The Power Of Interpretation Essay, Research Paper

Humans are set apart from all other animals for one reason. We have the power of imagination and thus power to interpret what we read. Therefore, we can argue that the written word is the most meaningful of all types of communication. It is valid to say that if ten people read a book and were asked to retell the book in their own words that we d hear ten different versions of the same book. In today s society, our interpretations are feared. We might interpret anything contrary to the author s intentional meaning. The author could then possibly be liable for any actions we take after reading his works. Don Quixote is one who consciously decides to interpret his books of chivalry as the right way of life and concurrently decides to live his own life in that manner. I remember reading that a certain Spanish knight . . . having broken his sword in battle, tore a great bough or limb from an oak (69). Since Don Quixote had read about this particular knight, he justifies it to himself that he too could also tear a limb from a tree and uses it as a makeshift lance. When Sancho asks if Don Quixote had any pain, he replies, I do not complain of the pain because a knight errant is not allowed to complain of any wounds (69-70). Again, Don Quixote is going by a set of rules of chivalry that he obtained from his reading. At night, Don Quixote refuses to sleep but thought about his Lady Dulcinea, to conform to what he had read in his books about knight errants spending many sleepless nights in the woodland and desert dwelling on thememory of their ladies (70). I do not believe that Don Quixote is mad, as some may say, but that he is only interpreting what he has read to suit him. If Don Quixote were a real human in today s society his family could very well sue the publishers of the books that he read, claiming that the books drove him to insanity and should not have been published. However, if all written works were feared in that context, then it is also a possible that all books are to be feared. This is shown when Don Quixote s niece helps a priest and a barber to burn Don Quixote s treasured books of chivalry. When the barber suggests that These do not deserve burning with the rest, because they do not and will not do the mischief those books of chivalry have done (61). The niece exclaims: Your worship should have burnt them like the rest. For once my uncle is cured of this disease of chivalry, he might very likely read those books and take it into this head to turn shepherd even worse, turn poet (61). Even Cervantes touches upon the fact that if one written subject is banned then so must the rest. Two of the most celebrated books written in this century both warn readers that someday all books will be banned because their content allow readers to think too much. In Ray Bradbury s Fahrenheit 451 people are led to believe that books are evil. The new generations of children are brought up burning books like the priest and the barber in Don Quixote. The same is in George Orwell s 1984. People are banned from reading books, owning books or even writing anything. It is because the government is afraid what kind of thoughts people may have after they read. It is possible to govern the body but not the mind. Thus if no material is given to the mind to process, there may be no evil thoughts that arise.

Even Don Quixote, by the prodding of his neighbors and niece, begins to believe that the books influence on him was unacceptable. My judgement is now clear and free which my ill-starred and continuous reading of those detestable books of chivalry had obscured it. Now I know their absurdities and their deceits, and the only thing that grieves me is that his discovery has come too late (935). Don Quixote goes so far as to deny his niece everything in his will if she marries a man who knows of any books of chivalry. The man who was unafraid to interpret his readings lay in his deathbed regretting that he had read anything at all. Cervantes paints a dark picture for the future. There will be more priests and barbers but no more Don Quixotes. Humans have been blessed with the incredible ability of imagination. It would be a waste to abolish books simply due to the fear of what we can interpret from them. The fantasies in science fiction books of only half a century ago, has become reality today. Without books giving us more knowledge to feed on, where would the ideas for future innovations come from? The future is coming fast. I believe what Orwell and Bradbury have foreshadowed in their books. This is the time to read as much as possible for in the future Big Brother may be watching.