

INTERTEXTUAL COMPETENCE:
THE READER'S KEY TO THE TREASURE

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While the inescapable "osmosis" of texts and their dependence one on another has always been a feature of literature, the term "intertextuality" which gives justice to this phenomenon was coined only in the 1960s. The term denoted a focus on the text and its correspondences with other literary works, the waning interest in the person of the author and the mounting interest in the reader, who was for the first time perceived as the (inter-) text's true maker. Since the 1960s, there have been a vast number of "metatextual" (Genette 1992: 82)¹ studies that have dealt with the process by means of which the recipient of a literary work of art acclimates the text at hand. Many of the above studies, independently of one another, assumed that reading is basically a two-phase cognitive phenomenon, and the reader's activity consists in a bilinear deciphering of a text. Reading is seen, then, as intertextual by nature; the boundary of a single work is transcended and (theoretically, at least) the whole of literature becomes accessible to the reader.

One of the earliest attempts at a definition of processes at work during reading was made by Stanley Fish in *Self-consuming artifacts* (1972). In the encounter between the text and the reader, the latter moves forward through the linear succession of lexical, syntactic, and semantic items realizing every now and then that some of them are unsettling and disturbing. Thus, at the superficial level the reader is faced with the resistance of meaning; he is bewildered and uncertain. The reaching of the end of an unclear sentence (paragraph, page, chapter, text) provokes one to return to its beginning in search for disambiguation.

¹ As the author notices half-jokingly in the manner of Mr. Jourdain from Moliere's play, "All literary critics, for centuries, have been producing metatext without knowing it." (Genette 1992: 82).

Confined to the level of lexemes, however, the search proves futile, hence the indispensability of venturing outside of it onto other planes of signification. Fish points to St. Augustine who was instrumental in placing significance outside of the purely textual surface: "Augustine, in effect, has made language defeat itself by making it point away from the temporal-spatial vision it naturally reflects ... what [the language] does is alert the reader to its inability ... to contain, deal with, capture, say anything about its putative subject, Christ. The sentence is thus a ploy in the strategy of conversion, impressing upon the reader or hearer, the insufficiency of one way of seeing in the hope that he will come to replace it with something better" (Fish 1972: 41-42).

The "something better" which according to Fish can be accountable for textual significance was subsequently scrutinized in one of the most influential analyses of the process of reading, written by the French critic Michael Riffaterre. In his *Semiotics of poetry* (1984) Riffaterre, the pope of intertextual studies, reiterates the dual division of reading proposed by Fish, defining somewhat more precisely the two stages of readerly activity. To provide a backdrop for his analysis of reading the French critic proposes a term "literary phenomenon". He defines it in terms of a communicative situation, as a dialectic between text and reader (Riffaterre 1984: 1). In his subsequent book, carrying a telling title *Text production*, the critic extends the definition of the above communicative act as follows: "The literary phenomenon is not only the text, but also its reader and all of the reader's possible reactions to the text – both *enonce* and *enonciation*" (Riffaterre 1983: 3). As to the stages of the deciphering, they take place on two planes concurrently. Initially, the reader decodes a text from beginning to end, in line with the linear succession of signifiers, "from top to bottom of the page, and follows the syntagmatic unfolding. This first, *heuristic* is where the first interpretation takes place, since it is during this reading that *meaning* is apprehended. The second stage is that of *retroactive* reading. This is the time for a second interpretation, for the truly *hermeneutical* reading. As he progresses through the text, the reader remembers what he has just read and modifies his understanding of it in the light of what he is now decoding. As he works from start to finish, he is reviewing, revising, comparing backwards" (Riffaterre 1984: 5-6).

The *significance* of the text is "produced" during the transfer from the first, mimetic, or referential plane onto the second, comparative or intertextual level of decoding. This is made possible through the existence of many places of ungrammaticality in the text. By these Riffaterre means the referentially illogical fragments, figurative expressions, or obscurities whose contradiction is confined to the mimesis only. The feeling of unease in the face of such apparent textual oddities urges the text's recipient to "hurdle the mimesis" (Riffaterre 1984: 5) and to seek for explanation, or significance, at a level higher than that of the text at hand. While solving textual puzzles the reader ventures out and makes a

reference to his prior literary experience. Text production is, then, the constant friction between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of concentration on the text at hand and, simultaneously, on the whole of literature.

