Review Article

Reader-Response Criticism: Reader, Response and Interpretation₁

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Abstract

Reader-response criticism is not a conceptually unified critical position. Its theory is instead associated with the work of critics who use the reading process and response to centralize the process of interpretation. The interpretive process delineates the author's attitude towards the reader, categorizes types of readers, and how different readers reach the meaning and the relation of reading conventions to the texts under discussion. The status of a text is discussed in relation to its objectivity. It is argued that a text cannot be objective. Writing and reading are the same activity, and literary response is a result of influence; therefore, the treatment of a text as an objective enterprise does not justify the aim of literary criticism. The meaning of the text is incomplete without the reader's revaluation. The prominent question is how far a text determines its own meaning and how far is the meaning determined by the reader.

Keywords: Reader-response, linguistics, hermeneutics, phenomenology, literary criticism.

Introduction

Reader-response criticism is not a conceptually unified critical position. It does not "designate any one critical theory" but focuses on the "process of reading" (Abrams, 1993). Its theory is instead associated with the work of critics who use the reading process and response to centralize the process of interpretation. The interpretive process delineates the author's attitude towards the reader, categorizes types of readers, and how different readers reach the meaning and the relation of reading conventions to the texts under discussion. The status of a text is discussed in relation to its objectivity. It is argued that a text cannot be objective. Writing and reading are the same activity, and literary response is a result of influence; therefore, the treatment of a text as an objective enterprise does not justify the aim of literary criticism. The

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meaning of the text is incomplete without the reader's revaluation. The prominent question is how far a text determines its own meaning and how far is the meaning determined by the reader. There are two positions in answering this question; one is that the meaning of the text is determined by the context; the other is that the meaning depends on the reader. This kind of assumption leads to philosophical and linguistic questions about the nature of meaning with its relation to text-context rearrangement and the concept of the reader. The issue of reading and interpretation is likely to have a relation to the theory of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and linguistics. The idea of interpretation and inquiry for meaning are two basic stages that relate the reader-response theory to hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutics deals with the question of understanding. Understanding, according to Hermeneutics, is before meaning. The purpose of interpretation is to help the reader understand the text; therefore, there is a ground for multiple explanations. Each reader responds to a text according to his intellectual learning and knowledge, and mostly there aren't many similarities between the answers. Terms like law, politics, history, tone, words have certain explanations within the same language, but their interpretation will change according to each reader. In this sense, understanding of something presupposes the explanation. A different explanation is related to a different understanding, and the differences in understanding and explanation lead to circularities of interpretation. The location of meaning, textuality, and readers are certain interrelated concepts of the reader-response theory which need further explanation.

Linguistics: Where is the Reader?
The reader is in the text. Walker Gibson (1950), a prominent reader-response critic, argues that the reader is also a textual construction and needs to be in the text. A reader or student of literature should have special training to identify the reader in the text. Gibson, asserts that every text includes its reader. The writer of a text breaks the boundaries between text, reader, literary tradition, and himself through the mock reader he creates and employs his work. The mock reader is a property of a text - it is not a real reader - and gives the reader's experience its shape. The mock reader marks the evolution of reader-response criticism in that a literary text is a self-sufficient and unique object, which does not depend on any external factor for value. Gibson states this as follows:

> There are two readers distinguishable in every literary experience. First, there is the real individual upon whose crossed knee rests the open volume . . . Second, there is a fictitious reader – However, shall call him Mock Reader - whose mask and costume the individual takes on in order to experience the language. (1950; 2)

A mock reader is a fictitious character in literary text and is a necessary identifier. Literary writing demands the reader to participate in the adventure the writer of a text presents. Once the mock reader is discovered, it becomes easier for a real reader to grasp the underlying meaning of a text. Although Gibson introduces to literature a new term and contributes to the development of reader-response criticism, he insists that the meaning of a text is contained in the words on the page and a reader of a text, therefore, first needs to be aware of formal construction. A mock reader is not outside the text; it is included and produced by the author of a text within the text. Gibson claims that every text has a Mock Reader – who is fictitious – as a necessary part of the narration. Gerald Prince (1973), on the other hand, makes a series of distinctions among the kinds of readers. There is a *real reader*, a person who holds the book in hand, and a *virtual reader,* the person to whom the author writes the book.

