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# Reassessing Reception Theory and Reader-Response Criticism

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Mahmoud Salami

Associate Prof., English Department,  
Faculty of Arts, Taif University ,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The article explores how the reception theory and the reader-response criticism is still a necessity even at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the culture of the Internet in which it is assumed that information can be retrieved from books or computers, that human beings still make meanings by the dynamic process of interpretation rather than being passive retrievers of meanings. It remains true that the reader's perception of a literary work determines the formation of that work. The way in which we respond to literature or what really literature does to us and how readers become the true writers of the texts they read will always be a valid question. This essay revolves around the contention of the power of the reader in the text and the entire dynamism of the act of reading itself, and how meanings are formulated and infinitely reformulated by readers. In rereading many 20<sup>th</sup>-century reception theorists, this paper foregrounds how the reader is deeply involved in a transactional experience while reading: both the text and the reader play roughly equal parts in the interpretive process; the reader is granted a greater degree of co-partnership with the text: the reader is liberal, flexible, open-minded and is prepared to put his/her own beliefs or societies into question and allow them to be interrogated, deconstructed and transformed. Reading is a variable, complex matter, which accepts the disruptions and dissonances to be expected in any work of art. The overarching role and value of reader-response criticism and reception theory is certainly indispensable to fully comprehend a literary text and understand its relationship to our own life. This essay answers the question of how the various theories discussed here seem to prune their own differences and coalesce and converge together into producing a momentum into the forceful freedom of the reader. Reading and critical textual analysis now become an aesthetic experience as well as a socio-political endeavour whereby both the reader and the text combine in the consciousness of the reader to create such text, the poem, the novel or literary criticism. This essay proves this point through investigating both the historical and philosophical connections that exist and can still be further made among traditional reception theorists and the most modern ones who all work together to foreground the important role of the reader within the discipline of literary criticism.

Reassessing the reception theory and the reader-response criticism seems a necessity in order to find out the growth of multiple tendencies among late-twentieth-century critics and the ways in which many of them, like some others before, decided that the reader's perception of a literary work really determines the formation of that work. The term "reception" simply deals with the ways in which texts, literary texts, are received, taken in, and accepted or rejected by readers. In general, it examines how we respond to literature, and to follow up from what Stanley Fish has argued, what literature really does to us and how readers become the true writers of the texts they read.<sup>1</sup> Reading a poem or any short story to a class of undergraduates, for example, would certainly trigger many responses from the students who may come from the same social group let alone other social or racial groups. Students differ in their various readings and approaches; none of them views the text as an objective entity that contains its own fixed meaning. This means that they read through the eyes and views of their own communities and backgrounds, thereby it is the reading community that matters most. In this context I can never forget readers' radical responses to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which triggered not only personal responses from those who had read it but also from those who had never read it to issue trans-national death warrants against the author, a case which is still living today and which reflects political, social, racial, religious and sacrilegious implications for the reader-response criticism. For these students, the text does not and cannot interpret itself independently. To determine a text's meaning, readers must become active readers and participants in the interpretive processes; they must become aware of the threat to the security of their ideas and beliefs. These various theoretical processes, assumptions and methodologies that are used to discover the text's meanings exemplify the upholding of the reader-response criticism, the core subject of this paper.

The main focus of this essay revolves around the contention of the power and capability of the reader in the text and the entire dynamism of the act of reading itself, and how meanings are formulated and infinitely reformulated by readers. In rereading many 20<sup>th</sup>-century reception theorists, this paper attempts to foreground how the reader is deeply involved in a transactional experience while reading: both the text and the reader play roughly equal parts in the interpretive process; the reader is granted a greater degree of co-partnership with the text: the reader is liberal, flexible, open-minded and is prepared to put his or her own beliefs or societies into question and allow them to be interrogated, deconstructed, and transformed. Reading is an event that culminates in the creation of a work of art. Reading indeed is a variable,

complex matter, which accepts the disruptions and dissonances to be expected in any work of art. Ultimately, the overarching role and value of reader-response criticism and reception theory is certainly indispensable to fully comprehend a literary text and understand its relationship to our own life and reality. This essay will answer the question of how the various theories discussed here seem to prune their own differences and coalesce and converge together into producing a momentum into the forceful freedom of the reader. Reading and critical textual analysis now become an aesthetic experience as well as a socio-political endeavour whereby both the reader and the text combine in the consciousness of the reader to create such a text, the poem, the novel or literary criticism. This essay hopes to prove this point through investigating both the historical and philosophical connections that exist and can still be further made among traditional reception theorists and the most modern ones who all work together to foreground the important role of the reader within the discipline of literary criticism. Indeed this essay concludes that even at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the culture of the Internet in which it is generally assumed that information can be retrieved from books or computers, human beings still make meanings by the dynamic process of interpretation rather than being passive retrievers of meanings; it re-emphasizes the active process of reading texts (poems, plays and novels) and making meanings in the context of such a culture.<sup>2</sup>

One important late-twentieth-century reception theorist and critic, Susan Suleiman, argued the same point in her essay, "Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," where she insisted that literature generally

provides a challenging context for undertaking reader-oriented and deconstructive technique studies. The status of the reading subject, and the text, are now the focus of intense critical attention. This foregrounding of the reader's role stems from the recognition that a literary text is not a static artifact which is passively received by its readers. Instead, a literary text is a dynamic process whereby a given reader functions as mediator between text and author. As a result, the deployment of deconstructive reading techniques and of reader-oriented criticism opens the text to previously unknown dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

The argument of this paper builds upon this central idea that reading is an important and responsible activity which the reader takes upon him/herself. Reading is actually the writing of the text itself since the author is "dead", as Roland Barthes has long said, the moment he publishes his text. The overall conclusion of all those critics and thinkers that I want to sift through in this essay connects to this idea and lies at the heart of the reception theory of a

literary work and determines the formation of literary criticism as a whole. I shall endeavour this process of re-exploring the reader-response criticism by looking back at the various theories and then try to see how they all share the same conviction that readers are crucial to the making of textual meaning.

