

THE MEANING OF THE LITERARY TEXT – READER’S INDIVIDUAL ACT

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Abstract. *The relationship between a literary text and a reader, and especially the triad the author – the text – the reader are complex phenomena that have been studied from different perspectives in the science of literature. However, the least attention has been paid to the reader as an important, if not the most important factor in the process of successfully revealing numerous potential meanings of the literary text. Only at the beginning of the 20th century did the reader become a significant component in the interpretation of the text. Many scientific disciplines have become interested in the reader, while his emotional sensitivity, motivation to read, depth of experience and level of mental engagement have become crucial for all possible meanings of the text. The reader becomes the key element in the process of understanding the text, whose dedication and level of reception and the future fate of the text will depend on. Starting from Ingarden's claim that there are two different phases of interpreting a literary text (while-reading and post-reading phase), and having in mind the need to educate a true, dedicated, realistic reader, this paper highlights the importance of good motivation for experiencing and understanding a text as a prerequisite for nurturing a literary taste, developing the emotional sensitivity and individuality of a person from an early age. Understanding a literary text, whether by listening or reading, implies a mentally active recipient who is fully engaged in both phases and in direct contact with the text, and he discovers, interprets and re-creates the literary text based on his personal experience, while at the same time advancing himself spiritually, aesthetically and emotionally with new meanings that the text radiates. That is why the approach to a literary text should always be open-minded and new, it should look for unexpected, original answers that are an expression of the reader's individual experience.*

Key words: *literary text, reader, motivation, understanding, individuality, meaning*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Valuable literary text, without exception, even when it belongs to the distant past or the “world” insufficiently known to the modern reader, reaches into life and with its objectivity encompasses people and events, nature and the world as a whole with all its complex and intertwined relationships. It therefore requires active reading, whereby “the meaning of the sentences read should be revealed with that original originality and activity” (Ingarden, 1971, p. 36). Thus, the reader becomes a co-author of the literary text. Only a well-motivated and mentally engaged reader can truly interpret a literary text; for this reader, such a text is no longer the world of the past (regardless of the fact that it actually belongs there), but it rather becomes a world of the moment in which the text recipient lives. The reader recognizes himself among the characters; he experiences their fear, feelings, wandering, suffering and pain.

The fact that the text begins to “live” in the full sense only when it comes into the hands of the reader obliges all interpreters of the written word to organize the instruction of literature in a way that the recipient and the literary text become *one* during the active reading and understanding process. The poetic world of the literary text in itself sensuously impresses the reader, enhances his feelings and narrows the circle of the rational. As a result, there is an emotional experience and reception. *Literary communication* is established, which is a system of interaction between the literary text and the recipient. It involves three basic elements: *the text* (as a source of information), *reading/listening* (the activity by which that information is transmitted) and the *reader/recipient* (Rosandić, 2005, p. 273) the one who receives and reacts to what is read. The foundation of the literary text reception should be an independent, research work of the reader, his personal experience unencumbered by excessive suggestions from other parties. The literary text resists any strict teaching methodology that in any way violates its nature, and neglects the reader. Being aware of that, at the beginning of the 20th century, the interpreters of literary art start to pay more and more attention to the reader. Apart from linguistics, the theory of reception and the methodology of teaching literature, other scientific disciplines including psychology, pedagogy and other begin to be interested in the reader.

So far, the procedures and approaches to teaching literary texts to younger school-age students caused the originality and creative potentials of readers to be hindered by the traditional teaching approach and the hierarchical teaching model where the teachers do not show interest in students’ emotional experience of the literary text due to curriculum requirements. They have neglected the important fact that communication between the text and the recipient should be mediated only when and how much it is needed as a “source of literary-historical and literary-theoretical information about the text”, and this information “should not encourage original and aesthetic impressions (experiences and knowledge)” (see more in Rosandić, 2005, p. 281). Therefore, when providing students with additional information about the text, before they even read it, teachers should be careful and moderate, in order for students to be able to experience it, to have a realistic level of understanding, and their own opinion during the literary and didactic interaction. An important starting point for all of the above is good motivation for emotional experience and active reading of the text, which is seen as the first phase of learning.

