Post-colonialism addresses the development of cultural studies within the scope of diverse humanity postcolonial contexts. One of these developments is the issue of identity. Post-colonialism perceives identity in the light of anthropology, psychoanalysis, ecocriticism, queer and gender studies and other interdisciplinary fields. Scholars try to provide a sufficient and appropriate conceptualization of cultural identity and its patient relationship with post-colonialism. Gautam Basu Thakur (2020) discusses cultural identity in terms of psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework. To illustrate, the colonized minority is left with psychic complexes after the period of colonization in their homeland. Thakur (2020), consequently, ascribes identity to the narratives of exclusion, othering and cultural appropriation. As such, Thakur (2020) conceptualizes this shift as "politics of ontological discordance" (p.10), and he (2020) polarizes Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore the otherness of marginalized subjectivity and decolonial theoretical critiques, such as those of Fanon, Bhabha and Spivak to formulate an interdisciplinary interrelationship between psychoanalysis and post-colonialism and their crucial role in identify the nature of the oppressed otherness's identity. Chinua Achebe, In *Things Fall Apart*, deals with the intricate relationship between the native ethnicity of Igboland through liberal humanism in order to find out how different cultures could accept each other.

2.2 Morality

Morality has multifarious cultural implications due to the fact that people have their relative views of morality concerning many issues. Some social norms could be acceptable in a certain country or ethnicity, which "signals concerning the reality of the *moral* realm and the status of *morality* as an object of knowledge" (Hämäläinen, 2017, p.44). However, it could be rejected or considered totally taboo in another one. This moral discrepancy is created by the inherited cultural residuals that are handed down from one generation to another through "the consequences of everyday affects and the extraordinary ordinariness of the ethical encounters we engage again and again" (DeFalco and York, 2018, p.9). For example, André Brink's *Philida* addresses morality from different perspectives. The novel hinges on South African culture on the verge of various cultural changes.

In the course of the plot, slavery is depicted as against human dignity. It advocates the voice of the black suppressed minority, and at the same time, it exposes the faults of the white's exploitive colonial powers. In this way, the novel unravels the formation of the identity of the indigenous South African people. Both slavery and racism have a long history. In addition, the novel focuses on the colonial reality in the black societies. Moreover, slavery and racism resulted in a cultural division among the colonized black South African societies. Consequently, *Philida* is concerned with the discursive practices that aspire to elevate the position of the subjugated blacks and harness them for the whites' colonial benefits. In this sense, slavery emerges as an imperial rule which legitimizes the whites' ability to exploit the blacks since morality "deals with radicalism freedom of expression and primitivism ... as a capacity fictional imagination which is allowed free rein" (Abu Jweid, 2021 p.6). The issue of morality, in this context, relates to the fictional character that "seems to be devoid of human morality" (p.9). Nevertheless, this character might have a great deal of morality, but he/she becomes devoid of morality due to changing life conditions leading to ethical crises.

Being that so, *Philida* deals with the whites' hegemony over the blacks' colonized territories, whereby the divisive territorial consequences of the whites' colonialism subjugate and control the blacks' belongings. In addition, the whites' slavery practices involve the control of the blacks' residential locations in order to impose socio-cultural influences upon the blacks. Therefore, colonial racism is a result of slavery created by the whites. The reduction of slavery could not be achieved as long as the whites maintained powerful control over the blacks. That is, the whites' enslavement and harsh treatment of the blacks make them resistant and, consequently, opposing the whites' covetous agendas. The novel addresses morality in the light of slavery to deliver a vivid picture of the tremendous effect of racial segregation on the characters' psyches. Consequently, Brink conveys to the reader the way by which slavery might be obliterated by attending to the principles of morality and its role in improving the reality of enslaved people. In this regard, he uses fictional characters as mere replicas of people who suffered from the sequences of apartheid in South Africa, where racial segregation spread nastily to some extent.

Philida, furthermore, offers a close portrayal of the white and black characters and how slavery and racism develop among them within the scope of moral considerations related to the reality of slavery in South Africa. The racial relation in the novel reveals that though there is an antagonistic opposition between the whites and the blacks, there is a common human line which lies under their relations. To explain, the whites consider the blacks inferior, but they have the right to keep their homeland. On the other hand, the blacks consider the whites aggressive and vicious, but they are superior to them because they have power. In the novel, slaves like Philida, Francis, and Petronella represent the blacks in the position of weak colonial conditions. This is because the whites have complete control over the blacks. In this case, the blacks embody the marginalized colonized nations at the hands of their European counterparts. The white and black ethnic groups might seek a cultural equilibrium by dint of morality and its relative human matters.