The virtual reader has certain qualities, capacities, and tastes. There is also an *ideal reader;* a person who understands the text perfectly and approves its every nuance (Prince, 1973). Prince

locates the readers outside the textual construction. However, some internal, preliminary components of a text should be considered in every act of interpretation. Narration is one of them, and narratee is the other. The narration of a text has so far been analysed and studied by scholars. The narratee, on the other hand, has been ignored, and scholars of literary tradition have not paid much attention to it.

Every writer develops his narrative as a function of certain types of the reader on whom he bestows his opinion of man in general. There is also the public reader of a text who purchases the book to read. The ideal reader, on the other hand, is capable of interpreting, analysing, and contributing to the value of a text. The narratee is not a virtual reader; neither is it a real reader. It is not the ideal reader. A narratee may and may not be familiar with the intention of a writer; he may and may not be aware of the real meaning of words. He may as well be inept at interpreting the text; therefore, a narratee in a literary text is distinct from the virtual, real, and ideal reader. He may be in the text and outside the text. A text may and may not contain signs of the narratee. A critic of a text first needs to identify the narratee of a text because by studying the character of a narratee, he can discover well-defined and reproducible reading. Some statements may give us a clue about the narratee of a text. The expressions like "my dear," my friend," second-person pronoun and some verbs refer to the narratee of a text. The narrator may also present the narratee in the form of a question or negation. Marcel Proust, when referring to the behaviour of Swann, directs a question to the narratee, "but who has not seen unaffected royal princesses…spontaneously adopt the language of old bores?" (Prince;14). Comparison and analogues furnish us with a great deal of information, and over justification may provide interesting details about the narratee of a text, as Prince remarks:

> Thanks to the signals describing the narratee, we are able to characterize any narration according to the type of the narratee to whom it is addressed . . . whether or not he assumes the role of a character, whether or not he is irreplaceable, whether he plays several roles or just one, the narratee can be a listener, or a reader. Obviously, a text may not necessarily say whether a narratee is a listener or a reader. (1973; 17)

The absence and presence of a narratee have a crucial role in the narrative. In Joseph Conrad's novella "Heart of Darkness," (1899), the narrator can tell the story to anyone. Therefore, a narrator does not need to have a comrade to narrate the story; however, in "One Thousand and One Nights" when the narrator - who is at the same time the narratee - refuses to listen to the stories the narrator will die. Prince (1973) states that the narrator, narrative, narratee, and characters have coherence, and they together create the text. In the absence of coherence between them, there appears complexity and instability. Prince (1973) believes that the narratee plays a major role between the author and the reader. The reader discovers the emphasis, classification, and description of certain values through the character of the narratee, who is a mediator between writer and reader. In the case of a distance between the writer and characters of a text, a narratee may appear to resolve the problem. When the narratee of a text is a narratee-character, we learn more about the characters. If the narratee is identified with the narrator, we learn more about the theme. The narratee is part of the narrative. The frame-story develops from this relationship. The obvious role of the narratee is:

> that of a relay between the narrator and the reader(s), or rather between the author and reader(s). Should certain values have to be defended or certain ambiguities clarified, this can easily be done using asides addressed to the narrate. (Prince, 1973; 21)

Prince here argues that a narratee exercises particular functions in the narrative. The exposition of the narratee supplies the reader an advantage to have a better understanding not only of the narrative genre but of all acts of communication. Prince and Gibson develop formalist arguments on the significance of the reader. Thus, they focus on a literary text and try to discover what is on the page instead of finding out what are the readers of a text that are not included within the pages. The mock readers of Gibson and the narratee of Prince belong to a text. They do not have any function outside the text. For instance, they do not suggest any guideline to help the critics of a text to reach the true meaning or to identify the possible relation of a work to the external reality. Then, though they seem to be important and leading figures of the reader theory, their investigation runs around the formalist tradition.

