

You have heard of the "Choose Your Own Adventure" series.
Well now...

CHOOSE YOUR OWN TERM PAPER

or

The Journey into Critical Theory
Volume One: The History of the Subject

Megan Driscoll
Foucault & Critical Theory
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What is the subject? What is a subject? What is the history of the subject? These questions will be developed in a few different parts.

The way that you go about reading them is up to you!

YOU get to choose which page you turn to!

YOU get to choose where to start and where to finish!

Because this is all about YOU!

READY?

Here we go...

There are a few ways that we can begin to look at what the subject is and how we can observe this through the text. If you, by some strange chance are not the professor reading this, you may not know what these texts are. But don't worry. It does not matter one bit. They are texts that are there for us to read, just like any other. You should continue on.

Choose your path- Turn to page

2

If you would like to read about the subject in terms of what the text is about.

5

If you would like to read about the subject in terms of something that is under the control of something else.

When a writer begins to write, when the material begins to form in his head even before the pen hits the paper (or the computer is started up), he has a subject in mind. The subject here will be the topic of the writing--who or what the writing is about.

So what is a piece of text about? Who is the subject that an author writes about? Let us take it from the point of view of the author. The author is writing something. But why? Why write? The reason that someone writes seems to be so that someone else can read what they are writing. Their creative act goes out into the world to imprint something onto someone else. Sartre, in the text, writes, "one of the chief motives of artistic creation is certainly the need of feeling that we are essential in relationship to the world." So although the author may be writing about something other than himself, to this author, he is his own subject. It is about him.

The purpose of writing something then becomes to tell the audience, the reader, whomever, something about yourself. It is purely egotistical. It is about him. He is the subject. So reader, what do you think? Do you think that the act of writing, or any creative act, one might say, is entirely selfish and masturbatory? Why would a writer write something? Time to choose your path. Choose page

5

If you think that perhaps the writer is not the actual subject, but he instead is making a subject of the reader.

3

If you think that the writer cannot be the subject of his own work, especially if he is writing anything other than an autobiography.

Reader, you have come to a dangerous place. You need to start looking at things if you want to stay in the critical world! Think about something. Why do you think that I am writing this right now? Do you think I feel the need to help you think critically about the texts you read? Do you think I am only doing this because I have to? I am writing this about myself, reader. But the second that you begin to read this, you are going to be putting yourself into it.

Going through all of this critical thinking is hard. It is sometimes disillusioning. Sometimes it makes things look bleak and meaningless. I do not disagree with you. I agree with you so much that that is the entire reason why I am giving you this opportunity to take this journey. You will not be judged if you choose the less critical path. Heck, I might even see you there tomorrow. I just want you to see that the history of the subject can be an interesting thing. Because, see, it is always about me. (Or you, or whoever.) Listen closely:

Nothing is more to me than myself.

Did you hear that, reader? No matter what you may say, when it comes right down to it, nothing is more important to any of us than ourselves.

Choose page

8

If you cannot think about things so much. The subject is whatever the thing is about. It usually has nothing to do with me, although, I can relate.

9

If you finally see that it is always about YOU.

Let us take the definition of a subject that has been used throughout the history of the word. Subject can mean not what or who something is about, but it can also mean he who is under the rule of someone else. The king and his subjects. The writer and his audience?

If we think about the subject this way, it becomes more clear why a writer writes. A writer would write, then, to have, gain, or keep control over someone else. Who could a writer gain control over, you ask?

Here we are at an interesting stage of our journey. Think about the last time that you read a book that you found really interesting. What happened to you once you had completed it? Did you stop thinking about it altogether and never have it cross your mind again? Or did it somehow change the way you looked at something? Did you consider anything new?

Well think, then, why would the writer have asked you to consider something in a different way? Can they gain anything from it?

Of course they can. They gain not only your appreciation, but the possibility that you will adopt some of their feelings on whatever topic and keep these in mind as you go through your life. A choice that you may have made last week, before you read the book, could have an entirely different outcome now. Does this give a writer power over us? Could it make us his "subjects?" Do we now live our own lives leaning a little bit more in his direction?

There are two ways you can turn now, reader. You can either choose to turn your ear from this nonsense and continue to read the stories you have always loved, turn to page 8 or you can choose to look a bit further into this, to see if you really are the subject under the rule of all of your most beloved authors, turn to page 6.

Congratulations, you have continued on your critical adventure. Just when you thought you knew the motives behind what you read, you may need to think again. Now that we have thought about the author, let me ask you a few questions about yourself, reader.

Why do you read? Are you looking to be enlightened? Are you looking for inspiration or for something to identify with? Think about this for a minute. How much of you do you see in what you are reading? YOU are always the subject of everything that you read. And I mean subject as being the topic and as being under the control of.

Let us start with the subject as in what the text is about. Have you ever noticed that there is always one character that you can really relate to in a novel? Or what about in a more academic book? Does something in there remind you of something that happened in your life? Why do you think this is? Do you ever feel like the writer is talking to you? Does he address you?

Maybe this makes you feel more connected to the book. Maybe it makes you feel important and privileged to be gaining such knowledge. Maybe it makes you feel important. Well, you, reader, are the SUBJECT. You, because of your egocentrism, make yourself the sole subject of everything that you come upon in your life. Every text that you are exposed to suddenly becomes about YOU. You are the SUBJECT. Some writers will even go so far as to allow us to put ourselves in the position of the speaker. "Reader, take on the 'I' that is used. It is about you!" No matter what the intention of the writer, the reader makes himself the subject. It is as simple as that.

9

If you would like further convincing. It is about YOU after all.

8

If you have heard enough.

Well critical adventurer, your trip has come to an end. We fully understand the choice that you have made. Continue to enjoy your meaningful life, being touched and inspired by the texts that you love. Turn away any critical words that would cause you to live your life any less pleasantly. Enjoy.

Your adventure in the critical realm is over.

YOU.