Riffaterre's claim that what is unintelligible at the level of an individual text is fully comprehensible in the inter-textual context indicates that notwithstanding the length or the direction of the path walked by the reader in search of significance, the destination is always located outside of a given text.² As the critic himself put it in the concluding lines of *Semiotics of poetry*, what needs to be underscored "repeatedly is that any ungrammaticality within the poem is a sign of grammaticality elsewhere, that is, of belonging in another system. The systemic relationship confers significance. The poetic sign has two faces: textually ungrammatical, intertextually grammatical; displaced and distorted in the mimetic system, but in the semiotic grid appropriate and rightly placed" (Riffaterre 1984: 164-165). Riffaterre shares, then, the belief in the overall intelligibility of literature expressed previously by Northrop Fry in his *Anatomy of criticism*. After all, one of the primary postulates of the latter critic was "the assumption of total coherence" (Fry 1957: 16) in the world of letters.

Riffaterre's assumption of textual ungrammaticalities tallies with the postulated resistance of texts, made by his compatriot, the structuralist Roland Barthes, in *The pleasure of the text* (1973). In the above work Barthes introduces the division into texts of pleasure and texts of bliss. He defines the former as gratifying the reader's literary self-assurance by fulfilling his/her expectations, and as such linked "to a comfortable practice of reading" (Barthes 1975: 14). On the other hand, in order to experience the *jouissance* of the other type of text, the reader must suspend his literary stereotypes, voluntarily exposing himself to the absolutely new (see Barthes 1975: 40). Unlike the text of pleasure (and comfort), the text of bliss is the one that "imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts ... unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (Barthes 1975: 14). Faced with such disconcerting elements in the text the reader is pressed to either reject the latter as nonsensical or to look for clues leading to its comprehension outside (as well as inside) of it. The other response, i.e. the indefatigable pursuit of textual significance, hinges on the belief in its existence either further outside of or deeper within the immediate literary work. A breach of intelligibility in the *linear* reading eventually leads to a capture of a trace of intelligibility during a *non-linear* one.

² Unless we assume a radical intertextual proposition that all texts, like Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, bend upon themselves. In such a case significance can be sought and found within the boundaries of one work of literature. Once the reader enters the fictional wood of such a text, s/he is bound to wander there for ever (Eco 1995: 123).

A double process of apprehending the text is suggested likewise by Umberto Eco in *The role of the reader* (1979). Similarly to Riffaterre, the Italian semiotician perceives the above role in terms of active participation rather than insipid reception of the text. On a number of occasions Eco refers to the above process as to the "production", "generation", or "realization" of the text (Eco 1979: 3, 17, 19). The two-directional realization in question proceeds simultaneously along the text's manifest linear expression and its projected content. According to Eco, the written message, mentally recorded by its recipient as polysemous and equivocal, triggers a series of impressions based on the reader's past experience. Once activated, these impressions together impact the reader's second encounter with the text and help bring out still other meanings thereof, meanings which were hidden, or at least not readily apparent to the reader during the first reading. As a result, following in Riffaterre's footsteps, Eco postulates the existence of two levels of meaning: the overt lexical one and the implied textual one. Cognizant of the inherent gap between the two meanings, Eco (again echoing the French critic) nevertheless maintains that the gap is by no means "incurable" (Eco 1979: 17). For the text's linear representation to signify, one needs to refer outside of it and process the verbal meaning through the intertextual network of co-reference. The semantic and syntactic analysis of the first level, and the unavoidable difficulties encountered in the process can be disambiguated through extra-textual, or con-textual connections. Eco defines the network of connections operating in the text as follows: "While co-textual relations are all the links displayed through expressed lexemes by the linear text manifestation, contextual selections are previously established by a semantic representation with the format of an encyclopedia and are only virtually present in a given text. It is one of the tasks of the reader to actualize them" (Eco 1979: 19).

An analysis of the reader's construction of narrative akin to those sketched above was provided by Horst Ruthrof. The author posits two kinds of transformations performed by the reader during the perusal of a text. "The one, a propositional transformation which is analytical and inter-subjective, producing meanings not unlike those of definitions: lexical or denotative meanings; the other, a concretizing transformation which is inter-subjective to a degree, but to a certain extent also personal. The former is necessary for us to make sense of a novel as a shared code; the latter allows us to understand the novel in terms of shared coded experience. The former, though more readily communicable, is reductive; it narrows a number of similar surface expressions down to a more general propositional meaning; the latter, though less easily communicable, is expansive, activating as it does the reader's propositional understanding of the linguistic surface by means of his/her typified stock of literary and lived experience" (Ruthrof 1981: 13). Contingent on the two transformations are two strata of textual interpretation; according to Ruthrof, these include the literal and the struc-

tural one. The latter relies heavily on the former, but at the same time transcends it and enriches it with inter-textual and extra-textual elements. Referring to the surface text the author introduces the term "textural", comprising all the visual and auditory elements of a text, its stylistic aspects, as well as its linguistic arrangement. "Textural approach, then, is a special discipline within the wider structural investigation, focusing ... on the work's surface text, while 'structural' is meant to comprise all aspects textural and non-textural: in short, the total construct which the reader synthesizes with the indispensable help of extrinsic inter-textuality and life experience on the basis of a given narrative text" (Ruthrof 1981: 42).