2. MOTIVES AS THE DRIVERS OF ACTIVITIES AND PRECONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL RECEPTION OF THE TEXT

In an active relationship with the recipient, due to its layering and ambiguity, a valuable literary work leads to self-reflection which further turns into numerous personal competencies. As the great Serbian children's poet Dušan Radović pointed out – “you are small when you start reading the book, but you become big when you finish it”. The Italian literary critic and esthetician Umberto Eco also speaks about the possibilities of “entering” a literary text, and believes that a literary text is “... open, which means that the reader adds to the writer's thoughts in his imagination ... he reads creatively”. The writer discreetly “invites” the active reader to finish up the imagination process and to develop a new creation of what has already been written, because “every literary text contains a perspective of its reader. The reader is, we can say, one of the characters in the text” (Weinrich in Maricki, 1978, p. 84). That is why teaching a literary text to students of younger primary school age in a good-quality manner should be a distinct experience in which they will play the main role.

The possibilities to educate an active listener, who would later become a dedicated reader, a productive and creative interpreter of the literary text are numerous. It all starts with a good motivation for the world of the written word, encouraging the desire to revive poetic images, to feel the melody of language. Motivation, initially external, and later internal, is the main precondition for active reading and reception of the text. This can be ensured in several ways. The most important ones are the curiosity motive, the creativity motive, the awareness of the obstacle and the interested teacher as a motive.

The curiosity motive is one of the most important motives for successful text understanding. Curiosity is a powerful driving force. Considering that curiosity is the most prevalent, but also short-lived, at the preschool and younger primary school age, it should be nurtured in order to grow into interest, i.e., the need, over time. The curiosity about the new character that the potential reader will meet, his actions, positive traits, but also the consequences of negative behaviour, the events that will follow encourage the youngest readers to listen and read the text carefully, which allows for a more complete reception and better analysis.

The creativity motive significantly contributes to the reception of the text. A literary text as a “schematic creation contains segments of uncertainty concretized by the reader, and this concretization makes complete what we call a literary text” (more in Ingarden, 1971, pp. 46-52). Creativity, whose starting point is the literary text, allows students to express their own experience, send feedback on the level of reception and the strength of the experience. Literary, artistic, musical and drama creativity ensure a high level of motivation of the recipient when reading, but also interpreting the poetic text.

The awareness of the obstacle and the need for mental effort to overcome it, also encourages the youngest to make greater efforts. The obstacle is at the same time a challenge to discover, understand and adopt something that is enigmatic, unknown, and distant from them. Creating a problem situation, introducing students to the world of literature, guiding them to imagine themselves as one of the characters/participants, someone who should help the protagonist in trouble, solve the problem, free the prisoner, help the weak, protect the weak, and ensures the intellectual, moral and emotional personality development.

The interested teacher is a significant driver of successful reception and a deeper emotional experience of the text (see more in: Stojanović, 2010, p. 290). Children feel and evaluate the behaviour of adults (parents, preschool and school teachers). It often

happens that their interest will depend on the teacher's attitude towards the book, or towards something else. Since interests get stabilized only between the ages of ten and eleven, it is up to the parents, and especially preschool and school teachers, to influence the development of love of reading during that period, following the interests of students and creating an exciting atmosphere in socializing with the book, since their interest in books will further develop love of reading (more in: Purić and Stojanović, 2019, pp. 281-296). *Vygotsky pointed out that what the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow.* In that sense, if students' work on the text is tracked, if their interest in reading is nurtured, if their comments are listened to carefully, their language expression encouraged, results praised, they will work harder, have the desire to explore the unknown, learn new and thus meet teachers' expectations, but also their own. Understanding a literary text begins with the teacher's expressive reading or telling. Expressive (interpretive, aesthetic, artistic) reading should be the highest form of reading. It is "congruous, strong, stimulating, expressive, filled with enthusiasm and the desire to deepen the experience of the text, but also to ensure its understanding" (Milatović, 2011, p. 245). By listening or reading, the text "mobilizes the consciousness and sub consciousness of the recipient and brings him, in certain stages of understanding, to a state of infantile ecstasy; there are many potential meanings and hidden messages, which can transform in different ways and when the conditions for that are met, will present themselves in the reader's rational and irrational being" (Smiljković i Milinković, 2010, p. 77). With its poetic originality in the process of reading, the literary text is multiplied, enriched and improved through context and non-linguistic signs. This act is significantly contributed by an active reader who in his consciousness revives poetic images, imagination, and with invisible thread connects the real and the surreal, the visible and the invisible, the given and the suggested, and thus builds his inner world on the basis of a literary text.