The beginnings of the reception theory and the reader-response criticism can be traced back to the 1920s. Even such a precise date is artificial, for readers have obviously been responding to what they have read and experienced since Plato's and Aristotle's time. Both Plato and Aristotle were concerned with the viewer's reactions; they mostly believed that the spectators of a play sit and absorb the contents of the artistic creation and allow it to dominate and maybe change their thoughts and actions. For them the play provides all that is needed to interpret itself without their interference. This view almost continued to dominate much traditional and modern literary scene of receiving texts passively until maybe the Romantic Movement in the 1800s when the focus of criticism shifted from the text to the author. I say "almost" because one can argue in this context that there were many situations of active readings of texts during and after the Renaissance period when readers imitated ancient writers and actively glossed texts. There were many texts which caused political fears and state unrest, hence their ban from the reading public and the response they may elicit—Defoe's and Bunyan's texts are good examples. Nineteenth-century criticism continued to grant the author such an importance in matters related to his/her life, times and social context as chief components of textual analysis.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially with the Formalists, emphasis shifted back again from the author and history to the text. We know that the Formalists and the New Critics paid great attention to the form, the literariness of the text and abandoned the author, and the response of the reader was just a way of understanding how the defamiliarization process was operating. The text became autonomous verbal icon, an objective entity that could be textually analyzed and botanically dissected. In such a thorough scientific and anatomical way, the text would reveal its own meaning without the help of extrinsic factors such as historical or social contexts. Indeed, such critics see that the text itself contains the seeds of its own interpretations or what we really need to discover in it. We unlock its meaning through our mastery of the technical vocaband the correct techniques inherently provided in it. This means that for them the reader is somehow implicated in this process of reading and interpreting a text, the process of locating the meaning or meanings, or to achieve some certainty about how meanings are produced in a text, matters which are central to reception theory and reader-response

criticism. As we shall see throughout this article, reader-response criticism questions and deconstructs traditional/Platonic notions of reading. One leading critic of this period who exemplifies the early founders of reader-response criticism in Anglo-American culture and who functions as my starting point in this article is I. A. Richards.

Richards used a clear reader-response-criticism approach to the textual analysis he applied in his own book, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1925), which mainly pronounced the scientific nature of reading texts and poetry in particular, and that only science can lead to truth or the correct view of the world. He insists that poetry leads only to unverifiable facts, or what he called "pseudo-statements" about life and reality. However, he did not abandon these pseudo-statements as bad responses; he considers them to be individually different and psychologically healthy responses. Richards was indeed formulating a system of analysis, which builds upon the reader's morality and his or her emotional responses to any given text.

But Richards changed his mind and abandoned this reader-approach in his own study of poetry and literature as a whole. He concentrated on the structure or what later the New Critics adopted as the scientific view that the poem itself contains all the necessary information to arrive at the "right" or "more adequate" interpretation. Through minute textual analysis Richards believes a reader can arrive at a better interpretation of a poem than relying on his own private, emotional and personal responses that may not tally with the text. But to give Richards his due one must acknowledge that his initial reader-response methodology was important to initiate the vital role of the reader in the text. In recognizing the contextual nature of reading a poem, Richards concedes that a reader brings to the text a vast array of ideas emanating from his or her own social and historical experiences and applying them to the text s/he is reading, a point which is central, for example, to Fish's argument about the interpretive community. In this way, Richards is important for us because he foreshadows the main principle of the reception theory, or rather represents the early type of the reader-response criticism—the reader is no longer the passive recipient of knowledge but an active participant in the production of it.

Many of Richards's ideas concerning the contextual nature of the reading process were further developed in the 1930s by Louise Rosenblatt in her work, *Literature as Exploration* (1937). Very simply, Rosenblatt says that both the reader and the text must work together to produce meaning; the reader and the text are partners in the interpretive process. This view was radical enough to be accepted by the New Critics, who complained that Rosenblatt had shifted the focus of textual analysis away from the text alone into history,

and therefore she was seen as revolutionary and abstract and could not be accepted in the canon. That is why Rosenblatt was put off by such responses but she did not completely abandon those ideas. She picked them later in her book. *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978), where she clarifies her earlier ideas and presents them in the light of the so many developments following the concerns of phenomenology, hermeneutics and reception theory.

Echoing Iser, Rosenblatt asserts that the reading process involves a reader and a text. Both the reader and the text actively interact or share a transactional experience: the text acts as a stimulus for eliciting various responses from the reader, responses that emanate from his or her past experiences, thoughts, and ideas that are shared by the common daily existand experience. In the same way, the text formulates the reader's experiences, selecting, limiting, and ordering the ideas that best conform to the text. Through this mutual, transactional experience, the reader and the text produce a new creation, a poem. For Rosenblatt, like many other reader-response critics, a poem is now defined as the result of an event that takes place during the reading process, or what Rosenblatt calls "the aesthetic transaction."<sup>4</sup> Rosenblatt was really a poststructuralist when she confirms that the word "text" is no longer synonymous with the word "poem" for she believes that a poem is created each time a reader interacts with its text, be that interaction a first reading or any of countless re-readings of the same text. As we know, this is the view of various poststructuralists and deconstructionists and their readings of literature in the last 30 years or so.

For Rosenblatt, the true poem can exist only in the reader's consciousness, not on the printed page. When reader and text interact, the poem and thereits meanings are created; they exist only in the consciousness of the reader. Reading and textual analysis become an aesthetic experience whereby both the reader and the text combine in the consciousness of the reader to create the poem. For Rosenblatt we live through the transactional experience of reading/creating the poem. The reader's imagination must work, filling in the gaps in the text and conjecturing about characters' actions, personality traits, and motives. This last phase of Rosenblatt indeed links nicely with the most famous theorists of reception theory and reader-response criticism, namely Wolfgang Iser, from whom, as we shall see later, she largely adopts her views concerning the dynamic interaction between the reader and the text. Indeed the role of the reader in literary criticism was further enhanced through the development of phenomenology which supported in many ways the thesis of the reader as the perceiver and maker of meanings.

Phenomenology was originally developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who argues that one is conscious of something

either through sensing it or thinking of it. For Husserl, the act of thinking and the object of thought are internally related and mutually dependent. Consciousness then is not just a passive registration of the world but actively constitutes it. This would be very credible when we are conscious of a poem or a novel, for example, and how we actively posit our meanings and interpretations of it. In order to be certain, then, we must preclude anything which is not part of our own experiences or our immediate awareness of it; the external world is reduced to the contents of our consciousness alone.<sup>5</sup> Husserl called this process the "phenomenological reduction": everything which cannot be conceived by the consciousness must be neglected, and all realities must be treated as pure "phenomena", as they appear in our mind and as they constitute the only data from which we can begin our analysis. Husserl named his philosophical method—phenomenology. Phenomenology is a science of pure phenomena. Phenomenology is a modern philosophical tendency that emphasizes the perceiver. Objects can have meaning, phenomenologists maintain, only if an active consciousness (a perceiver) absorbs or notes their existence. In other words, objects exist only if we register them in our consciousness.<sup>6</sup> This of course connects strongly with the validity of the reader-response criticism and how readers actively read and how intentionality produces meanings. Thus, for Husserl, perception is an active process; it is a science of human subjectivity. It establishes man as the origin of meaning; man is given his central position as being prior to his history and social conditions.