Where is the Text?
Textuality and literary tradition are another two crucial terms of the reader theory. The response of the reader develops in his relation to and awareness of the literary tradition. Jonathan Culler (1976) discusses the characteristics of literary culture and investigates the nature of perception. He thinks that the reading of literature requires awareness of literary discourse as well as linguistic discourse. The literary text has its convention and implication. Reading poetry, for instance, asks the reader to look at the language in new ways. The reader assumes that a poem expresses a significant attitude to some problems concerning man and his relation to the universe (Culler, 1975). The work has structure and meaning because it is read in a way. To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions: one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse, which tells one what to look for. A reader's awareness of literary conventions helps him to discover the message. A writer of a text attempts to create a certain effect on a reader, and unless it is achieved, a writer is not regarded as a successful writer. Likewise, a reader may not be able to perceive the true meaning of the text unless he has literary competence. Literary competence is a set of conventions for reading a literary text; readers who have artful ways of processing these sentences do all the creative work and their interpretation. This convention is proof that there is a coherent and comprehensive literary theory that helps critics and readers to make sense of what is written on a sheet of paper. Even difficult work becomes intelligible through this convention because new ways of reading are always developed. Culler identifies the ideal reader as someone who has literary competence to perceive the text with all its semantic and linguistic components. A critic, according to Culler, is at the same time, an ideal reader of a text and must ". . . make decisions about what can be taken for granted, what is explicitly defended, and what constitutes an acceptable defense . . . he must also convince the reader that he knows what he is talking about" (1975; 112). Culler (1975) summarizes that reading is a process of discovering the conventions present in the text; therefore, a reader needs literary competence to be able to interpret a text with all its linguistic and poetic combinations. Interpretation is an act to find out the linguistic and poetic forms that make up the meaning, which is a derivative of reading-experience. He offers a kind of interpretation in which a work of art is what it shows the reader about the problems of his condition as maker and reader of signs. The notion of literary competence thus comes to serve as the basis of a reflexive interpretation.

What Does A Reader Do?
Gibson and Prince explore the function of the reader in the text. Culler emphasizes the competence of literary convention from a post-structuralist point of view. In such approaches, the reader's freedom is limited within the border of the text. The reader outside the textual border has not been identified. Is there an autonomous reader outside the text? What does an autonomous reader do? Such questions are left ambiguous by formalist tradition. Michael

Riffaterre (1966) may be regarded as the first formalist critic who tries to identify the autonomous reader – the reader outside the text. He emphasizes the relationship of the reader to the production of meaning. Although he thinks that meaning is a property of language, the reader's response is evidence of the presence of poetic meaning in the text. He calls upon the reader of a text to specify poetically significant linguistic features present in the narrative. He thinks that there is a relation between a poem and a reader's feelings: "A reasonable assumption is that the linguistic analysis of a poem should turn up specific features and that there is a causal relationship between the presence of these features in the text and our empirical feeling" (as cited in Tompkins, 1980, 26). Riffaterre (1966) brings a structuralist view to a literary text, thus, he focuses on a special form of text regarding its language. Poetry is no more than a linguistic artefact, but its meaning resides in the reader's response to the present linguistic features. A linguistic alone is lacking in consideration of the special form of language and ignores the role of a reader in the production of meaning. Readers of a text and the poetic language must be studied together because a text includes the message of the author in its context that should be delivered to the perceiver, which is the reader. It is explained this as follows: "The message and the addressee - the reader - are indeed the only factors involved in this communication whose presence is necessary . . . contact is assured by the control the message has over the reader's attention" (Riffaterre, 1966; 37). Riffaterre introduces the concept of the *superreader* to the critical tradition. He claims that the subjective interpretation of a text can be overcome when a critic of a literary text takes two precautions: he should first empty the response of its content, then it will be possible for him to apply all forms of reactions including cultural, biographical and linguistic. Second, a critic needs to multiply the responses. Riffaterre is in favor of the linguistic approach to a text. What separates him from the rest of the formalist, structuralist, and linguistics critics is that he pays attention to the role of the reader and considers the reader of a text as something outside the text that should be considered in the production of meaning.

