

- **Introduction**

The domain of literature has a vast horizon representing a cluster of literary theories. Each of these theories has come from a different school of thoughts, forming a strict sense of the systematic study of literature. The purpose is to analyze the subtleties of literature that includes social prophecy, interdisciplinary themes, intellectual history, and moral philosophy. Hence, it considers anything that has relevance to interpret meanings to humans.

Reader response criticism, in modern academics, is another literary theory, focusing on the audiences or readers' experience of any literary work. The theory gained popularity because of its contrastive ideology. The traditional theories primarily focused on the form or content of the literary work.

- **Background**

However, reader-response criticism, as modern literary philosophy emerged between the 1960s and 80s, particularly in German and the US. The clearly dominated the work of Roland Barthes, Norman Holland, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and many others.

Typically, Reader-response criticism revolves around the phenomena 'Respond to Reading'. The theory identifies the reader as a significant and active agent who is responsible to impart the real meaning of the text by interpreting it. The modern school of thought argues on the existing perception of the literature. According to it, literature is like a performing art that enables reader creates his own text-related unique performance.

It stood against the other theories of New Criticism and formalism, which totally ignored the reader's role in re-creating the meaning. New criticism considered that only structure, form, and content, or whatever is within the text, create the meaning. There was no appeal to the author's intention or his authority, nor did it consider the reader's psychology. None of this single element was focused on the new critics orthodox.

- **Beginning**

Attention to the reading process emerged during the 1930s as a reaction against the growing tendency to reject the reader's role in creating meaning, a tendency that became a formal principle of the New Criticism that dominated critical practice in the 1940s and 1950s. New Critics believed that the timeless meaning of the text—what the text is—is contained in the text alone. Its meaning is not a product of the author's intention and does not change with the reader's response. New Critics claimed that attention to the reader's response confuses what the text is with what the text does. Reader-response theory, which didn't receive much attention until the 1970s, maintains that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does. For despite their divergent views of the reading process, which we'll examine a little later, reader-response theorists share two beliefs: (1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and (2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature.

- **Beliefs**

Reader Response criticism is a school of literary thought that focuses on reader and their experiences of a literary work. It is basically a reader oriented theory. Its basic purpose is the interpretation of author's work by someone who's reading it. when it was understood that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does. This theory is an answer to new Criticism because it has subjective approach i.e. here "I" is important and it can never be wrong. As Louise Rosenblatt in her book Literature Exploration said

that it is important for teachers to avoid any preconceived notions about the proper way to react to any work.

Reader response theorists shared two beliefs:

- Role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature
- Readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text rather they actively make the meanings they find in literature.

### **Types of Reader Response Criticism:**

There are multiple approaches within the theoretical branch of reader-response criticism, yet all are unified in their belief that the meaning of a text is derived from the reader through the reading process.

These approaches are as follows:

1. Transactional reader response
2. Affective stylistics
3. Subjective reader response
4. Psychological reader response
5. Social reader response

- Major Theorists and their contributions

### **• Transactional reader Response by Louise Rosenblatt**

It was led by Louise Rosenblatt and supported by Wolfgang Iser. It involves a transaction between the text's inferred meaning and the individual interpretation by the reader influenced by their personal emotions and knowledge. Attempt of Transaction involved two approaches of readers' and reading as described by Rosenblatt i.e.

1. Aesthetic
2. Efferent

In Aesthetic mode, the reader experiences a personal relationship with the text that focuses his attention on the emotional aspects of the text.

In Efferent mode, the reader just focuses on the information contained in the text. Reader is not interested in prose style or rhyme rather he or she is just interested obtaining a certain piece of information.

Rosenblatt says that if one wants to transact a text and the reader, one must follow the aesthetic approach towards the text.

These types further included actual and implied readers which are similar to these.

Iser elaborated that an implied reader is a hypothetical figure who is likely to get most of what the author intended, when an author writes a book or article they do so with certain readers in mind and they believe that those known as the implied reader will understand or appreciate the metaphors and ironies which the author has written.

Whereas according to Iser, the actual reader who may eventually manage to get through the book, such as when one is struggling to enjoy it because the book is either too complex or they do not understand the metaphors and ironies which the author has written.