But phenomenological criticism seems to work against its own grain: it aims at a wholly mental reading of the text, totally unaffected by anything outside it. The text is reduced to a pure embodiment of the author's consciousness, and that the author's mind forms its unifying essence and provides all the things we need to know about this text. To know this mind, we must look deeper into the structures of the text, how images, themes, and certain patterns are used; we must not refer to anything real about the author outside the text. Biographical criticism is banned with phenomenology and phenomenologists attempted to achieve complete objectivity and disinterestedness. Phenomenological criticism is wholly uncritical, non-evaluative and therefore passively recipient of what is in the text without any active constructions of further meanings outside the text. A literary work is an organic, coherent unified whole and phenomenological criticism tries to study these unities, thereby reflecting further connections with Richards's structural literary criticism. As Eagleton argued, phenomenological criticism is truly "an idealist, essentialist, anti-historical, formalist, and organicist type of criticism."<sup>7</sup>

The process of interpreting texts historically and philosophically thus

becomes problematical with Husserl's phenomenology when it totally bracketed off the social and historical context and when it wrongly rendered the reader as a passive recipient of whatever is in the writer's mind. This theory was further complicated by another phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who developed and even rejected many of Husserl's ideas when he emphasized the quality of "givenness", of production, of the human mind. Heidegger developed his ideas with reference to his analysis of human existence, or *Dasein* as he calls it or existentialism in his great work *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger argues that meanings are those structures in which we live before we think about them. We interpret the world in the light of our beliefs and assumptions and we repeat this process endlessly until we die, and therefore we interpret a literary text as we see it in our own perspectives and within the parameters of our own beliefs and milieu.

For Heidegger knowing is deeply related to doing. Human beings have a dialectical existential relationship with the outside material world. For Heidegger human existence is an active dialogue with the world, a dialogue which implies listening, receiving, and talking and giving your own ideas, feelings and opinions. Heidegger gave the Being, the human subject, *Dasein*, a positive and active role in his own society and reality. This does not mean that Heidegger gave literary interpretations a social and material view as a Marxist would do for instance. Literary interpretation for Heidegger is not something we do, is not an activity, but something we must let happen. We must open ourselves to the text and allow ourselves to be interrogated by its inexhaustible being.<sup>8</sup> This means for Heidegger that we are caught up in this endless struggle to overcome time, to overcome our inward authentic existence and to engage in a permanent dialogue with the text as Other being. Ultimately, Heidegger is correct when he argued that a reader must experience the "inner life" of a text in order to understand it at all and to have a valid interpretation of it, and that is why the whole process of interpretation for him is always relative.

But what is missing in Heidegger's philosophy and which is relevant to literary criticism is the ways in which he, like Husserl and other western metaphysical thinkers, abandoned history in his theory of interpreting a literary text. What is useful here, however, is his emphasis on the role of the reader, and that meanings do not only exist within the text but within the reader's mind as well as his being. In fact, Heidegger describes his philosophy as a "hermeneutic of Being"; and the word "hermeneutic" means the science or art of interpretation. Heidegger's form of philosophy is generally referred to as "hermeneutical phenomenology", to distinguish it from the "transcendental phenomenology" of Husserl and others. Hermeneutical phenomenology bases

itself upon questions of historical interpretations rather than on the transcendental and mysterious consciousness of Husserl. Hermeneutics began as the science of interpreting ancient documents, making a consistent picture when the parts themselves drew their meaning from the document as a whole, but has become important to literary theory and literature in general. In other words, Hermeneutics, basically stresses the notion of valid interpretation, and valid interpretation can be achieved only by a sustained interaction between our progressive sense of the whole and our retrospective understanding of its component parts. In other words, hermeneutics, phenomenology and structuralism are linked so aptly together with the theory of reader-response criticism since they all address the same problem of how we interpret and read texts and how we take or indeed give meanings to these texts.

Heidegger's most celebrated successor as hermeneuticist and reader-response theorists was the modern German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his central work *Truth and Method* (1960), Gadamer argues that the process of interpretation is also relative and depends on the reader doing the interpretation. He believes that a literary work bears the self-image and moral dimensions of its author and society. For him the meaning of a literary work is never exhausted by the intentions of its author; indeed a work of art absorbs both artist and reader. For him, a literary work is always open for further readers to pour in their new meanings that are recollected from the changing circumstances of man's life. The new interpretations do not come about through slavishly following certain rules, but something which emerges in the hermeneutical struggle of artistic creation, the continual adjustment and readjustment of concept with medium, and of individual view with the wider social truths.<sup>9</sup> For Gadamer, all interpretation is thus situational and shaped by the historically relative criteria of a particular society; there is no possibility of knowing the literary text as it is.

For Gadamer, all interpretation of a past work consists in a dialogue between past and present. As such, they are replete with the presuppositions (prejudices, Gadamer calls them) of those circumstances. How can we filter out these prejudices, and ensure we do not replace them with prejudices of our own? We cannot, says Gadamer. We must allow the two sets of prejudices to confront each other, a process which leads to the ultimate understanding of a text. Understanding is then productive and is always realizing new potential in the text. The present is only understandable through the past, with which it forms a living continuity; and the past is also grasped from our own partial view point within the present. Understanding occurs when the two horizons of the past and present fuse together to produce the common meaning we seek while reading, and in doing so, Gadamer says, we reach

home and achieve a complete understanding of ourselves. Thus, past and present, subject and object, the alien and the intimate are all securely coupled by tradition or a Being which encompasses them all. Like Heidegger, Gadamer sees language as the house of Being. He is also pleased with Wittgenstein's picture of language as social games. Through playing (i.e. using language) we acquire an understanding of the world. He sees such language corruptions and prejudices as constitutive of understanding; there is no language free of them.

Such a view of language and reading texts is developed further by Gadamer's colleague Jürgen Habermas, who sees language as a sedimented ideology, full of undisclosed corruptions and prejudices which must be brought to light through analysis. Habermas stresses the communicative function of language by initially grounding it in psychoanalysis. He then adopted a linguistic model which attempts to show that truth, justice and freedom are interwoven at a fundamental level in language.<sup>10</sup> He believes we cannot entirely eliminate distortions of language, but we can be aware of them, which is sufficient for him. Also absolute truth is unattainable if communication is between people with slightly different viewpoints. In this context of reader-response criticism, Habermas asks: how then do we arrive at a proper interpretation of objects from past civilizations? He simply does not explain. Thus, all things are relative: no one interpretation is to be preferred over another.