The common denominator of all the four studies, beyond the aforementioned divisions of reading into two stages and a similar description of these stages, is the posited existence of a set of prerequisites, identical in all the four cases, for both stages of readerly activity to take place. The critics unanimously indicate that the basis for the first level of reading to proceed smoothly and produce meaning is the linguistic competence of the individual. Eco refers to the reader's input at stage one as simply the reader's acquired and internalized lexicon; Ruthrof also makes an allowance for the inexperienced reader, letting him/her look up the terms in the relevant dictionary. Michael Riffaterre further describes it as predicated on the assumption that language is a referential phenomenon (Eco 1979: 18; Ruthrof 1981: 13; Riffaterre 1984: 5).

But, as held by the French critic, linguistic competence is by no means the sole factor. It comes into play at the stage of mere deciphering the *literal* code of the text, but does not suffice for the *literary* phenomenon to occur. What is essential in stage two of reading is literary competence, which he defines as "the reader's familiarity with the descriptive systems, with themes, with his society's mythologies, and above all with other texts. Wherever there are gaps or compressions in the text ... it is this literary competence alone that will enable the reader to respond properly and to complete" (Riffaterre 1984: 5) the text s/he is decoding. Thus, literary competence encompasses not only the texts the reader has previously read and that are stored up in his memory, but also a certain amount of knowledge of systems of significance operating in the world around (Turski 1997: 87).

Names given to the reader's literary input vary. As such input is perforce related to the transcendence and intersection of diverse texts, Umberto Eco in *The role of the reader* uses somewhat more precise terms of "intertextual competence" or "intertextual knowledge" in lieu of Riffaterre's "literary competence" (Eco 1984: 21).³ Not only the phrasing, however, but also the idea behind it is

³ It can be claimed, though, that for Riffaterre the term "literary" is tantamount with "intertextual" and that abstaining from the use of the latter name he avoids being too simplistic.

slightly different, as the Italian semiotician limits it to the reader's prior literary experience, his remembrance of texts past, with the exclusion of social or mythological codes of significance. Thus Eco defines the intertextual competence indirectly, by means of a phrase: "every text refers back to previous texts" (Eco 1984: 19). Incidentally, Eco's understanding of the reader's competence bears a similarity to that of Roland Barthes'. The latter prefers the term "circular memory", defined briefly as an ability of summoning up (previously read) inter-texts (Barthes 1975: 39).

In addition to the above terms of "intertextual competence" or "intertextual knowledge", however, in many of his writings Eco posits the existence of a vast encyclopedia whose innumerable chapters provide nourishment to the reader (Eco 1984: 7). Eco's encyclopedia has a far broader scope than intertextual knowledge itself, which is but one of its many parts, and is consequently closer in meaning to Riffaterre's literary competence. In *Interpretation and overinterpretation* (1992), Eco demonstrates that this encyclopedia, rooted in the language of the text, comprises, among others, "the cultural conventions that the language has produced and the very history of the previous interpretations of many texts" (Eco 1992: 67). In his later work, *Six walks in the fictional woods* (1994), Eco ponders over the size of the reader's encyclopedia. It goes without saying that the actual scope of such an encyclopedia varies from one reader to the next and it is consequently hard to predict what and how much s/he should know to crack the code of the text at hand. He further admits that, paradoxically, while the total number of encyclopedic entries is potentially unlimited, in reality it is finite and always related directly to the work currently read. Admittedly, the particular text imposes limitations on the scope of the readerly encyclopedia by either assuming or requiring a certain amount of knowledge on his part. As to how this is done, though, Eco remains evasive and equivocal (Eco 1995: 109-131).