Hermeneutics: Reading and Interpretation

The linguistic tradition of the reader theory concretizes the literary and textual qualities of the reading process. Hermeneutics investigates the relation between reader and author. Poulet (1972), a pioneer of the hermeneutic-reader theory, questions the relation of the reader to the author. He takes the author to be the producer of a literary text. The reader produces the meaning of a literary text. Reading is a process that realizes authorial intention in the experience of the reader. That is, reading is to be involved by the author experiencing the world. A book does not have any literary, cultural, or historical value until someone reads and interprets it. The books are "made of paper and ink; they lie where they are put until the moment someone shows an interest in them. They wait . . . They appear to be lit up with that hope. Read me; they seem to say" (Poulet, 1972; 41). Rejecting the formalist view of textuality that takes the text as an object, Poulet claims that a book reader is not an object; instead, it is a product of the 'consciousness of another,' which is very similar to the consciousness present in every human being.

The difference is that a text is 'open to the reader, welcomes him, lets him look inside and allows him to think and feel' what is thought and felt by the author. Reading saves the book from its materiality and produces new words, images, ideas, and gives the literary text new existence together with the reader's inner self (Poulet, 1972). The reader subjectifies the text after he intervenes the consciousness. In this process, the two consciousnesses interact and the reader of a text - which is the active consciousness - 'behaves as though it were the consciousness of another.' Then, a reader of a text identifies, forgets, and alienates his self-identity. He is a loan to another consciousness that thinks, feels, suffers, and acts within the reader. But this is not a complete loss of identity; rather, it is a process in which two minds share similar experiences.

Moreover, criticism of a text is a result of the interaction between these two consciousnesses. The interpretive process annihilates, forgets, and partly elevates itself to the apprehension of a subjective mind by a subjective consciousness (Poulet, 1972). Poulet contributes to reader-response criticism with his claim of reading as an interaction of reader and writer's consciousness. He does not bring or develop a new system for reading. He mostly relies on phenomenological assumptions. That is, the mind of an artist creates an object of art with which the mind of a reader interacts in a dynamic process of perception, and this process of perception, objects cease to exist as objects and become the subjective reality of the reader's consciousness. That is, a reader places himself in the hands of an author and surrenders his time and attention to the author's creation and begins to live in the world the author created. Within the perception of a reader, the text begins to come alive, for text can live only when it is read (Guerin et al., 1996).

Interpretation, Mind, and Meaning
Poulet (1972) thinks that a reader is involved by the authorial consciousness in the process of reading. The emphasis on authorial consciousness is transformed into the consciousness of a world of a text by Wolfgang Iser (1977). He thinks that a reader of a text is involved in the world of a text and lives this world in his mind. Reading, then, is not only a process that involves the understanding of a text but also a process, which contains the reader's response. The reader actively participates in the formation of textual meaning and writes the unwritten parts. That is, the existence of a text is better realized and understood by the response of a reader. A work of art, Iser claims, stands halfway between two poles: artistic and aesthetic. The artistic part is the written section of a text by the author, and the aesthetic part is the "concretized" and realized part of a text. A work is not complete unless the author writes it, and it is evaluated by someone. Therefore, a literary work which is not evaluated, cannot be completely identical with a text that is evaluated by readers. It is only with the convergence of author and reader that a literary work comes into existence. That is, reading makes a work of art to 'unfold its dynamic character' because a reader of a text fills in the gaps, writes the unwritten parts. In this sense, 'interpretation is a proof for the inexhaustibility of a text which also uncovers the intention of a text'(Iser, 1974).
The text comes into existence in reading; evaluation of a text is an attempt to find a reference. Interpretation is the explanation of references. In Iser's theory of interpretation - as in linguistics - there is a distinction between everyday language and literary language: in a literary text, sentences are organized to give a special effect and imply more than what is written on a sheet of paper (1974). We convey information through language. However, literature uses language with a special purpose. That is, a literary text says more than what is implied in the sentences, but such implications become meaningful only in the activity of reading, and this activity takes place in the mind of a reader. Then, a literary text acquires meaning in the consciousness of a reader.
The consciousness of a reader performs three activities while reading: expectation, anticipation, and retrospection. The expectation is presented to a reader in the sentence, and each sentence opens a horizon. Iser argues that "the more a text individualizes or confirms an expectation it has initially aroused, the more aware we become of its didactic purpose" (1974;23). Memory and perception are different things for Iser. What we read sinks into our memory, and later it is evoked in a different background and reader – when reading a text for the second time - is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable parts. This part is the product of the reader's mind and becomes possible only with anticipation and retrospection. Expectation, anticipation, and retrospection move the reader forth and give him a chance to fill in the gaps left by the author. This is because, during the process of reading, there is an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection, which may also help the reader of text – in his second reading - to go further