This position was developed further by the American hermeneuticist Eric Hirsch in his major work, *Validity in Interpretation* (1976). Hirsch argues that a literary work does not necessarily have just one meaning since it is already written by one author at a particular time and place. There are a number of different valid interpretations which somehow must move within the possible and the probable that the work itself allows. The point "time and place" means that a literary work may mean different things to different people in different times and different places. This is certainly true for what *Hamlet*, for instance, meant for Shakespeare himself, for his own Elizabethan people, for later Victorian and modern British or American people, let alone what it meant maybe for a Russian, a Japanese or an Arab reader. In fact, Hirsch differentiates between "meaning" and the "significance" of a work: meaning remains the same whereas significance changes according to time and place and people. For him authors assign meanings whereas readers assign significances.

Hirsch develops this position since he identifies the meaning of the text with the author's intention, and that we readers cannot always have access to the writer's mind. Hirsch goes against the production current of the reader-

response criticism when he says that meaning is absolute and immutable and does not change by time or place. This negative authoritative position promotes what the author *wills* in his text, and all that we hope for as readers is to try to unearth this fixed hidden meaning. For Hirsch the reader will reconstruct the moments of writing and will guard the text and make sure that it resists all historical and potentially anarchic interpretations and will restrict it to what is typical and traditional of meaning. The reader's position towards the text is then slavish, authoritarian and juridical: anything which cannot be hemmed inside the author's gamut of meaning is then expelled as an unacceptable interpretation. The reader then tries to preserve and to police the sanctity and the unalterable meaning of the sacred text as ordained by its own creator-father-author. Indeed though in a different vein, this is close to what Stanley Fish has argued about the function of the 'interpretive community' when he proclaimed that the interpretive community serves somewhat to 'police' readings and thus prohibits outlandish interpretations.<sup>11</sup> Meaning for Hirsch is thus the private property of its author and no one should be allowed to trespass such property. For Hirsch the reader cannot be trusted for s/he may trivialize and even vulgarize the meaning and therefore the author has to use his power to protect the sanctity of his text. Meanings can be turned upside down, can be carnivalized in all sorts of ways and one may feel OK about it, but Hirsch is absolutely adamant to allow that into his theory. He seems unsure of his own principles and values that seem shaky bourgeois values facing a strong mob of angry readers who demand some respect for their own voices and opinions.

Meaning, for Hirsch, is thus authoritative, solid, pure, universal, truthful and unimpeachable which will anchor the work for ever. But this is really problematical since meanings are not fixed and stable and determinate for ever simply because they are governed by language and linguistics which develop and change through time and societies. Indeed, not only does the "significance" of the work of art change through time and place but also its meaning and one may think of even religious texts which meant something for their own adherent readers two thousand years ago and they may mean today completely something else. Thus, one may disagree with Hirsch and say that the notion of absolute objectivity in identifying the author's meaning is an illusion because one should think of the various historical conditions that affect and produce different frames of meaning and perception. Meaning is always historical and does change through time and place and almost completely governed by relativism. Meanings are governed by language and that the meaning of a certain language is a social matter; in fact, language belongs to society before it belongs to the individual, and the individual derives his

knowledge of the language through society itself. Texts are open and this openness, in fact, comes from the various positions the text offers in order to be intelligible. These positions, however, are never single because in the first place they belong to language, and language always manifests various positions in specific discourses. It is thus the dynamic power of the word that provides the plurality of meaning in given text in relation to a given reader.

This seems to be reflected and advanced by Heidegger and elaborated further by Gadamer and Habermas in their own ways but to the same effect. Indeed, hermeneutics was developed further in Germany at the hands of Wolfgang Iser and before him the Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden, with both of whom a new name for hermeneutics emerges as *Rezeptionsaesthetik*, "reception aesthetics" or "reception theory". This theory concentrates on the role of the reader in literature, a role which has been neglected by previous schools of criticism and theory and which I try to promote and revive in this article. With the reception theory the reader is given back his/her due attention since very simply texts are written to be read by people not to be put on bookshelves, and literature exists through both author and reader alike.

Roman Ingarden considers "intention" as central to his concept of the literary work because texts preserve the acts of consciousness on the part of the writer, which are then reanimated in various ways by the reader. He rigorously advocates the connection between the text and the reader in his book *The Literary Work of Art* (1973), where he argues that a literary text is constructed from four strata: "(1) the stratum of *word sounds* and the phonetic formations of higher order built on them; (2) the stratum of *meaning units* of various orders; (3) the stratum of manifold schematized aspects [...] and, finally, (4) the stratum of *represented objectivities* and their vicissitudes."<sup>12</sup> For Ingarden there is some sort of hierarchy among these components. The stratum of meaning or semantic units (words, sentences, and sentence complexes that arise from the first stratum) occupies the top of this hierarchy, and according to Ingarden, it "provides the structural framework for the whole work" and where the role of the reader is foregrounded.<sup>13</sup> For Ingarden, the role of the reader is essential for concretizing the textual meanings, and it is connected to the reader's past experience. Every reader provides or fills in the schemata, or the text's layers, by the addition of "various details which actually do not belong to them and which the reader draws from the contents of other, formerly experienced concrete aspects."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the fictional objects in a given text are built not only on a linguistic foundation, but also on the represented objects from the author's world, on the reader's participation, on his/her acquired knowledge the conceptualization of the text.

This issue inevitably leads to the question of the text's indeterminacy.

One must always remember, as I contend throughout this paper, that a text may never lead to closure and can never be fully classified, and this of course is related to its quality of openness and plurality. Indeed, in developing this issue of indeterminacy, Ingarden argues that "every literary work is in principle incomplete and always in need of further supplementation; in terms of the text, however, this supplementation can never be completed."<sup>15</sup> That is, the "intended" objects of the text are involved in a process of continuous change, development, and displacement, and this can always be realized or fulfilled during the reading process. Reading, therefore, functions as a supplementary activity that attempts to determine the "intended objects" being represented in a given text, and as such, for Ingarden, a literary text is primarily intentional. Indeed, this process of textual determination by the reader only becomes possible through the fleshing out of what Ingarden calls the text's "spots of indeterminacy," or as Iser calls them, the "indeterminacy gaps."<sup>16</sup>

Principally, these "spots of indeterminacy" are defined by Ingarden as those "empty spots," or "those moments which have the basis" for projecting, qualifying, and concretizing the represented objects in a given text.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, for Ingarden, these gaps are simply filled in by the reader and determined according to his/her own understanding of these objects. On the other hand, Wolfgang Iser reconstructs Ingarden's central ideas and advances them extensively in his own formulation of a theory of reading. In his book *The Act of Reading* Iser demonstrates the shortcomings of Ingarden's theory, which is mainly concerned with the act of reading a "one-way incline from text to reader and not [...] a two-way relationship."<sup>18</sup> While Ingarden's theory postulates reading as a process of "completion" or "filling in," and while it locates the reader in a fixed position in the text, Iser's theory, on the other hand, problematizes the reading process by promoting a dynamic relationship between the reader and the text. Indeed, Iser foregrounds successfully this dialectical relationship that operates throughout the reading process, where the meaning is a process of negotiation between the writer and the reader. This means here that the meanings of texts are neither completely predetermined by the author nor completely open, but are subject to certain constraints; one of which is interestingly linked to the 'interpretive community' advanced by Fish.