3. THE READER AND THE RECEPTION OF A LITERARY TEXT DURING AND AFTER READING

Reading is a mental activity that includes anticipation and imagination starting from the title and the first lines of the text. Expressive reading gives the teacher the opportunity to establish successful communication with students, provide a stimulating environment and design a lesson from the methodological standpoint to allow for freedom of thought and language activity. Therefore, during expressive text reading, one should dwell on each word, new sentence, stop at the end of the paragraph, or even better, at each exciting point in the text and give the listener an opportunity to imagine, come to life, present his vision, and predict the further course of action. Predictive reading significantly motivates the youngest readers to be creative (see more in Stojanović, 2014, pp. 399-412), because "each phase of reading passes from a state in which it was unknown to the readers, possibly containing only some indefinite and vague hints, to the state of the immediate present, but it immediately changes into the form in which it is already known, although it is no longer current and directly present" (Ingarden, 1971, p. 92). The uncertainty present in the text aims to make the poetic world of the text adaptable to the most individual reader dispositions. Therefore, the text is "determined by a kind of floating state, which in a way oscillates between the world of real objects and the experiential world of the reader" (Izer in Maricki, 1978, p. 84). From the linguistic and artistic aspect, "the combination of codes is present as a ready possibility, and is realized in accordance with the reader's willingness and experience

of power” (Nikolić, 1992, p. 129). Thus, in his consciousness, “the meaning of an artistic expression expands and deepens not based on the linguistic experience, but based on the power of the semiotic associations of the reader” (Nikolić, 1992, p. 129). Moreover, “linguistic, sensuous, social, psychological and ethical codes” work together in revealing the meaning. The language system and its grammar rules in the text are subordinated to the writer's way of thinking, the way of seeing reality, human consciousness in it and the attitude towards the world. At the same time, each text contains “certain instructions for the reader, which should enable or facilitate his orientation in that part of the world that the book provides him with. If the (formed) content of a certain text is called its semantics, then these signals can be considered its syntax” (Weinrich in Maricki, 1978, p. 87). Incomplete sentences in the text often require additional engagement from the reader, send him an invitation, oblige him to cooperate with the author and create together with the writer. At the same time, the reader is kept at a certain distance, which is constantly affirmed by the new signals he receives. With its language and style, the literary text has a strong impact on readers, “it sprinkles them with thousands of language drops that scatter, shine, appear and disappear, hum and murmur, burst in their beauty and inspiration” (Milatović, 2011, p. 248). A significant part of the life experience that is produced through the reader's expectations makes the linguistic-artistic sign in the literary text to get its essence outside the primary semantics, because it is never identical to itself, it always points to something other than what we are used to.

By using the presence of absence, skilled writers engage readers to subconsciously long and assume, perceive the presence of a sign that does not exist. Thus, when interpreting the protagonist's conversation with nature, it is required, expected and assumed to find another opposite sign that testifies that the protagonist does not find interlocutors equal to himself in the earthly world that surrounds him, but often longs and establishes communication with the otherworldly - celestial or underwater world, such as the *Nebeska reka* [Heavenly River], *Maslačak* [Dandelion] or *Sedefna ruža* [Pearl Rose], the protagonists of Grozdana Olujić's fairy tales. Only in that, at first glance, invisible correlation between the present and the absent, near and far, known and unknown, one's own and another's, real and surreal, lies a new perspective developed in the reader's consciousness that rests as an antipodal aesthetic correlate. The sign is suppressed from the lexical perspective and only in the actual context does its aesthetic function increase.

The often present motif of “hunger” in children's literature indicates not only a lack of material goods such as food, but also spiritual in terms of beauty (*Ugly Duckling* – H. C. Andersen), happiness (*The Selfish Giant* – O. Wilde), love (*Glassmaker's love* [Staklareva ljubav] – G. Olujić), books (*little Radojica*, *The Story of a Boy and the Moon* [Priča o dečaku i Mesecu] by B. V. Radičević), reading (*Bastian*, *The Neverending Story* by M. Ende), knowledge, art, culture.

