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Інтерпретація тексту: теорія і практика

Text Interpretation: Theory and Practice

*Навчально-методичний посібник для здобувачів вищої
освіти факультету іноземних мов*

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Навчально-методичний посібник з курсу інтерпретації тексту призначений для здобувачів вищої освіти факультету іноземних мов. Посібник містить орієнтовний зміст лінгвістичного аналізу англomовного художнього оповідання та його інтерпретації, завдання на закріплення окремих складових аналізу, варіант плану аналізу, список пропонованих кліше для інтерпретації, художній текст та зразок його інтерпретації. Може бути використаний здобувачами вищої освіти для самостійної підготовки до випускного чи вступного екзамену з питання інтерпретації тексту.

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PREFACE

This course will aid in dealing with the reading and interpretation of short stories by American and British writers and is aimed at the expansion of understanding of a short story beyond the literal and simple recollection of factual details. The majority of the activities in this course will concentrate on reading and analyzing the short story and its elements (the genre, the plot-structure, and the forms of presentation).

The course presupposes thorough and conscientious independent and class work on behalf of the student.

I hope that this course will encourage students to respond imaginatively to what they read, to build up their vocabulary. It will help to understand and enjoy reading English language literature and will give tools and methods for appreciating fiction students will read in the future.

The Manual is intended to serve as a stimulus while one is reading. It is designed to give the reader an increased understanding and the enjoyment of the short stories chosen for reading, interpretation and discussion.

One feature that distinguishes a good piece of literature is the conscious artistry that fuses a work into a unified whole; every detail contributes to the unity of the final product and nothing superfluous is permitted to remain.

Every writer has a distinctive voice. And it is important for a non-native reader to be able to hear the individual voice of the writer, to interpret the message of the story and perceive the gentle reverberations of meaning, the ingenious symbols to be explored and decoded. It is difficult for a foreign reader to recognize all allusions and historic and cultural references familiar to the native user of English. We mustn't underestimate the value of cultural, historical and linguistic commentaries as helpful instruments of grasping the content and the message of a literary work.

The reader has to be able to follow the narrative up and down, listen to the expression of various images, if he is to understand the story. He will be able to hear the narrator's voice that gives a specific intonation to the story.

PART I. THEORY

Unit 1. Text interpretation and other disciplines it's related to

Text interpretation is designed to help a philologist gain as profound an understanding of a literary work as possible, derive its denotative (factual) and connotative (emotive, expressive, evaluative and stylistic) information and account for its ideological, educational and emotional influence on the reader.

Interpretation of literary works as a college practice has for its theoretical background the theory of literature. In fact, it is close to the practice of book-based essay writing. To be able to analyze fiction one must be versed in fundamentals of the theory of literature. A considerable part of this exposition will be, in fact, recapitulation of these fundamentals. Yet, before this comes, let us specify some other disciplines text interpretation is related to and draw distinctions between them.

Stylistics studies functional styles present in the text, the author's idiom (peculiarities of the author's language), the characters' idiolects (their speech, as reflecting their social standing, profession, the territory where they live), and various graphical, phonetic, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic stylistic devices, used in the text. Unlike stylistics, text interpretation does not lay so much emphasis on styles and does not seek to ascertain and minutely analyze every trope and figure actualized in a text. It only selects the linguistic data, which may be of vital importance for text comprehension.

Literary criticism, in the first place, asserts the text's message and form and interprets the text. Then, it places a particular literary work among other works by some writer or a literary trend he represents; compares it with similar works, both in form and in message, by other writers; determines the value of this work in fiction and poetry, the continuity of ideas adopted from predecessors and passed on to successors. A critic usually treats a work of literature in conformity with a current or school of criticism he belongs to. The 20th century criticism highlighted such currents as structuralism, hermeneutics, 'New Criticism', mythological criticism, receptive or reader-response criticism, post-structuralism, etc.

this passage, richly embellished with extended metaphors, are that for young people it is natural to prefer sincere and strong emotions, full-blooded life and ardour to cautiousness, calm calculation and worldly wisdom.

The tough-minded Nathan turned his attention to a girl 'who had a neat little fortune'. Note the ironic understatement 'neat little fortune', showing that her fortune was a considerable one and the following metonymy 'Nathan married that', which proves that his was the marriage of convenience. It is at this point that the exposition closes and the entanglement of the action begins.

It actually begins with the author's description of the place where the scene is set – the town named Braddle. Braddle is characterized as a gaunt hill, which is suggestive of its gloom and lifelessness. The mill, which is fed by a stream running down one side of that hill, is, on the contrary, qualified as beneficent. This is vaguely ironical, since, as we can suggest, it spoils the stream, the air, and takes up much human labour. The trivial knowledge of the narrow-minded people there is that they would be ruined unless the mill worked. Note the personification 'the heart of Braddle would cease to beat', which suggests that the people perceive their place and the mill as a kind of deity demanding all sort of sacrifice.