However, both Ingarden and Iser agree on the premise that the text is constructed from different strata or schemata that the reader always determines through the act of reading. Iser suggests that the meaning of the text "is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced."<sup>19</sup> He also reconstructs a synthesis that largely echoes Ingarden's main schemata:

"It is as if the schema were a hollow form into which the reader is invited to pour his own store of knowledge."<sup>20</sup> The word "schema" is used by cognitive psychologists to refer to a kind of cognitive structure or a knowledge structure. Schemata are stored in long-term memory and are employed when we interpret our experiences. Schemata embody such expectations, and therefore perception, comprehension, interpretation and memory are mediated by schemata. Thus in reading the reader always constructs, concretizes, reproduces, supplements, and elaborates the literary work by filling in the missing details, deliberately left out by the author, these gaps from his/her experience. In reading we must draw not only on our knowledge of language but on our knowledge of the world.

Iser emphasizes throughout his argument that "it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process."<sup>21</sup> This means that the main emphasis in this theory of reading is laid upon the text and the textual blanks that somehow determine the reader's response. According to Iser the text's power lies mainly not in its content, but in the spaces left between its textual segments. The text is really no more than a series of cues to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning. Indeed he locates the importance of these segments in their specific ability to unite with each other: "each textual segment does not carry its own deterwithin itself, but will gain this in relation to other seg"<sup>22</sup> Unlike Ingarden's theory, the reader's past experience, then, does not seem to constitute the meaning of the text, but rather the text itself becomes meaningful through the dynamic interrelation of these segments with each other, with other segments, other meaning units, or other represented objects in the text. The interior juxtaposition of objects to other objects, according to Iser, is generally determined through the gaps within the text itself: "The object itself is a product of interconnections, the structuring of which is to a great extent regulated and controlled by blanks."<sup>23</sup>

For example, the juxtaposition of textual segments in John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is clearly illustrated through the multiplicity of viewpoints. Characters' perspectives reflect the various structural qualities of the interconnection of blanks or gaps. In this novel the aim of depicting existential freedom in contrast to Victorian norms is fulfilled by way of a repertoire that incorporates the prevailing norms of nineteenth-century thought and represents it as governing the characters' conduct. These Victorian norms are portrayed, for instance, by Mrs. Poulteney (reactionary views concerning love and marriage), Mr. Freeman (industrialism, capitalism, and exploitation), Ernestina (naive Victorian girl with naive notions of love), Mary and Sam (social deprivation). These characters are constructed to

Charles and Dr. Grogan, who represent modern aspects of existential freedom. All these views serve as contrasts to the position of the hero and the heroine. The relationship between Charles and Sarah is also juxtaposed and transformed another tension: Charles's lack of discernment of Sarah's principles of existential freedom. Thus, the contrasts and discrepancies within the perspectives of the characters give rise to the missing links that the reader must supply by him/herself. The narrator often represents the missing link, and in fact through these links the reader decides the position of the narrator, who supports Sarah's struggle for freedom. Indeed it is this dynamic process of reading and the indispensable role of the reader that are foregrounded literature and in this reception theory.

The reader is thus involved in a transactional experience when interpreting a text. It becomes clear then that reading is not the passive assimilation of textual information, but it requires the reader to go beyond the information given in the text. Even the most mundane texts are full of 'indeterminacies' which require the reader's active interpretation, require the reader to go beyond that which is explicitly stated in order to make sense of them, though we are normally unaware of the extent of such interpretation in our everyday reading. Both the text and the reader play roughly equal parts in the interpretive process; the reader is granted a greater degree of co-partnership with the text: reading is an event that culminates in the creation of a work of art. Reading indeed is a variable, complex matter, which accepts the disruptions and dissonances to be expected in any work of art. The reading process for Iser is thus always subjective. He also maintained this position in his earlier work, *The Implied Reader* (1974), where he sees reading as always a dialectical process between the reader and the text. Indeed, for Iser the concept of the "implied reader" is somewhat akin to an "ideal reader" who is actually a hypothetical reader of the text. According to Iser, the implied reader embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effects—predispositions laid down by the text itself. This means, and in a reflection of what Wayne Booth has argued the same term before in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1963), that the implied reader as a concept is firmly planted in the structure of the text; s/he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader. Indeed, before Ingarden and Iser, Hans Robert Jauss stresses a change of attitude towards the act of writing and reading; he gave a social dimension to the act of reading.<sup>24</sup> Since we absorb a work only when we enlarge the horizon of our understanding, the accepted canons of literature that no longer shock and challenge may not be relevant. Meaning emerges in the interaction between text and readers, often in societies very different from the writer's expectations, and so largely out of his control. The

whole point of reading for Iser, as Eagleton pointed out, "is that it brings us into deeper self-consciousness and catalyzes a more critical view of our own identities. It is as though what we have been 'reading', in working our way in a book, is ourselves."<sup>25</sup> This means that in reading the reader is liberal, flexible, and open-minded and is prepared to put his or her beliefs or societies into question and allow them to be transformed.

Like Ingarden and Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, in two of his important works *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) and *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (1982), emphasized that a text's social history must be considered in the act of interpretation. He maintained that a reader's aesthetic experience is always bound by time and historical determinants. Jauss declares that critics must examine how any given text was received by its contemporeaders. Using the term 'horizons of expectation', Jauss explains how a reader's "expectation" is based on the reader's past experience. Jauss contended that for a work to be considered a classic it needed to exceed a reader's horizons of expectations. The term also meant to include all of a historical period's critical vocabulary and assessment of a text. Thus, because each historical period rightly establishes its own 'horizons of expectation', the overall value of any text can never be fixed. Jauss is correct to say this for readers, in any given period, are able to establish for themselves what they value in a text. Therefore, a text does not have only one correct interpretation, for its supposed meaning changes from one historical period to another. A final assessment of any literary work thus becomes illusory and even impossible. This again supports what Ingarden and Iser have later said about the active role of the reader in theories of reading, and also enhances what Stanley Fish has later argued about the 'interpretive communities' and the social dimension of reading.