Horst Ruthrof, in turn, while not providing a special name for the reader's input into the concretizing textual transformation, enumerates a set of preconditions indispensable for the "structural" approach to the text and, in consequence, for obtaining significance. These include "the presentational process with its spatio-temporal narrative situation, acts of narrating, narrator personality, narrator-reader relationship, the novel's space-time world, its events and human acts, its personae and the inferences which all these suggest ... [the reader's] total physic and socio-cultural make-up at the moment of reading" (Ruthrof 1981: 42, 49).

A question arises with respect to the reader's competence whether the latter is a sum total of textual (both literary and extra-literary), idiosyncratic reading experiences of an individual, or rather a set of coded responses of a whole social community. A number of critical analyses of the issue seem to favor the former approach, giving a lot of credit to the reader him- or herself. The individual re-

ceiving a text is referred to as "a knowledgeable reader" (Stillinger 1991: 14), "an elitist reader" (Kopcewicz 1992: 57), or "a well-versed decoder of signs" (Clayton – Rothstein 1991: 21). In *Interpretation and overinterpretation* Eco soberly points that notwithstanding the obligatory readings shared by the majority of members in a given community, it is inevitable that some readers are more competent than others by virtue of their own effort of perusing, or rather producing, a bigger number of texts (Eco 1992: 16). Eco proposes his own term, "the model reader" (Eco 1979: 7). It is not so much a living individual but a theoretical being endowed with an infinite encyclopedic competence which enables him/her to intercept all textual allusions and move freely over all semantic fields. According to Eco, the model reader's competence could be comparable to that of the perfectly omniscient and ideally insomniac recipient of *Finnegans Wake*, someone resembling Funes the Memorius, the character from J.L. Borges's (memorable) story (Eco 1995: 123).

A similar stance underscoring the value of the reading individual's expertise during the literary phenomenon was put forth by Roland A. Champagne in "The writer within the intertext" In the essay Champagne analyzes Roland Barthes' critical oeuvre and, in line with the author of *The pleasure of the text*, points out that social literary stereotypes are in fact inimical to the reception of a new text if the latter is supposed to lead to bliss. The alternative is that the readership "can either follow the writer's creativity and fabricate their own meanings or be nullified into accepting the generalized myths offered by individual cultures" (Champagne 1975: 136).

There are a host of literary critics, though, that give justice to the competence of the individual reader inasmuch as it is the product of his acquisition of the various signifying codes operating within their immediate community. Jonathan Culler, for instance, in *The pursuit of signs* (1981) provides an in-depth analysis of literary competence. Taking off from Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence, Culler observes that a native speaker of a language is capable of producing ever new strings of utterances not because s/he knows them all, but because s/he has acquired a set of codes and rules operative in a language. Similarly, a literary text is meaningful "only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated" (Culler 1981: 116) and internalized.

A like proposition was put forth by Stanley Fish in *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities* (1980). For him, textual significance is not the direct responsibility of "free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible both for the shape of the reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce" (Fish 1980: 322). The latter communities are not so much groups of individuals, but categories of perception and strategies of literary interpretation, which are supposedly not unique or idiosyncratic, but constitute a common property.

The two above contentions, pertaining directly to literature, are corroborated in a wider context by humanistic sciences. One of the most outstanding Polish sociologists that deal with the problem of humanistic interpretation as a social activity is Jerzy Kmita. In his 1971 book *Z metodologicznych problemów interpretacji humanistycznej* [Of the methodological problems of humanistic interpretation], Kmita provides an extensive analysis of rational interpretable acts. These are acts that can be correctly construed by a group of individuals that, for one thing, share a certain set of interpretive rules and, for another, assume that the other members of the group are fully cognizant of these rules. A group that fulfills the two conditions is called "a cultural group", whereas the rules of interpretation common to its members are referred to as "rules of cultural interpretation". Kmita maintains that all potential rational interpretable acts are culture-bound and their being carried out by an individual requires "cultural competence" on his part (Kmita 1971: 35-37). Subsequently, the author provides an encyclopedia-like definition of his term: "The cultural competence of an individual breaks into a number of sub-components referring to different cultural systems. The part of cultural competence that incorporates rules of a language system can be called linguistic competence, whereas the part including rules of a literary system (rules of cultural interpretation for creative literary acts) can be referred to as literary competence" (Kmita 1971: 35-37).

In light of the aforementioned contentions it could be argued that the literary knowledge of a reader is the vector of both his cultural group affiliation *and* idiosyncratic features. It is a highly variable and thus virtually unpredictable factor that is responsible for the direction in which reading proceeds. Familiarity with the rules of a given culture, be it popular or refined, is but one of the many ingredients of the reader's initial input into text production. The degree and scope of this familiarity, as well as one's belonging to a particular class, gender, race and religion (itself a system of signification) would account for dramatic dissimilarities in literary sensitivity between members of the same social community.