in a kind of advance interpretation. An advance interpretation is a creative process. A reading activity must be creative because, without an act of re-creation of the object, a work of art is not perceived. In the act of re-creation "we look forward; we look back, we decide, we change our decisions, we form expectations, we shock, we question, we muse, we accept, we reject (Iser, 1974; 62)". Iser recalls this process and discusses the activity concerning familiar literary, social, and historical illusions. That is, a reading of a text is also the interplay of *illusion-forming* and *illusion-breaking* that makes 'reading essentially recreative process.' Iser here identifies three aspects of reading that form the relationship between reader and text: the process of anticipation and retrospection, the unfolding of a text as an event to be rewritten by a reader, and the impression of life-likeliness constructed through illusion-forming and illusion-breaking.

Reader theory also takes attention to the relation between text and reader. Stanley Fish (1970) argues that interpretation is the product of reader-texts interaction. Re-contextualizing phenomenological and hermeneutical argument, Fish agrees that reading is an experience, an activity in which the consciousness of a reader and the language of a text activate. Through this interaction, a response is created. The value of this procedure is:

> predicated on the idea of *meaning as an event*, something that is happening between the words and in the reader's mind . . . the word and its effect are the basic data of the meaning experience, and they will direct our description because they direct the reader. (Fish, 1970; 74)

Reading is an experience of the reader because it takes in his mind, and his mind does something in this process or makes him do something. Meaning, on the other hand, is a constituent of a sentence and experience of an utterance. That is, the reader and text produce the response of a reader, but language gives the meaning to this interaction. Considering this, Fish argues that "affective fallacy" is a fallacy in itself. Meaning occurs on the part of the reader, rather than a literary text. Therefore, it does not lead to impressionism. It is sentences and words that give experience to the reader and produces the meaning, not something outside the text.

Moreover, art is self-sufficient, and literature is not static. Then, criticism that regards "the poem as an object of specifically critical judgment forgets this principle," thus:

> Transforms a temporal experience into a spatial one . . . It is criticism that takes the physical dimension of artefact and within these dimensions . . . discovers frequency distribution, traces out patterns of imagery . . . its question is what goes into the work rather than what does the work go into. (Fish, 1970; 83)

We usually evaluate the value of literature concerning the impulses it gives, and we presume that the best poetry is the poetry that gives the most impulses, with the greatest intensity. Literature uses language to create an effect upon the reader; then, it is difficult to ignore or to condemn the effect of the literary text in the interpretation. In this sense, it becomes arbitrary to defend Affective Fallacy. Fish, in his argument, makes a distinction between reading and interpretation. He thinks that the act of interpretation is harder because it requires the competence of not only language but also literature. There will always be a divergence of opinions in reading; therefore, what one reader loves may be something that the other reader hates. He asks, "why should two or more readers ever agree and why differences in the career of a single reader ever occur?" He explains that the answer to all of these questions is to be found in the notion of *interpretive communities*. Then, divergences in the interpretation of a different and the same text are originated from *interpretive strategies* that the reader or

interpreter of a text employs depending on the *interpretive community* to which he belongs. He discusses the term in his article, *Interpreting the Variorum* as follows:

> *Interpretive communities* are made up of those whose *interpretive strategies,* not for reading but writing the text for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions . . . and if a community believes in the existence of only one text, then the single strategy its member employ will be forever writing it . . . meaning is not extracted but made and made not by encoded forms but by interpretive strategies that call forms into being . . . then when what utterers do is give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings by inviting them to put into execution a set of *strategies*. (1976; 182)

The same reader may perform different strategies when reading two different texts; therefore, it may reach different interpretations. Likewise, two different readers of the same text may reach similar interpretations due to the similar strategy they employ when reading. In this sense, the differences in the interpretation arise not from the text itself, but from the reader of a text; therefore, two texts are different from one another when the readers of these two texts decide that they are different (Fish, 1976). Questioning the terms such as reading, reader, text, and response, Fish believes that interpretation aims to find out the meaning of the text that is self-sufficient. The meaning, however, comes into existence in the activity of a reader's mind. The consciousness of a reader indeed produces the responses: but it is also true that a reader's mind – consciousness - is under the influence of interpretive community and interpretive strategies when interpreting a work of art. Fish claims that once all these components are carefully studied and analyzed, it is going to be easier to realize the nature of textual interpretation.