According to Stanley Fish, at the center of all stories, for instance, there is a conflict or a dramatic tension that often results in a sudden loss, pain, joy, fear, or even a great fulfillment. Such changes cause the reader to change and modify his or her horizons of expectation to fit a text's particular situation, be it social, political or even aesthetic. This point exceeds what Iser and Ingarden have argued in their theory of reading but connects with Fish's 'interpretive communities.' Indeed, Fish is not a strongly socially-oriented literary theorist, since the reader and the act of reading is his central concern, but he did introduce good concepts which make allowance for the social framing of reading. Like many other socio-historical critics, he saw reading as more social and readers as part of a historically-specific 'reading public'. He emphasized that although reading usually takes place in solitude, it is nevertheless a social activity framed by social conventions.

Fish's reader-response theory and criticism can be summarized in two trends: one is phenomenological, which characterizes much of Fish's earlier work, and the other is epistemological, which embodies much of Fish's later work. The phenomenological method focuses on what happens in the reader's mind as s/he reads. Fish applies this method in his early work *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967). His thesis in this work is that Milton used a number of literary techniques intentionally to lead the reader into a false sense of security whereupon he would effect a turn from the reader's expectations in order to surprise the reader with his own prideful self-sufficiency. Fish argues that Milton intends to force the reader to see his own sinfulness in a new light and be forced back to God's grace. This theory of authorial intention was rejected by Fish in his later work *Is There a Text in This Class?* when he came to see the contradiction in maintaining an anti-intentionalist stance while attempting to demonstrate Milton's rhetorical techniques.<sup>26</sup>

Fish's main concern in this book, mainly in the first half, is to see what the text does to the reader as opposed to what it originally means. He rejects the New Critics' view which posits that meaning is embedded in the textual artifact, and suggests instead that the formal features of a text do not exist prior to and independently of interpretive strategies. He insists that rather than having a text that contains formal features identifiable in all times and places that it is the reader that projects these features onto the text, thereby answering "No" to the question, "Is there a text in this class?" Indeed, this stance embodied Fish's theory of criticism by rejecting the author's intentionality and places meaning solely within the territory of the reader. In this Fish deals with what he sometimes called "reception aesthetics" or "affective stylistics." He claims that it is the interpretive community which writes its own texts, gives those meanings, life, and creates its own reality. In this context we see how his theory of reading is epistemological in that it deals with how meanings are made in texts, how interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. For Fish, interpreters of a text do not decode the text; they make them. This is the point on which he mostly focuses in his later reader-response theory and which enhances my main premise throughout this paper.

The most radical point in Fish's theory is that he posits that meanings reside not inherently in the text, but in the reader or rather the reading community. He insists that the text does not contain meaning: despite being written upon, the text is a blank slate onto which the reader, in reading, actually writes it. The text contains nothing in itself, rather the content is supplied by the reader. It is the reader that determines the shape of text, its form, and its content; it is the reader that makes the text. This is exactly what reading does as Fish argues throughout his theory.<sup>27</sup> He believes that there is

no stable basis for meaning; there is no correct interpretation that will always hold true; meaning does not exist "out there" somewhere; it exists, rather, within the reader. In this way he defines meaning to be "an experience; it occurs; it does something; it makes us do something. Indeed, I would go so far as to say, in direct contradiction of Wimsatt and Beardsley, that what it does is what it means."<sup>28</sup> This principle eventually reveals Fish's theory to be moving from an "objective" to a fully blown "subjective" interpretive theory since it connects with the experiential dimension of meaning and how it is formulated within the "activating consciousness of the reader."<sup>29</sup> But whilst rejecting the objectivity of the text he insisted that he rejected pure subjectivism when he referred all this to what he calls the "interpretive community".<sup>30</sup>

Fish's central thesis is that he has a strong view of the social construction of reality. He believes that knowledge is not objective but always socially conditioned. All our ideas and thinking come as an interpretation of the social context in which we live. For Fish the very thoughts one thinks are made possible by presuppositions of the community in which one lives and furthermore individuals, who are all socially conditioned, cannot think beyond the limits made possible by the culture. This culture is referred to by Fish as an "interpretive community" and the strategies of an interpreter are "community property, and insofar as they at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is too [community property] [...]. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties."<sup>31</sup> In this context, Fish thinks that interpretive communities, like languages, are purely conventional or arbitrary in the way they are constructed. There is no such thing as higher reality that governs a community; a community is rather a construction of all parts of society. That is why the interpretive strategies a culture employs as well as their notions of right and wrong are always socially made. Finally, Fish argues that it is not possible to abstract one's self from one's values or the society's ideology. Culture fills our minds with assumptions and beliefs that are not only similar but always alike. An individual is simply a product of his environment without the ability to choose his beliefs and values. Such values are instead informed or determined by the culture which is historically conditioned, a point which is at the core of the most recent developments in cultural literary theory and criticism.<sup>32</sup> Throughout this analysis about the vital role of the reader-response criticism, Fish is ultimately reflecting the new theory of poststructuralism and deconstruction, where the author does not live beyond the creation of the text; the author is just a creation of the reader, a point which so strongly highlights the role of the reader in the last two decades of literary criticism, and which I uphold throughout this essay.

I must emphasize that the need to look again and again at the role of the reader within the most recent developments in literary theory and criticism will undoubtedly live on for some time to come. It is certain that the reader is no longer a passive consumer of meanings or merely applying a long list of learned, poetic devices to a text in the hope of discovering its intricate patterns of paradoxes and irony, which, in turn, will lead to a supposed correct interpretation. For reader-response critics, the reader now becomes an active participant along with the text in creating meanings.<sup>33</sup>

Looking back at all those reader-response critics one can say that they do not provide us with a single methodological approach for textual analysis. They really share a common concern for the reader: a literary work's interpretation is created when a reader and a text interact or transact. The proper study of literature must consider the reader and the text, not simply a text nor the author in isolation. There is a precaution that one must keep in mind about all this: if reader-response critics allow for a wide range of legitiresponses to a text, does it mean that any and all interpretations are valid or of equal importance? Simply. The boundaries and restrictions placed on possible interpretations of a text vary, depending upon how the critic defines the various elements of the reading process. For an interpretation to be an interpretation of *this* text and not some other, it must in some sense be logically constrained by the text itself. Indeed a work of art exercises a degree of determinacy over the readers' responses to it; otherwise criticism would seem to fall into total anarchy. In fact, it is these definitions and assumptions that allowed us to see different and valid groups of of reader-response critics throughout the years between Richards and Roland Barthes and Derrida for example.<sup>34</sup>

One important group of reader-response critics can be classed under structuralism and later poststructuralism since they based their ideas on modern linguistics, and their structuralist approach of textual analysis is quite scientific. Critics like Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Roman Jakobson, Claude Levi-Strauss, Gerald Prince, and Jonathan Culler, each in his own way looked for specific codes within the text, codes that allow meaning to occur. These codes or signs exist in literature and in real life and the reader works with them to achieve meaning. Codes are embedded in all sorts of texts just as they are part of a larger system that allows meaning to occur in all facets of society.