The narration that follows alternates and contrasts information about Nathan and Tony. Where Tony is concerned, the author is quite straightforward – he relates simple facts of unambitious life, the life of toil and grind (note the four-time repetition of 'Tony went on working at the mill'). But when it comes to Nathan, the author becomes singularly verbose, using understatements (So did Nathan in a way) and innuendoes (Nathan's steadiness so increased his opportunities that...; He had a cute ambitious wife, and what with her money and influence he was soon made a manager of one of the departments; Then his colleague died; he was appointed sole manager...). The pieces about Nathan's breathtaking career seem very matter-of-course owing to these understatements and innuendoes. They are arranged in gradation, culminating in the statement about his buying the entire concern. This is in sharp contrast to the description of Tony's destiny, which remains the same throughout the passage.

In the passage that follows, describing the war-time, we witness the

author's imitation of that day's pompous press ('The Braddle mills were worn from their very bearings by their colossal efforts, increasing by day or by night, to provide what were called the sinews of war'). The workers at the mill are described as 'white and thin and sullen'. In contrast to them, and as an anticlimax the Regents are said to have received a vast increase of wealth so that 'their eyes sparkled'.

In the phrase of Nathan's wife about the help to the country, marked with chiasmus for emphasis ('In times like these we must help our country still more, still more we must help; let us lend our money to the country'), the hypocrisy of those days' propaganda is reflected. The rich put in more money into the war machine, therefore getting increasingly richer, as the tribute paid to them still enlarges their property. The poor pay the tribute to the country by their very lives and are never rewarded for this.

Another hypocrisy is the Regents' help to the country by recruiting their own workmen. Nathan himself came to embody the heart of Braddle. He was exempt from military service, but he sat upon the tribunal and enrolled his workers' children. Three parallel descriptions of Tony's children and Tony himself being enlisted, said good-bye to and eventually killed are terse and seemingly unemotional, yet they have a very strong impact.

When the father of the family was killed, 'the country gave Patience a widow's pension, as well as a touching inducement to marry again' - hypocritical and impracticable advice. The ironical epithet 'touching' adds more venom to the irony hidden in this phrase. The short conclusion after the semi-colon - 'she died of grief' - as if her death were in the order of things - is the anti-climax to the country's 'benefaction'. It creates the effect of defeated expectancy for the reader. Nathan and his wife died, too, but in contrast - of excess, of over-eating.

These deaths earmark the change of times and generations, and actually, finish the first line, or, perhaps, circle of the plot. New characters come on the scene - Olive, the Regents' daughter, and Nancy, the Vassalls' girl. Olive, a very beautiful girl, married a grand man 'with bouncing red cheeks' quite hiding the small sharp nose, 'as completely as two hills hide a little barn in a valley'. We can suppose that she repeated her father's choice and had a marriage of convenience. Nancy, in contrast, married a man 'who had done deeds of valour in the war'. Note the definite positive

connotations of these words, which serve to determine the reader's attitude to the characters.

In this part we again encounter a sample of bitter irony regarding the glaring social inequity – the vicious circle of 'tribute': 'The Trustee went on lending the Braddle money to the country, the country went on sending large sums of interest to Olive (which was the country's tribute to her because of her parents' unforgotten, and indeed unforgettable kindness), while Braddle went on with its work of enabling the country to do so'. And again here we see the hypocritical clichéd appeal to work harder, so that 'the heart of Braddle might not cease to beat', and the shortsighted assent to it on the part of common people – 'those who had not given their lives' in the war yet. A good deal of irony is allotted to the high and wealthy – the Regents: 'Olive lived in a grand mansion with numerous servants who helped her to rear a little family of one, a girl named Mercy, who also had a small sharp nose and round red cheeks'.

The passage describing Olive's annual supper given to her workpeople has a somewhat elevated and artificially sentimental flavour: 'Every year one of the workmen would make a little speech..., thanking Olive for enabling the heart of Braddle to continue its beats, calling down the spiritual blessings of heaven and the golden blessings of the world upon Olive's golden head'. Moved by these speeches, Olive 'wanted to go on seeing them, being with them, and living with rapture in their workaday world. But she did not do this.' The anticlimax in these lines brings down Olive's good intentions to the level of wishful thinking.

The dramatic monologue that Olive addresses to her daughter comes as the culmination of the second line of the plot. It is full of affected emotionalism and bears evidence that Olive, as well as her workmen presumably, is under the delusion that God himself ordained the present order of things. Olive and her kin are 'the agents' of the Almighty, theirs is 'a divine position, a noble responsibility', and the people 'are being cared for' by them, 'just simply' them. 'It goes on for years, years upon years it goes on. It will go on, of course, yes, forever...'

Olive does not realize, that it is largely owing to her late father's enterprise and, apparently, unscrupulousness that she rose to the position she occupies now. She does not realize that she herself is an unconscious tool for the authorities to rule the masses, although, of course, she gets

large gains by her 'service'. The final sentence: 'And the people really love me - I think' comes as an anticlimax of Olive's gushing speech. The infirm 'I think' shows that even Olive cannot mistake the sentimental affectation of speeches at the parties for true love, for there is obviously no ground for common people to love their oppressors.

By way of general appraisal of the story, it is worth pointing out that the concise and seemingly impassive narration brings the message home most efficiently. Its irony is not lost on the reader. And it is really amazing how a short story like this can set us reflecting on the problems on a large scale: of individuals and society, social inequity, good and evil and, above all, of the forces that pull strings in a society.

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