Arthur Miller's *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* is a play about a travelling salesman who kills himself so that his son will receive his life insurance money, is an example of an efferent stance towards the text. In contrast, when we read in aesthetic mode, reader focuses his attention towards the emotional subtleties of its language and is encouraged to make judgments.

Followers of Wolfgang Iser might explain what Rosenblatt refers to as the blueprint and stimulus functions of the text in terms of two kinds of meaning every text offers: determinate and indeterminate meaning.

Determinate meaning refers to what might be called the facts of the text, certain events in the plot or physical descriptions clearly provided by the words on the page.

Indeterminate meaning, or indeterminacy, refers to "gaps" in the text such as actions that are not clearly explained or that seem to have multiple explanations which allow or even invite readers to create their own interpretations.

- **Affective Stylistics by Stanley Fish**

It was established by Fish, who believed that a text can only come into existence as it is read; therefore, a text cannot have meaning independent of the reader. It states that a literary text is an event that occurs in time that comes into being as it is read rather than an object that exists in space. The text is examined closely, often line by line or even word by word, in order to understand how (stylistics) it affects (affective) the reader in the process of reading. It simply means that a text is not an objective entity which has some fixed meanings rather these meanings differ within the whole text. Stanley Fish believed that text served as a puzzle that needs to be organized by the reader in his mind which basically shows the cognitive ability of a reader's mind. He believed on the notion that the text doesn't tell us that what it has to say rather it reveals the concept that what it does to the reader when he goes through the text. He further elaborates his concept through the point that the text tells us how to read it by creating the notions of certainty and uncertainty.

- **Subjective reader-response theory by David Bleich**

It is associated with David Bleich and looks entirely to the reader's response for literary meaning as individual written responses to a text are then compared to other individual interpretations to find continuity of meaning. It doesn't call for the analysis of textual cues.

David Bleich, readers' responses are the text, both in the sense that there is no literary text beyond the meanings created by readers' interpretations and in the sense that the text the critic analyzes is not the literary work but the written responses of readers.

Like many other reader-response critics, he differentiates between what he calls real objects and symbolic objects.

Real objects are physical objects, such as tables, chairs, cars, books, and the like. The printed pages of a literary text are real objects.

Symbolic Objects are the experiences created when someone reads those printed pages, like language itself, because it occurs not in the physical world but in the conceptual world, that is, in the mind of the reader.

This is why Bleich calls reading—the feelings, associations, and memories that occur as we react subjectively to the printed words on the page symbolization: our perception and identification of our reading experience create a conceptual, or symbolic, world in our mind as we read. It is basically his

subjective method towards the text. Then he talks about Resymbolization which occurs when our experience of the text produces in us a desire. It means that our evaluation of the text's quality is also an act of re-symbolization: we don't like or dislike a text; we like or dislike our symbolization of it. Thus, the text we talk about isn't really the text on the page, it's the text in our mind.

- **Psychological reader-response theory by Norman Holland**

It was employed by Norman Holland in 1968, in his book *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, believes that a reader's motives heavily affect how they read, and subsequently use this reading to analyze the psychological response of the reader. He implies psychoanalytic concepts and focuses on the psychoanalytical responses of the readers. He believes that each reader interjects a fantasy "in" the text then modifies it by defense mechanism into an interpretation. In 1973, however having recorded responses from real readers, Holland found variations too great to fit in his model in which responses are mostly alike but show minor individual variations. Then he developed a second model which was based upon his case studies.

An Individual has (in the brain) a core identity theme (behaviour then becoming understandable as themes and variation as in music). This core gives that individual a certain style of being and reading. Each reader uses the physical literary plus invariable codes (such as the shapes of letters) and variable canons (different interpretive communities) plus an individual style of reading to build a response both like and unlike other readers' response.