Roland Barthes's argument about the plural text and the dynamic nature of texts reinforces the role of the reader he has given in his analysis in *S/Z* and *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), texts that are central for the reader-response criticism. Barthes defines the means of reading, analyzing or

rewriting a text as a means of observing the various ways in which it is both produced and interpreted through the reading process. Barthes reinforces the active role of the reader in this process of suspending the traditional ways of locating the meaning within the territory of the author only, and positioning the reader as a consumer of such meanings. For Barthes, the reader is no longer a consumer of what the author offers or intends in the text, but rather a producer of different meanings. Barthes believes that meaning can be found only through discovering the binary opposition within the text. For him, *Sarrasine*, an individual text, is simply an open text, a message (a parole) that must be interpreted by using the appropriate codes or signs or binary operations that form the basis of the entire system, the langue. Only through recognizing the codes or binary operations within the text, says Barthes, can we explain the message encoded within the text. By finding other binary oppositions within the text and showing how these oppositions interrelate, the structuralist and the reader-response critic can decode the text, thereby explaining its meaning. Thus, the terms *scriptible* and *lisible* are used by Barthes as a way of negotiating the difference between the polyphonic or the plural text and the monologic, monolithic or the single closed text. The *scriptible* text is polyphonic and wholly plural where all statements are of an indefinite nature, whereas the *lisible* text is often determined, fixed, and inclined towards totalization. This of course excludes the author, society and history from such text, and that is why Barthes announces the death of the author and the long-life of the reader.

Indeed, the key group of reader-response critics we have seen so far, including Ingarden, Iser, and Fish among others, are those who place a great deal of emphasis on the reader himself, on his psyche and subjectivity, his thoughts, beliefs, personal experiences, and his society or community rather than the text. They rightly believe that such elements are more important than the text itself in formulating the meaning. Proponents of these reader-response critics are often called *subjective critics*, who include also, among others, Norman Holland and David Bleich.

Norman Holland specifies Freudian psychoanalysis as the basis for his theory where he observes that at birth we receive from our mothers a primary identity, which is further individualized and even transformed through society and its social and moral parameters and by which we see the world. Consequently, reading literature and interpreting texts becomes a matter of concretizing and working out our own fears, desires, and needs to help maintain our psychological health.<sup>35</sup> That is why, for Holland, the reading process is a transaction between the text and the reader. The text is important because it contains its own themes, its own unity, its own structure, own world and even

its own fantasy. And the reader transforms this text, structure, world, fantasy into his own private world, a place where one works out and maybe fulfils his hidden desires, ego, fantasies, which are negotiated and mediated by the text so that they will be socially acceptable. All this is subjective analysis and leads to subjective interpretations. Indeed, Holland's reader-response theory rightly reasserts that there is no such thing as a purely "literary" response; there is no such thing as a correct interpretation; there are as many valid interpretaas there are readers, for the act of interpretation is a subjective experience and is deeply imbricated with our own social and historical overtures.

In the same way, David Bleich, the founder of subjective criticism, agrees with Holland's psychological paradigm of interpretation and asserts that the text is less valuable than the reader. For Bleich the starting point for interpretation, is the reader's responses to a text, not the text itself: these responses do not constitute the text's meaning, for meaning cannot be found within a text or within responses to the text. Rather, a text's meaning must be *developed* out of the reader's responses, working in conjunction with other readers' responses and with past literary and life experiences; meaning is *developed* when the reader works in cooperation with other readers to achieve the text's collective meaning. Interpretation then involves the collective work of all types of readers: each reader is able to articuhis or her individual responses within a group about the text, and then can the group, working together, negotiate the meaning. Such "communally motivated negotiations" ultimately determine the text's meanings.<sup>36</sup> Bleich explains this point that a reader may respond to something in the text in a bizarre, private and personal way. But these private responses will be changed and pruned away by members of the reader's social group. The group will finally decide what is acceptable in this interpretation and what is not. This process of filtering and negotiating meanings with other readers, with other social groups, with other texts, or with society as a whole, leads to how meanings are actually developed from and about these texts, a point which totally agrees with what Fish and other critics have argued about the social dimension of interpreting texts.

Finally, one may conclude that all these reader-response critics believe in the reader and in his or her vital position within the text although they may vary in their own practice and different methodologies with regard to textual analysis. All show that a work gives a read a task to fulfill in his own "interpretive community" –a task how to actively "realize" a text, as Susan Suleiman again emphasized about the active reading of texts:

The act of reading is defined as essentially a sense-making activity, consisting of the complementary activities of selection and organization, anticipation and retrospection, the formulation and modification

of expectations in the course of the reading process. Although every reader performs these activities, exactly how they are performed varies from reader to reader and even within a single reader at different times; these variations account for different realizations of a given text.<sup>37</sup>

This echoes to a great extent what Roland Barthes was doing in his literary criticism and also what Jacques Derrida has pioneered in his most radical deconstructive readings of texts. As we have seen earlier, Barthes's most influential notion in this respect is "the death of the author". For Barthes the death of the author begins with the act of narration: "At the point when he begins to write, the author dies. His own particular voice loses its origin, becoming many voices as the readers become the creators of the text."<sup>38</sup> This reader-oriented argument is valid through a random examination of many postmodernist texts (for instance novels by Samuel Beckett, John Barth and John Fowles are good examples of this) where the authorial position is challenged by constructing a text where a center, a fixed origin, is not to be found either in the person of the writer or in the ironic circularity of language which he employs. For Barthes, the author in practice can only construct a text by assembling its textual fragments: "the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them."<sup>39</sup> The author becomes a "scriptor," who "is born simultaneously with the text."<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Michel Foucault argues that writing "is not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods" that is owned by the author; it is "essentially an act" of assembling different discourses and connecting various meanings.<sup>41</sup> In other words, the authority of the text is illusory and the reader is the one who decides these meanings. Ultimately, the death of the author means the termination of the author's presence in his text and the total freedom of the reader: "Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing."<sup>42</sup>