An experienced, as well as a less experienced reader, encouraged from an early age to be led by the oral and written word, will not question, for example, the longing for knowledge of the little boy Radojica, the protagonist of *The Story of a Boy and the Moon* by Branko V. Radičević, who has an immense love for books, enjoys every word he reads, even if it was reading by candlelight, where he hides from his thrifty boss. The only light in that darkness, both material and spiritual, he sees in education, and that is why he promises himself that he will find and read the wisest book in the world, from which one learns how to overcome poverty.

Thus, a literary text as an open system of signs and meanings testifies that everything that exists within it “whether in its linguistic or experiential setting, belongs to an

aesthetically composed structure of signs ... and it is in its entirety a sign of high structural rank, which contains within itself and opens up a special art world with itself" (Nikolić, 1992, p. 132). This sign combines "several structural values such as motifs, poetic images, descriptions, dialogue, symbols, characters, languages and styles that ... branch out in all layers, break through and connect them" (Nikolić, 1992, p. 132). In this way, the reader "transfers the familiar events into new, changed horizons, and from there they show themselves as enriched, changed, corrected ... which is the main precondition for this collaboration" (Izer in Maricki, 1978, p. 103).

Free and creative access to the literary text, with maximum engagement of students in accordance with their abilities, ensures a more complete reception, while the feeling of voluntariness and the possibility of making decisions and actively participating in the interpretation process further sparks their interest and emotions stimulated by reading. The pleasure that the youngest recipient feels when reading mostly comes from the fact that he satisfies the need for adventures, which is especially strong in the preschool and younger primary school age. "When a child goes to the imaginary world that the book created for him, he imagines himself doing everything he would like to do, which he is not able to do in real life" (Hurlock, 1956, p. 350). That is why contemporary poets and prose writers fit into the modern age with their specific poetic expression, and some literary texts have a very noticeable "dynamic events, sudden twists, sudden interruptions, mosaic fragments, unusual words that capture the readers' attention and encourage them to connect with the core element of the art work" (Marković, 2003, p. 191).

With their value, the language and artistic signs in the literary text, draw the reader's attention, spark his curiosity, and invite him to the enigmatic game of discovery and revelation to which he inherently surrenders. By introducing game and independent research, live and free interaction in the process of discovering the art world of literature, using other media such as comic books (see more in Stojanović et al., 2017, pp. 325-329), students have a research-based approach to the text, ask themselves many questions, they perceive, imagine, create.

If the teacher more often creates scenarios in class where the students will be free to express their impressions about what they have read, it significantly increases the motivation to read new books, develops aesthetic taste and love for books. Over time, even after reading the same literary text in different periods of life, the reader perceives it in different ways, because "receptive activity is conditioned at the same time by the literary work and the reader, where the text represents the objective side, while the reader represents the subjective side in this relationship" (Izer in Maricki, 1978, p. 147). The reader himself changes over time, grows intellectually, gets spiritually richer, emotionally and morally strong, and reacts differently. That is why the approach to a literary text should always be open-minded and new, it should look for unexpected, original answers that are an expression of the reader's individual experience.

When creative teaching models are used, the reader "challenges his own knowledge and opinions when reading and never accepts something for granted, but rather questions everything using thorough consideration and critical judgment". Active reading allows the reader to "creatively project and actualize the poetic world of the literary text in his own unique and singular way, he adds the meanings to the literary text based on his life and literary experience, and according to his own imagination and sensibility" (Nikolić, 1992, p. 163).

4. CONCLUSION

In teaching language and literature, reading is important for the overall educational process which is why special attention is paid to it. It is considered a cognitive process, cognitive activity, and activity of discovering the meaning of what is read, which highlights the reader's reception and cognitive abilities, activates the nervous system and the psychological basis of personality. Reading with the purpose of learning and analysing a literary text lays the foundation for students' literary knowledge, develops aesthetic taste, enriches the spirit of a young being, and develops positive personality traits. This significantly influences the philosophical and moral attitudes and overall cultural development of a person. The goal of the reading culture is "to enable the student not only to enjoy the beauty of literary and artistic work in general, but also to be able to explain the literary text, interpret its positive and negative values, use other people's experiences about the text" (Pedagoški rječnik 2 [Pedagogical Dictionary 2], 1967, p. 593).