The question of realization or self-awareness is central to Holland's argument. He thinks that readers of a text deal with literary text the same way they deal with life experience. Each person develops a style of coping. Holland explains this as follows: "The reader will filter a text through his characteristic patterns of defense, project onto it his characteristic fantasies, translate the experience into socially acceptable form, and thus produce what we call interpretation" (as cited in Tompkins, 1980; xix).

In his article "Unity, Identity, Text, Self," Holland (1975) discusses that *text* is what the author writes down on a page, *identity* is the individual's awareness of his existence, *unity* is one's personality as opposed to the other personalities, *self* is a real total person of an individual, including both his body and psyche. He compares the terms and states that *identity* is the *unity* that a reader finds in *self* if he looks at it as though it were a *text*. In a simpler sense, he asserts that interpretation of a text has to lie in the psychological identity of a reader; that is, the text and self of a reader produce the experience, and from the experiences of these two identities, we draw our interpretation. The interpretation of a text is related to the personality, personal characteristics, and psychological development of each reader, and each individual will inevitably bring to a text his interpretation, which will be different from the interpretation of other personalities. He claims that "as readers, each of us will bring different kinds of external information to bear, each will seek out certain themes that concern us" (1975;123). Then, the differences in the interpretation arise from the differences in the personalities of interpreters and interpretation, in Holland, becomes the *function of identity*. That is, any individual shapes the materials the literary work offers, and a reader of a text gives his wishes and fears to his interpretation, constructing his characteristic ways of dealing with such fears and wishes. It is because reading is an activity of the reader's consciousness, and response is a part of his psychological awareness.

Holland's argument on the reader's relation to a literary text is psychological and mostly runs around the idea of the psychoanalytic idea of the individual. That is, everyone has a unique characteristic; therefore, he has a different way of coping with life. An individual will develop his method of coping with the fears and will take pleasure from life in his way. The awareness of his existence plays a major role in his life-struggle. Similarly, different readers can all take pleasure from the same fantasy, and one reader can take pleasure from different fantasies because the reader re-creates the work in terms of his identity theme (Holland, 1975). Then, the act of perception is, at the same time, the act of creation of a new identity.

The idea of reader and identity-formation process is taken further by David Bleich, who re-examines the relation between text, reader, response, and interpretation. He has a mixed view: he refers to Holland when discussing the terms such as *self, text, and identity*, to Fish when discussing the *interpretive community*, and to Culler when he focuses on the relationship between the reader's awareness of literary and linguistic conventions. He tries to reach the epistemology of the response. Bleich focuses on the linguistic awareness of the reader because he thinks that language, as employed in the literary activity, determines the whole activity of criticism. A reader of text can only decide according to his experience, capacity, and competence of language; however, no decision is free from the context that a reader of a text inhabits. Therefore, a reader of a text decides about what he wants to know. The reader's decision has a connection with unity-text, self-identity themes, and the interpretive community to which he belongs, together with his awareness of language. Then, a reader of a text discovers the meaning with the awareness of his purposes, motives, feelings, which have a subjective nature. The interpretation of a text turns out to be the subjective activity of a reader. Bleich agrees that interpretation is subjective, but what he asks is "how shall subjective feelings, motives, and purposes of a reader be converted into publicly negotiable issues" (1978;137). The subjective feelings are concretized and transformed into shared symbols by the reader. The response is the transformation of the perception of the reader into symbols. Readers perceive the signs present on the page and give them meaning via consciousness and then attempt to interpret them. Each reader automatically does this process, but it has a very complex nature. Firstly, a reader has a self-identity the same and different from other readers. It is the same because two minds can activate a similar function; it is different because depending on their experience of a literary text, linguistic competence, and individual characteristics, two readers will give a different meaning to a text.