The South African natives were invaded by the whites and made subject to exploitation during colonial times. In other words, the white masters bequeath their posterity, such as sons and grandsons, to take colonial sovereignty over the blacks. Such exploitation contradicts the norms of ethics that try to establish "moral value, and it is valuable irrespective of whether it is effectual. That is not to say that consequences do not figure ... *literature on moral* luck departs from the Kantian picture initially in the vantage point it adopts (Dempsey and Renaud, 2023, p.57). Moral value is very important to elevating human life, which abounds with many drastic changes influencing the status quo of nations and individuals from all walks of life. *Philida* approaches this moral fact by shedding light on the. Consequently, the white masters could torment the blacks, and they could trade in the blacks' children because they had a colonial power. The novel's depiction of colonial slavery also includes the whites' control over the blacks' families. When the whites have domination and superiority over a black individual, they also have superiority over his family members, such as father, mother, husband, sisters, brother and so forth. The whites deprive the black slaves of learning. As such, the purpose behind this deprivation is to prevent the slaves from progressing to be equal to the whites.

2.3 Society

Society plays an integral role in identifying the relationship between the author and the reader. It conveys to the reader the typical social background that is very necessary for understanding the social conditions stimulating the author to write since literature and society "are inextricably linked concepts" (Milner, 2016, p.20). Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, for example, highlights the social reality of postmodern America. The novel has been perceived as a contemporary writing reflecting the essence of postmodernism and cultural transformation, which began in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The novel obviously tackles postmodernism due to its appropriation of miscommunication that had appeared as a result of the drastic changes that stormed the world, especially after September 11th, 2001. Additionally, it highlights the cultural conflict among world nations that are now under the influence of collective mentality concerning the gigantic technological advancements in recent years. As such, this cultural conflict is an indication of the reality of a society that has been invaded by the impact of media. Undoubtedly, media plays a crucial role in shaping human mob psychology. That is, this novel authentically deals with the American cultural treatment of other world nations, which is the core of social studies.

Being so, the novel offers a genuine view of the postmodern concept of miscommunication and cultural conflict since it employs precise details on how world nations interact with each other in American society. In other words, it unravels the very notion of "cultural relativity," a culture that refers to the subjective view of social and humanistic perception of life through different perspectives. The inference of the impact of media on human mentality, presumably, exemplifies the target of social studies, which go hand in hand with postmodern radical changes in America. Here, the novel is a perfect postmodern cinematic masterpiece dealing with decisive socio-cultural issues that might appear in the future. These issues are the crux of the social traits of the novel because Pynchon – as a contemporary author – is widely recognized as a postmodern authorial millstone who writes about postmodern social matters and their relative aspects.

Consequently, the interpretation of society and its pertinent matters would lead to an original study of literary works "as they incarnate the plurality of voices contrived by dint of narrative demonstration of particular themes related to culture, society, and literature" (Abu Jweid, 2023, p.22). As a rule of thumb, the influence of society is massive since it lays bare the essential humanistic and cultural background of the author. In this sense, the reader could critically examine the work in the light of the social components and effects shaping the genuine notions of literature as a whole. Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, in this way, is an obtrusive example of the social changes in America due to its meticulous narrative nature. It deals with precise details of society at the time. The social attributes of the novel are appropriate for investigating the thematic characteristics of American society, which has witnessed tremendous change. This is because it has been viewed from different anthropological, cultural, and ethnic perspectives. In other words, it had become a fine destination for many world nations, making the novel feasible for many critical interpretations.

The social aspects of Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* are also subject to technical interpretation. That is, it utilizes narrative experimentation; it is the stereotypical writing style of postmodern fiction. Pynchon, who is a great postmodern author, makes intensive use of this experimentation that goes together with social monumental changes at the onset of the twenty-first century. It reflects Pynchon's profound view of American society as well as its assimilation of various social backgrounds into one nation. In this respect, the study of society is practical, and it could be pinpointed "through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence" (McDonald, 2023, p.IV). At this point, the author-reader relationship is pursued by means of the didactic nuances of literary works. Pynchon might insert implicit messages concerning the transformation of American society by providing the reader with didactic themes to enhance the American ability to cope smoothly with these changes.