In this time of insufficiently developed reading habits, reading and analysis of a literary text in modern literature teaching is usually reduced to retelling, simple reproduction, passive adoption of events, characters and their characteristics without emotionally engaging the reader and encouraging him to imagine, revive and experience the poetic world of the literary text.

The path to a true, realistic reader who is formed on the basis of his attitude towards the text and the manner and intensity of his reception (see more in Vučković, 2008, p. 105) is made possible by growing external motivation for reading into internal, and by nurturing reader's individual experience. Goethe also pointed out that a literary work, which consists merely of "words and letters", must first be called to "life by spirit and heart" (quoted according to: Izer in Maricki, 1978, p. 145).

The child-reader, who is a recipient the same way the adults are, behaves towards the literary text like everyone else: he reacts emotionally, ethically, associatively, sensibly, sensitively and creatively. While reading, the child feels satisfied for discovering new ideas, acquiring knowledge, emotionally participating in the fate of the protagonist; he feels the joy of aesthetic enjoyment in style and language, as well as the charm of finding a solution to a literary puzzle. The variety of associations that the literary work evokes in students is a feature of its strong symbolism and particular aesthetic and thematic structure. Therefore, when reading and understanding, when interpreting a literary text, one should insist on emotions, experience of beauty, linguistic values of the work, but also the personal attitude of the reader. Literature classes should be organized in such a way that students feel pleasure and enthusiasm for the literary text, and fascination with its poetic world. Each and every exciting and unforgettable encounter with the literary work instigates the youngest recipient to read new books, to research, learn and create, "which, on the one hand, makes childhood, the *golden age* of children's creativity, and on the other hand, the critical period for further development of children's individuality and creativity" (Kamenov, 2002, p. 301). A valuable literary work establishes a dialogue with the recipient who, while reading, actualizes its values. Through active reading, the literary text expands the reader's horizons, enriches him spiritually by providing him with valuable knowledge, opens up new horizons and offers a different experience of the world. At the same time, it significantly changes the reader's already existing - inner world, thus continuing to live, becoming aesthetically and emotionally effective through epochs and centuries.

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ZNAČENJE KNJIŽEVNOG TEKSTA – INDIVIDUALNI ČIN ČITAoca

Odnoš između književno delo – čitalac, a posebno trijada pisac – delo – čitalac složeni su fenomeni koji su u nauci o književnosti izučavani sa različitih aspekata. Ipak, najmanje pažnje poklanjalo se čitaocu kao važnom, ako ne i najvažnijem u uspešnom razotkrivanju brojnih potencijalnih značenja dela. Tek početkom 20. veka čitalac dobija značajno mesto u tumačenju teksta. Za njega se interesuju mnoge nauke, a njegova emocionalna osetljivost, motivisanost za čitanje, dubina doživljaja i stepen misaonog angažovanja postaju presudni za sva moguća značenja dela. On postaje ključni subjekat u procesu saznavanja dela od čije će posvećenosti i stepena recepcije zavistiti dalja sudbina teksta.

Polazeći od Ingardenove tvrdnje da postoje dve različite faze saznavanja književnog teksta (faza za vreme čitanja i faza posle čitanja), a imajući u vidu potrebu za vaspitanjem istinskog, posvećenog, realnog čitaoca, u radu ističemo značaj dobre motivacije za doživljaj i recepciju dela kao preduslove negovanja književnog ukusa, razvoja emocionalne osetljivosti i individualnosti pojedinca počev od najranijeg uzrasta. Saznavanje književnog teksta, bilo slušanjem ili samostalnim čitanjem, podrazumeva misaono aktivnog recipijenta koji samoangažovanjem i u jednoj i u drugoj fazi, u neposrednom kontaktu sa tekstom otkriva, tumači i iznova stvara delo u skladu sa ličnim iskustvom, pritom duhovno, estetski i emocionalno bogateći sebe novim značenjima kojima delo isijava. Zato pristup književnom delu treba da bude uvek otvoren i nov, da se traže neočekivani, originalni odgovori koji su izraz individualnog doživljaja čitaoca.

Ključne reči: književni tekst, čitalac, motivacija, saznavanje, individualnost, značenje