Holland calls the pattern of our psychological conflicts and coping strategies our identity theme. He believes that in our daily lives we project that identity theme onto every situation we encounter and thus perceive the world through the lens of our psychological experience. Analogously, when we read literature, we project our identity theme, or variations of it, onto the text. That is, in various ways we unconsciously recreate in the text the world that exists in our own mind. Our interpretations, then, are products of the fears, defenses, needs, and desires we project onto the text. Interpretation is thus primarily a psychological process rather than an intellectual one. A literary interpretation may or may not reveal the meaning of the text, but to a discerning eye it always reveals the psychology of the reader.

He given three modes:

1. In the defense mode, our psychological defenses are raised by the text.
2. In the fantasy mode, we find a way to interpret the text that will tranquilize those defenses and thus fulfil our desire to be protected from threats to our psychological equilibrium.
3. In the transformation mode, we transform the first two steps into an abstract interpretation so that we can get the psychological satisfaction we desire without acknowledging to ourselves the anxiety-producing defenses and guilt-producing fantasies that underlie our assessment of the text. Thus, in the transformation mode, we focus on an intellectual interpretation of the text in order to avoid our own emotional response to it, and we ignore the fact that our intellectual interpretation grew out of our emotional response.

Psychological reader response theory deals with the readers' response after and before reading a literary work. Another notable personality named as David Miall, tested these emotional and affective responses through Defamiliarization and foregrounding techniques relating it to New Criticism and Neuropsychology.

- **Social reader-response theory by Stanley Fish**

It is Stanley Fish's extension of his earlier work, stating that any individual interpretation of a text is created in an interpretive community of minds consisting of participants who share a specific reading and interpretation strategy. According to Fish, what we take to be our individual subjective responses to literature are really products of the interpretive community to which we belong. By interpretive community, Fish means those who share the interpretive strategies we bring to texts when we read, whether or not we realize we're using interpretive strategies and whether or not we are aware that other people share them. These interpretive strategies always result from various sorts of institutionalized assumptions (assumptions established, for example, in high schools, churches, and colleges by prevailing cultural attitudes and philosophies) about what makes a text a piece of literature instead of a letter or a legal document or a church sermon—and what meanings we are supposed to find in it. In all interpretive communities, readers are predisposed to a particular form of interpretation as a consequence of strategies used at the time of reading.

Social reader-response theory doesn't offer us a new way to read texts. Nor does it promote any form of literary criticism that already exists. After all, its point is that no interpretation, and therefore no form of literary criticism, can claim to reveal what's in a text. Each interpretation will simply find whatever its interpretive strategies put there. This doesn't mean, however, that we are left with the anarchy of unconstrained interpretation. As Fish notes, interpretations will always be controlled by the relatively limited repertoire of interpretive strategies available at any given point in history.

- **Definition of Reader by different Critics**

Firstly, there is a difference between READER and THE READER.

READER is a term that refers student/fellow or any common man reading a literary text. It's a simple connotation for common readers. After one is able to differentiate these, it is easy to know different concepts given by different critics.

But THE READERS means those critics who carefully read their text for purpose of evaluation. In this way READER is different from THE READER.

Different critics and their views about READERS.

### **1. STANLEY FISH**

He is notable for his theory of Affective Stylistics and then for Social Reader Response theory.

If we look at his view about reader he talks about INFORMED READER.

Informed reader is one who has knowledge about the text and the rules governing it.

This type of reader has acquired linguistics and literacy competence and is able to interpret the text in the light of those skills.

One can associate other terms to this as well like,

The Educated reader

The optimal reader

The ideal reader

Then there is another concept developed by WOLFGANG ISER who gave his contributions to the formation of transactional Reader Response theory.

He talks about implied readers' by which he means the reader that the text seems to be addressing, whose characteristics we can deduce by studying the style in which the text is written. Stanley is notable for his two theories and this fundamental concept of informed reader. To this term "implied readers" other closely related terms can be associated like

Intended reader, Narratee.

- **What reader response critics do?**

They highlight the importance of readers in creation of any literary work

They developed a vital link between the text and the readers.

They evaluate the intended meaning of the text by keeping in mind the original meaning as well.

They give way to broad criticism by considering the views of readers. They focus on value of I.

How reader response theory is not Altogether a fruitful outcome in the end? First, the Anarchy

Subjectivity

Then the ignorance of the writer's view.