A question arises, however, whether the degree of that sensitivity lessens or enhances the pleasure (and possibly also the bliss) of reading for an individual. And, in the first place, if such an intertextual sensitivity or the ability to locate precisely the referents of the text currently read is indispensable at all. Opinions on these two issues vary. Some argue that competence is only an adjunct during the retroactive stage of reading; it is helpful in that it may lead to the reader's enhanced enjoyment, but is not a prerequisite for reading. Others see the reader's encyclopedia as a basis, not only for the greater satisfaction of readership, but first and foremost for the very understanding of a literary work.

Brian Stonehill in *The self-conscious novel* (1988) argues for the necessity of the reader's competence, especially while reading works packed to capacity with intertextual allusions. He holds, for instance, that Homeric parallels in

Joyce's *Ulysses* are meaningful only inasmuch as they are perceptible. In consequence, Stonehill openly speaks of works for the literary initiates, using the term "elitist esthetics" to embrace readers' productions of modernist and postmodernist texts (Stonehill 1988: 51).⁴ By means of a phrase extracted from *Ulysses*: "Deshil Holles Eamus", the author underscores the fact that "'the naive reader' has no application [t]here" (Stonehill 1988: 51). As the critic argues, Joyce's words will produce one effect on a literary novice and another on a reader who has internalized a sizeable encyclopedia and is additionally armed with a guide of Dublin. For the former the phrase remains opaque as a mere jumble of letters, the latter reader will recognize a message in three languages, Irish, English, and Latin, meaning "Let's go right (south) to Holles Street" (Stonehill 1988: 58). Incidentally, some readers may be reminded here of the hieroglyphics encountered by Arthur Gordon Pym in the caves on the island of Tsalal. The inscriptions are written in the Ethiopian, Arabic, and Egyptian languages, and the last one, by intertextual coincidence, also indicates "the region of the South". In addition, those readers whose encyclopedia encompasses the books of the Christian Scriptures may be reminded of an equally short inscription in three languages that can be found over the crucified Jesus. Pilate had the inscription stating the latter's guilt written in the local language (Hebrew), the most widely-spoken one, i.e. Latin, and in the Greek of the educated classes. It is interesting to note that Joyce's choice of languages in this particular case is based upon very much the same rationale, namely he selects the mother tongue of Dubliners, English as the *lingua franca*, and the Latin of the more linguistically competent. A major difference between the multi-language inscriptions in the three texts remains, though, that unlike in the cases of Poe's and Joyce's texts, the three languages on Jesus' cross reiterate the same message.

Robert Scholes, in turn, discussing the role of the reader's competence quotes a fragment of Hemingway's *In Our Time*, where a soldier led by a prostitute to her upstairs bedroom is compared to Dante's being chaperoned in *The Divine Comedy*. Scholes is less radical than Stonehill and allows the *un*-initiated readership to enter the literary phenomenon. He argues that the perception of the allusion is *not* absolutely essential, even though he admits that it may provide "a certain textual pleasure for the *knowing* reader" (Scholes 1985: 36). An almost identical stance is expressed by Andrzej Kopcewicz. The critic states that while the intertextual competence is important, it is not an indispensable condition for textual decoding. Not to possess vast intertextual knowledge "will not make for a defective reading, yet intertextual reading does imply its own *elitist* reader"

⁴ The author stipulates that Joyce's works are in the main for readers that are "moderately *ruse*", and that self-consciousness does presuppose "a certain sophistication".

(Kopcewicz 1992: 59). Similarly, Italo Calvino notes that the text's demands, unsettling as they are, lead ultimately to the reader's self-satisfaction and frequently verge on true bliss. Hence the writer forewarns against a paternalistic attitude toward the reading public. He urges his colleagues to "presuppose a public that is more cultured, and more cultured than the writer himself" (Calvino 1986: 95).

