

## Nihad Sirees (Syria)

The movement of people away from reading is one of the things that bothers the writer and makes him/her feel frustrated. A few days ago, we listened to other writers who don't come from countries in which illiteracy is widespread, rather they come from countries in the European Union such as Belgium and Germany. They complained of the low rate of interest in reading literature.

We also heard remarks by Nataša, of the IWP, that a large segment of Americans has abandoned reading and only watches TV.

Here, we are talking about advanced countries, whose people consider culture a priority, and where illiteracy was eliminated a long time ago. But how is reading in our countries, the countries of the Third World, where illiteracy is widespread and reaches shameful rates?

The 2003 Human Development Report issued by the United Nations reported that in one year Spain translated into Spanish the same amount that the Arab countries have translated over their entire history. George W. Bush said that Greece publishes annually more than what is published by all the Arab countries in one year, though the population of Greece is 9 million while Arabs number over 200 million.

At best, the writer in the Arab World publishes three thousand copies of his/her work, and waits many years for this edition to run out.

We the Arab writers have not surrendered to these frustrating statistics. We still write literature, and every year we read from new writers, and a new generation of writers is always born, and takes its literary place.

Shall we talk about the other side of the equation? Yes. Without the reader—or let us call him the recipient—the book loses its meaning. The presence of the recipient is the other half of the writing-reading process. In the absence of the recipient, the writer's voice is lost in the void and vanishes into oblivion. However, the writer has the ambition not to be forgotten. This is in fact a desire to continue; without that desire, the development of human culture would stop, and the existence of the whole human race would be in danger.

I have suffered myself from the scarcity of recipients. A few thousand wouldn't satisfy my ambition to convey my ideas and views to the audience and have a dialogue with them. I had already published many novels and short stories, when something drew my attention, that is the people's attention to visual arts, including TV. Therefore, I decided to go to the people, not being able to make them come to me. I have noticed that all people, men, women and children watch TV with passion, including, of course TV dramas which satisfy their love to see and follow stories, and which lead them to discover a new way of life.

But, something of importance made me think intently. I am treating, in my books, difficult issues. I look into our near history for the reasons for our backwardness, I look for seeds of enlightenment, and I urge the people to think about their reality and seek to make them think of change. How can I put forward issues of politics and enlightenment

in a TV series, and make the audience enjoy daily a long series that may reach forty nights?

It was hard, but my desire to reach a wide audience of millions of TV viewers made me try this new experience, which has been successful.

I am not only talking about the topics I had discussed in my novels, but I am also talking about my use of polyphony, the building of my characters, and the building of the novelistic space with the help of details and other elements. I may also discuss the imbrication of real facts (historical facts) with the imaginary world and the openness to possibility of the novelistic space, the fact which makes it possible to create dozens or hundreds of imaginary characters and their interaction on one part, and the circumstances of their novelistic world on the other.

In brief, I had to tackle a new experience, importing the novelistic technique, but in a new language, which is the language of the picture...the finished picture.

It is known that the novelist presents his novel with words. This means that the word is the link between the novelist and the reader. In other words, the reader reads written words, while the film viewer follows sequential pictures, which lead the viewer on a trip in which he follows the story and uncovers the unknown.

The reader reads written words that make him enjoy the charm of words, to a lesser or greater extent according to the writer, while the viewer follows pictures to enjoy the charm of the picture. What is important about reading is that the reader not only enjoys the charm of the words, expressions, etc. . . , but they allow the book to take him away on an imaginary trip. What is being imagined? The pictures, realms, characters and relationships the writer wants him to imagine.

Then, the game is almost won. It is definitely a joint relationship between the writer and the recipient, in which the main factor is dealing with the picture, or using the picture to get to the heart of the recipient by drawing the picture with words or through the finished picture.

There are bold differences between literary writing and writing for the screen. Based on the above, the main difference is whether the recipient is a group of readers (in the case of a book) or a single director (in the case of a film). In literature, each reader is vulnerable to falling into the trap of imagination set by the writer, while in writing for the screen, the director is the person whom the writer is trying to inspire. So, in literature, there is no limit to those whom the writer is pushing to imagine; while in cinema or TV, it is only one person, that is the DIRECTOR. The director imagines the picture that the writer wants, and then finishes the picture so that the writer reaches the audience with the images in the director's mind. But, reading is not like seeing. I will give you an example to differentiate between what the word does and what the picture does in the mind of the recipient.

Let us suppose I am describing in one of my novels the house of one main character. I do that briefly, and I mention some elements that are of interest to me in the course of the events of the novel, and I leave it to the reader to imagine the house he wants; while on the screen, the house of the hero reaches the eye and the mind of the recipient fully.

There is no place here for imagination. The viewer here only enjoys the charm of the picture shown before him.

In writing "The Beauty of the Place," the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard talks about the creation of nostalgia for a certain place by reading. This nostalgia is generated when the reader comes across a description of a certain house in the course of the novel. Each person has his own intimate place, and his intimate room for which he feels homesick. Such nostalgia comes out of the memory only through reading. When a certain person reads a story that tells about a certain house, the reader is in the process of imagining, and since the novel will not mention every detail in a certain corner, the reader will recall from his memory his own intimate corner from when he was a child to complete the drawing of the picture in his imagination.

The finished picture received by the viewer through the screen doesn't have this characteristic, since it is already finished and contains all details, so the viewer doesn't have to complete the details from his own intimate place. The director has already done that, and the viewer has only to enjoy the charm of the pre-made picture.

Naturally, other things will reach the viewer such as dialogue that contains ideas, encourages change or conveys information, but we are mainly concerned here about the picture.

Lastly, there is a very important thing in the finished picture that reaches the viewer through the screen, whose importance mustn't be ignored, so that we don't oversimplify things. While writing his screenplay mainly directed to the director, the writer seeks to present pictures full of his ideas and political ideologies without any dialogue. This is a very important characteristic of the picture. The writer can, through one picture on the screen, express a certain idea that he would need a page or many pages to express and get through to the reader. The picture may express a thought or a whole sermon by a politician. It is sufficient that a film shows a boy with an amputated foot, walking with the help of a walking stick beside an announcement warning of the presence of a mine field, to explain the political position of the writer or his thoughts on the atrocities of war, without an additional word.

Thank you.