Furthermore, the clash that arises when there are multiple responses by readers

Reader Response theory fails to agree on one homogeneous response to a single text.

So the cultural and personality traits of a reader are responsible for the common agreed upon responses. This hinders the progress of the theory.

BI\_ACTIVE MODEL

Now we can end this debate in this way that there is Bi active modal between the readers and the text that need to be known.

The reader is as much imp to the text as the text to the reader.

Neither we can deny the importance of reader nor the value of the text can be ignored.

#### • Practical Application of theory

##### • The house passage

The two boys ran until they came to the driveway. "See, I told you today was good for skipping school," said Mark. "Mom is never home on Thursday," he added. Tall hedges hid the house from the road so the pair strolled across the finely landscaped yard. "I never knew your place was so big," said Pete. "Yeah, but it's nicer now than it used to be since Dad had the new stone siding put on and added the fireplace."

There were front and back doors and a side door which led to the garage, which was empty except for three parked 10-speed bikes. They went in the side door, Mark explaining that it was always open in case his younger sisters got home earlier than their mother.

Pete wanted to see the house so Mark started with the living room. It, like the rest of the downstairs, was newly painted. Mark turned on the stereo, the noise of which worried Pete. "Don't worry, the nearest house is a quarter of a mile away," Mark shouted. Pete felt more comfortable observing that no houses could be seen in any direction beyond the huge yard.

The dining room, with all the china, silver, and cut glass, was no place to play so the boys moved into the kitchen, where they made sandwiches. Mark said they wouldn't go to the basement because it had been damp and musty ever since the new plumbing had been installed.

"This is where my Dad keeps his famous paintings and his coin collection," Mark said as they peered into the den. Mark bragged that he could get spending money whenever he needed it since he'd discovered that his Dad kept a lot in the desk drawer.

There were three upstairs bedrooms. Mark showed Pete his mother's closet, which was filled with furs and the locked box which held her jewels. His sisters' room was uninteresting except for the color TV, which Mark carried to his room. Mark bragged that the bathroom in the hall was his since one had been added to his sisters' room for their use. The big highlight in his room, though, was a leak in the ceiling where the old roof had finally rotted.

Many readers probably would produce a list of positive and negative qualities something like the following:

Positive qualities Negative qualities tall hedges (privacy) damp, musty basement

finely landscaped yard new plumbing amiss

stone siding rotting roof

fireplace leak in bedroom ceiling garage

newly painted downstairs nearest house 1/ mi. away (privacy)

den

upstairs bedrooms new bathroom added to bedroom

Now reread the passage and underline any detail, positive or negative, that you think would be important if you were casing the house in order to rob it. Many readers probably would produce a list of positive and negative qualities something like the following:

Positive qualities

- tall hedges (safe from observation) no one home on Thursdays finely landscaped yard
- (these folks have money) 10-speed bikes in garage side door always left open nearest house 1/ mi. away
- (safe from observation) many portable goods: stereo, china,
- silver, cut glass, paintings, coin collection, furs, box of jewels, tv set, cash kept in desk drawer.

During second reading of this passage, because one is thinking of robbing the house, so one can focus on very different details, and even when one focus on the same details, he has a very different meaning for us. For example, the privacy that is an asset for many home buyers becomes a liability in terms of the home's vulnerability to burglars. Merely changing the purpose for which we read a passage can radically alter the passage we read. Of course, some home-buying readers might immediately see the negative aspect of the home's privacy because their experience has made them more aware of crime, illustrating reader-response theory's assertion that readers draw on their personal experiences to create meaning.

As the above exercise illustrates, a written text is not an object, despite its physical existence, but an event that occurs within the reader, whose response is of primary importance in creating the text. Theorists disagree, however, about how our responses are formed and what role, if any, the text plays in creating them. Opinions range from the belief that the literary text is as active as the reader in creating meaning to the belief that the text doesn't exist at all except as it is created by readers.

• **Conclusion**

Reader-response theory recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. Reader-response criticism argues that literature should be viewed as a performing art in which each reader creates their own, possibly unique, text-related performance. It stands in total opposition to the theories of formalism and the New Criticism, in which the reader's role in re-creating literary works is ignored.