In his text *Literary symbiosis* David Cowart indicates that while the potential of intertextual knowledge can differ from reader to reader, its intensity also varies depending on the text read. The author makes a distinction between works that enjoy a relatively high autonomy and can be successfully read "in isolation", and those that are more heavily attached to previous texts and thus require more literary expertise (Cowart 1993: 6). In *Travels in hyperreality* Eco boasts of his cinematic competence, showing that a movie-goer cannot fully understand one film being oblivious to interconnections between this very film and other movies. Eco quotes a scene from Spielberg's *E.T.* where the extraterrestrial being meets another spooky creature. The author authoritatively claims that "nobody can enjoy the scene if he does not share, at least, 3 elements of intertextual competence" (Eco 1986: 210). These are, namely, the facts that the other character is a "quotation" from Lucas, that there is a connection between the two directors, and finally that both monsters were produced by the same designer, which makes them "brothers". Eco further argues that "the required expertise is not only intertextual, it is intermedia, in the sense that the addressee must know not only other movies but all the mass media gossip about movies. The ... example presupposes a 'Casablanca universe' in which cult has become the normal way of enjoying movies" (Eco 1986: 210).

One other issue, however, is that of the presupposed destination of literary knowledge. The solution to the above question hinges on the perception of the role of the reader; is he supposed to arrive at the *intentio auctoris*, or can he exercise more leeway in searching for intertexts in places that the empirical author has not thought about. If the former were true, literary competence would be limited only to the recreation of the significance inscribed at the moment of actual production of the text. In such a case we run the risk of committing what Wimsatt and Beardsley defined in 1954 as "the intentional fallacy": the reader needs to unveil a set number of textual traces scattered here and there by the author. Such, at least, is the purpose of literary competence as seen by Piotr Sadowski, who argues that "the extent to which the reader can understand the meaning of a text depends on the degree in which both the reader's and the author's literary competences overlap" (Sadowski 1992: 136).

Michael Riffaterre, too, holds that the reader is not at liberty to insert everything in his production of the text's significance. The French critic does not resort to the intention of the author, though, believing that the *intentio operis*

should be to a greater or lesser extent transparent to the reader; the text under scrutiny provides him with clues as to how and where to puzzle out the ungrammaticalities. The clues, functioning for the reader as Ariadne's thread, are supposed to guide the reader through the vast textual labyrinth. Although the semiotic process that takes place here seemingly encompasses the whole literature, reading is restricted to one preprogrammed path only.

Similarly to Riffaterre, Eco believes that the process of concretization, informed by intertextual competence, proceeds along the putative intention of the text through the exclusion of "alternative selection" (Eco 1992: 19). Like the French critic, the Italian one curbs the interpretive activity of the reader, preventing it from running too far afield. Eco contends that since the text's intention is not conspicuous on the surface, it is essential to make educated conjectures about it; the true initiative of the reader consists in making such conjectures about textual intention. Only on condition that the conjecture ventured by the reader proves correct, or textually economical, does a given literary work become a coherent whole. In Eco's words, "the internal textual coherence controls the otherwise uncontrollable drives of the reader" (Eco 1992: 65).⁵

Many critical analyses, however, do not impose limits on the intertextual competence and do not call upon the reader to search for the unspecified intention of the writer or an equally unclear intention of the text. They put credence in the interpretive capabilities of the reader of literature and in his nonlinear reception thereof. David Lodge, who is, like Eco, a practicing writer and a professor of literature, is of the opinion that to restrict reading to retracing authorial intentions belittles the value of both intertextual competence in particular and the reading process in general (Lodge 1990: 143). Ruthrof holds that in a literary work of art "the reader's aesthetic construction of meaning can only be said to be an approximation of the artistic meaning intention" and that "the ideal reconstruction of the artistic intention" is not only unlikely but also virtually unfeasible (Ruthrof 1981: 57).

It can be maintained, then, that the meaning of literary works of art is contained in their language, whereas their significance transcends the confines of one text and encompasses the entire literature. Linguistic competence, required at the basic level of decoding the text's linear representation, is seconded by literary competence that facilitates the intertextual search for traces of signification. A reader's intertextual knowledge is conditioned partly by his partaking in the social codes of a given community, and partly by highly individualized factors. Being in effect a variable feature, it accounts for marked differences in

⁵ Brilliant though Eco's analyses of incorrect readings are, they do not succeed in persuading the reader that a text can become a "coherent whole" provided it is read in one prescribed way only.

comprehending a particular text between readers. While a literary knowledge is not critical for obtaining the significance of some texts, it is a must during the acclimation of others, especially saturated with intertextual material. Lack of literary expertise while reading modernist or postmodernist texts may effectively bar their understanding for literary uncouth, or insensitive recipients. It is debatable whether a reader's literary acumen ultimately leads him to the intention of the author, to the presupposed intention of a given work, or whether it finds a significance outside of the two. It remains indisputable, however, that, as Kopcewicz puts it, the notion of an intertextual reading implies a literary competent, highly knowledgeable reader.

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