However, Bleich considers the subject from a different perspective and discusses the concept of response concerning knowledge. He thinks that language is a subjective matter, and as a reader, we participate in the construction of knowledge through reading, which, in a sense, produces the experience and knowledge of the text. He states that there are different ideas on the concept of response. Some pedagogies understand the response as being about the experience and knowledge of students. Therefore, a response to a work of literature is treated as an analysable item. Some distant group of scholars conceives response as the outcome of the relationship between a reader and a text. A reader of a text, in his response, is in the activity of self-engagement, perception, interpretation, and evaluation.

The author also plays an important role in the response of the reader. "Each writer invites his audience to agree that the experience he portrays is possible and interesting. The process of understanding a work implies a recreation of it an attempt to grasp completely the concepts which the author seeks to convey" (Bleich: 1978;143). The language is the common and negotiable point because all readers and writers of a text use the same device when they are writing and responding. The main point is that the origin of interpretation lies in the formation of knowledge and the formation of knowledge is a communal, linguistic process. The response cannot be one particular object that each person produces; rather it is an expression of a set of local choices, motive, and interest in knowledge (Bleich, 1978). Bleich attempts to locate the

response on common ground. However, he does not resolve the long-standing riddle of objectivity. He leaves the question of the subjectivity of the response unresolved. Walter Benn Michaels (1977) questions the relationship between text and its meaning concerning the subjectivity and objectivity. He thinks that in the American tradition of criticism, there is a long-standing tendency to resist subjective interpretation. Therefore, literary scholars did not prefer an individual interpretation of a text. Michaels presents a theory that takes the interpreter as a sign. He argues that all our thoughts are signs, and the only way we can know ourselves is as a sign; similarly, the text consists of signs. In his theory, the individual becomes both interpretation and interpreter. Thus, the imposition of personal meaning to a text becomes impossible. The text contains its meaning independent of the reader through its sign system, and a reader of a text approaches a literary text with a shared assumption, then, there is no need to fear subjectivity (Tompkins, 1980). In a simpler sense, Michaels (1977) rejects both subjectivity and objectivity and considers a literary text and evaluation of a text as a part of a special sign system.

Michaels (1977) refers to the 'core meaning' that helps the reader to deal with a text. A reader of the text discovers the determinate meaning before he establishes his interpretation of a text. A reader of a text, in his attempt to uncover the meaning of a text, not only deals with the author's intention present in his work but also faces the linguistic features of a text and tests his competence of reading and then, the intentional fallacy is 'completely neutralized'. He concludes that it is true that the components of a text – author, reader, text, language, context – are important in the activity of interpretation. However, text can only be shaped within the possibility of language; reading can only be realized by a reader with the knowledge of the language, context is presented through linguistic signs, and we reach the knowledge and interpretation of a text only through language. Therefore, language shapes the reader, text, and interpretation. But it is also true that interpretation is a result of convention between text and reader. If there is no one to read the text, it will not be possible to perform the interpretive activity. Michaels (1977) concludes that meaning is either subjective or objective; in the reader or the text, it is not compromising. Whenever we put them together, we get literary criticism.

Conclusion

Reader-response theory borrows various ideas and approaches from linguistics, phenomenology, and hermeneutics to develop a theoretical framework of interpretation. The hermeneutical tendency of the reader theory emphasizes text-context and author-reader relations. The linguistic tendency rather emphasizes the language arguing that the reader, writer, text, and context are all signs. As such, interpretation is the end of linguistic competence. The phenomenological tendency emphasizes the act of reading and perception and argues that the act of interpretation cannot be possible without an active mind that receives and interprets the signs. Thus, the consciousness of the reader plays a major role in the interpretive process. Meaning is the product of the mind.

Reader theory of criticism centralizes the reader and the reading process. The terms and arguments developed by reader theory fill the gap left by the historical and traditional theory of criticism. Text may include biographical, historical, cultural, and social particulars. However, such qualities are transformed into linguistic signs in the text. Therefore, social context, autobiographical evidence, and forms of the text are replaced by conventions between reader and text. The text is taken as a self-sufficient aesthetic entity. This self-sufficient entity is incomplete unless read and interpreted by the reader. The interpretive process is an attempt to discover the meaning, which is the creation of reading. Meaning and interpretation are not taken either objectively or subjectively. They are taken as the core of literary criticism in the reader theory.

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