

author becomes a great unknown about whom we know nothing or practically nothing. How then does one find out what the author wanted to say? Even in those cases where we can determine the author with some precision, how can we understand someone who lived millenia before us, and belonged to an entirely different culture, and spoke an entirely different language in a milieu different from our own?

The HC exegete sometimes extends his inquiry beyond the author. Some texts arise from oral tradition. All the *ipsissima verba Jesu* research goes far beyond the search for the meaning intended by the author of a text. Sometimes the researcher thinks that he understands better than the author what is at the basis of a text. Archaeology has given us information that the authors of the ancient texts did not have.

But it can be asked: What is it that we understand better? We know what is before the text and outside the text: the *pre-text* and the *extra-text*. The search for the author (or even for what comes before the author) has neglected the text itself, which, nonetheless, is the only reality of which we are certain.

Recently, studies have addressed the question, just what is a text? A text is a self-contained reality; in writing a text, the author creates a new reality. In spoken discourse, there is only the speaker and the hearer. There is an exchange of questions and answers, with the two agents present. In a piece of writing, there is the author, the text, and the reader. This presupposes two actions: the act of writing and the act of reading, which are done separately. When an author decides to place a text in circulation, he loses authority over the text. While he lives he can still protest against an incorrect interpretation of his text. But it could also happen that he would have to admit that, in fact, the text did not render exactly what he wanted to say. It's enough for the author to forget a word, a comma. The text is, therefore, a reality in itself.

The text is intelligible because it respects certain structures which literary theorists (semioticians) seek to bring to light. As each sentence obeys a grammar, a narrative respects a narrative grammar and a discursive organization. These structures pass beyond particular cultures and ages; they are as though innate in man. Some theorists (structuralists) would tell us that man is not a creator of signification but has signification imposed on him. HC exegesis assumed that man, as an individual or as a group (in the case of a tradition), is primarily an *author*, i.e., the "originator" or "creator" of significations. The exegete's job was to determine the *origin* and *evolution* of a text and the method was diachronic. "The text is studied in the context of the dynamic history made up of a succession of authors. Any aspect of the text, as well as any historical phenomenon, can be understood only in terms of what precedes and what succeeds it," (Patte:13). It always, at least indirectly, aimed at uncovering

what the author (as an individual or as a group) wanted to say.

The structuralist methodological preunderstanding of the text assumes that significations are imposed upon man. The exegesis no longer aims at what the author meant. Structuralists find the meaning of narratives in deep structures. These are either *functions* or *actants*. Functions are obtained by reducing an infinite set of variables (all the predicates of the class of "doing") to a limited number of constants; *actants* are an infinite set of *personages* reduced to a limited number of constants.

The structuralist approach, therefore, emphasizes the communal nature of the language and the communication which the individual author must respect: this is what renders the text open to everyone who reads it. The author enjoys great freedom but must take this grammar into account. As in chess: the possibilities are endless for the player, but within the rules of the game.

**"Meaning" vs. "Meanings":** The HC method seeks to find "the meaning willed by the author." The exegete believes that the author has deposited in the text a meaning which his excavative work will reveal. In short, the exegete assumes that the text belongs to the author. This author has fixed once for all what the text means.

Linguistic structuralism was already a mode of thought whose paramount strategy was to bypass "the subject," alias the meaning-conferring author. Structuralist discipline would enable readers to grasp each literary genre as a semiotic system—as a network of signs that take their significance not from authorial purpose or from any reference to the outside world, but from their unconsciously registered relations with each other.

Now structuralism itself is being questioned, a development which increases the pressure on traditional criticism. Psychoanalysis questions traditional criticism's pursuit of meaning that authors presumably imparted to their works in creating them, pointing to the sphere of the subconscious in man. Could it be that a text contains a meaning that the author had not directly willed, but which nonetheless can be attributed to him unconsciously?

Could it be that there is not a *single meaning*: that which the author willed, but *meanings* perceived by the reader. Not that the reader can see just anything in the text, in any way, since the text has its own laws. The text "permits" certain meanings to be seen, but it "resists" other meanings. This is particularly clear in other domains such as music and painting. When we hear a piece of music, we don't ask what the composer wanted to say exactly, but each one allows himself to be borne by the beauty of the piece in his own way, which is moreover re-created by the performer who interprets the composition. This approach, therefore, maintains that the text no longer belongs to the author, but to the reader. The text in itself is a dead object or one in hibernation. The reader makes it live again, gives it an ever new meaning within the