The study of the relationship between the author and the reader, Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, has its social attributes. The novel abounds with social topics that address the most recent updates of social studies and their influence on literature. Being so, the social factor is highly important to discovering diverse literary themes concerning the original social backgrounds. Society might be interpreted as a fresh impetus for the cultural circumstances which motivated the authors to comment on reality via a fictional narrative description. The author, on the one hand, finds possible writing paths to accentuate the continual changes of reality in

fictional writing pieces. On the other hand, the reader identifies these paths by tracing the implied authorial projections in the text. To clarify, the reader might follow a critical way to examine the way by which that author wants to rectify reality through fictional narratives. In this way, the fictional text becomes a theoretical connection between the author and the reader, and it links both of them by the reader's application of critical methodologies to interpret it. The figure below illustrates the historical, moral, and social relationship between the author and the reader with its technical and thematic significance:

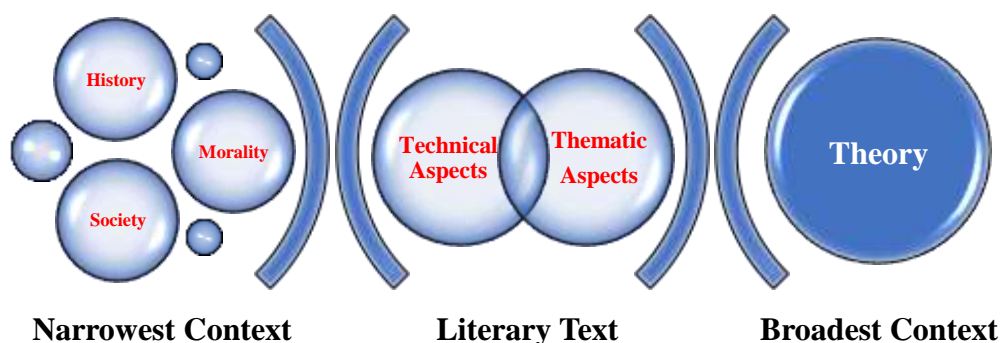


Figure 1.1: Historical, Moral, and Social Relationship between the author and the reader

In the beginning, the figure demonstrates how history, morality, and society represent the current study's concern with the triad of literary works as a whole. In the middle, the figure shows how the literary text exemplifies two fictional aspects of literary works. First, the technical aspect embodies the authors' utilization of, for example, literary experimentation and new narrative techniques to comment on reality outside the text. This part is only limited to the narrative techniques employed by the author to convey the text to the reader. Second, the thematic aspect is the core subject that the author aims to deliver to the reader through one coherent and united subject. This part is limited to the notions and comments ushered by the author in the course of the literary text. In the end, the figure presents the literary theory to allow the reader to follow any theoretical framework to interpret literary texts in the light of history, morality and society.

3. Conclusion

This essay has focused on the author-reader relationship and how it affects and is affected by the subjectivity of literary interpretations regarding history, morality, and society linked to the critical application of theory to literature. The study of literary works is very significant for grasping the essence of fictional texts, which reflect reality in all its complications. Consequently, the discussion of literature from a theoretical perspective foregrounds the reader's ability to find out different meanings in the course of the descriptive details projected by the author. For this reason, the study has accentuated the importance of literary theory for unravelling the latent textual-contextual messages to provide the reader with a vivid view of reality outside the text. Such a view could be thematic by its very nature, i.e. it conveys the text's factual appropriation of everyday matters concerning the existence of the reader and how he/she gets its primary point. Simultaneously, the theoretical interpretation maintains the text's authentic vigor without manipulating the realistic impression tackled by the author. At this point, literary theory becomes an analytical tool for readers to figure out and explore various layers of the thematic levels of the text.

The explication of the significance of literary theory in understanding different texts has been reinforced by the discussion of three interrelated topics, namely, history, morality, and society. First, history has been approached to demonstrate how the temporal background of the text could offer a genuine conceptualization of the author's life. Furthermore, it has pinpointed the conditions that simulated the author to shed light on meticulous facts and events that shaped his mentality and way of writing. In this respect, liberal humanism and post-colonialism have been discussed as samples of the dual nature of history, which influences people's identities and their living circumstances. Being so, the study has found that the historical aspect of the text would be a vital theoretical approach to literature and its treatment of the destiny of individuals and reality.

Second, morality has been examined in order to identify the humanistic attributes of literary texts. In other words, literary texts deal with complex ethical problems that are rectified by the authorial insertion of morality in the crux of the text's thematic concerns. Third, society has been emphasized for the sake of revealing the crucial role of society in affecting the text's connection with the reader, whereby the reader could have a comprehensive impression of society. That is, he/she could locate the consistent progression of social life around him/her. As such, literary theoretical interpretations are various and diverse regarding historical, moral, and social issues. They truly do attend to the proper interpretation that must be followed when discussing a specific literary text and its pertinent as well as concomitant affinity with reality outside it. In sum, they are essential for bridging the gap between the author-reader relationships in the process of the theoretical interpretation of literary works.

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