In postmodernist novels like *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) and *Daniel Martin* (1977) by Fowles and *Malone Dies* or *The Unnamable* (1959) by Beckett, for instance, the author absents himself as author from the very beginning of the work, and this absence serves to question the modern reader's preconceived notions about the validity of the author's is function. This shifting from established writing norms is partly responsible for the paradox found in them: the writer/reader who exists simultaneously with the text as Barthes says above, and within the text as Derrida maintains elsewhere: "For to write is to draw back from one's writing [...] lose one's hold on it, to let it make its way

alone and unarmed."<sup>43</sup> The designation of the writer under the term "author" automatically constitutes a persona and a creator/center, which misguides the reader's perception of that function. The absence of authorial presence, however, forces the reader to concentrate on the act of writing *per se*. The author (as creator), for Derrida, has never really existed at all, s/he is merely "a central presence which has never been itself."<sup>44</sup> The writer, on the other hand, is as concerned with the process of reading and the implied author as he is with the *écriture*. Again Foucault, supporting the modern tendency to decenter the work from the author/ creator concept, describes the act of writing as an ongoing activity, a kind of game in which the signs themselves (the *écriture*) play with language.<sup>45</sup> The author is familiar with literary tradition, with the inevitable reality of literary intertextuality, and s/he is therefore conscious of the fact that s/he is a *bricoleur*. And a "bricoleur" for Derrida "is someone who uses 'the means at hand,' that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used [...] one [...] adapt[s] them, not hesitating to change them."<sup>46</sup>

Such a position for the reader was developed by Derrida in all of his writings. To underscore the role and power of the reader, Derrida explains the nature of structure as a process of giving the work a centre, what he calls "a point of presence, a fixed origin."<sup>47</sup> Indeed for Derrida such a postmodernist text "has its center elsewhere"<sup>48</sup> because it is not centered in the traditional author function. As reader, one becomes the author and the center of the text, and one is reading/writing not the author's but one's own version. This de-authorization or decentering which occurs in many modernist or postmodernist texts does not "limit what we might call the play of the structure,"<sup>49</sup> its effect, in fact, is just the opposite. These myriad possibilities of textual play, then, may be what cause the mystification of the readers, because they shake perception by violating internalized orthodox reading patterns. For example, each of the texts by Beckett or Fowles mentioned above is a constant play of contradictions which negate every statement that it enunciates. Fowles's texts, for instance, exploit ironic techniques in such a unique manner that they exhibit him as a master ironist and deconstructionist capable of producing a carefully structured series of confusions to sustain the richly ironic vein that underlies his fiction. The circularity of language, also in Beckett's novels, is central to an understanding of his fiction. In such texts the reader is continually forced to turn back the pages in search of meanings, since the text is in a constant state of erasure. *Daniel Martin*, for instance, deconstructs its pronouncements, time and again, weaving one perplexity upon another until it becomes increasingly difficult to decipher. Indeed Fowles's textual discourses

must be viewed as open, circular and unending; they are non-authoritative and non-prescriptive and therefore preclude the possibility of being read in a linear/traditional way. Irony and parody are employed by Fowles to imply that the reader's experience is highly individual and important, needs to be recognized as unique and that, as such, it must be allowed to engender its own codes.

The ultimate message of reader-response criticism is that, because texts spring from individual contexts and are read by different individuals, the signs of discourse will always have a multiplicity of meanings, and that readers must realize that such discourse must be read unburdened by preconceived notions of authorial intention, must be free to read it as it comes. Indeed, the last two decades of the twentieth century did indeed show vital shifts in critical theory and practice as a symptom of transformations through which we have passed as readers and critics of literature. Close textual scrutiny is still the order of the day even with the latest developments in post-colonial and cultural theory where the need for reader-response criticism is still persistent concerning the huge racial and cultural diversions found in literature today and the reactions to it. We, the readers of today, are all the creatures of our tastes, our convictions, our habits, our education, our commitments, our tolerances and intolerances, and our pasts and presents, and therefore our responses are certainly diverse. as we have seen throughout this essay, the term *reader-response criticism* allows, for so much divergence in theory and practice, and many twentieth-century schools of criticism such as deconstruction, feminism, Marxism, queer theory, performance theory, political theory, psychoanalytic criticism, post-colonial theory and cultural and New Historicism declare their memin this broad classification. Critics who belong to these schools exhibit in their own diverse and ideological ways that they are also reader-response theorists and they develop their own unique methods of practical criticism. Such a comprehensive umbrella of reception theory and reader-response criticism proves its validity, vitality and ensures its long life for some years to come, or at least during the age of poststructuralism.

## Notes

- 1 - Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980; rpt. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Professor Fish gave us here in this eleventh reprinting of his book, which some readers find polarizing, a very valid argument about the reader-response theory, suggesting that readers use the value systems developed within their cultural milieus not to determine a text's meaning but to create it through their own readings. Generally, as I shall show in this paper, Fish considers how interpretation relates to cultural influence. He claims that any actual attempt to determine what exactly the

author intended will result in nothing more than an interpretation based upon the interpretive community of the reader making the interpretation. Fish believes that the author's intention is an epistemological point about what texts mean, whereas the reader's interpretation is a sociological one about how claims about those meanings are produced. Indeed Fish was particularly "drawn to works which do not allow a reader the security of his normal patterns of thought and belief." p. 51. See in particular pages 21-65, 174-180, 303-320, 338-360.

- 2 - See how similar points are argued by Theodore Roszak in his *The Cult of Information: The Folklore of Computers and the True Art of Thinking* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1986).
- 3 - Susan Suleiman, "Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism," in Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 17.
- 4 - Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). See also her Halicize, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1937).
- 5 - Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 55.
- 6 - For further details see Barry Smith and David Smith, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney, eds., *The Phenomenology Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960); Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964); Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 Vols. (New York: Routledge, 2001); Hubert Dreyfus, ed., *Husserl: Intentionality and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982); and Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967).
- 7 - Eagleton, p. 60.
- 8 - Eagleton, pp. 64-5. See also Charles Guignon, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- 9 - See Roy Howard, *Three Faces of Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1960), 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 132-53.
- 10 - Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 115. See also Jürgen Habermas, "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence," in *Recent Sociology*, ed., H. P. Dreitzel (New York: Macmillan, 1970).
- 11 - See how Stanley Fish argued this and similar points in Part Two of his book, *Is There a Text in This Class?* particularly chapter 15: "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable," pp. 338-355.
- 12 - Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, trans. George Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 30.
- 13 - *Ibid.*, p. 29; see also William Ray, *Literary Meaning: From Phenomenology to Deconstruction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 28; see also Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 139-41.
- 14 - Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, p. 265.
- 15 - *Ibid.* p. 251.
- 16 - Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge &

Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 165-79. See also his, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Indeed, the 'implied reader' is a term developed before by Wayne C. Booth in his influential book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

- 17 - Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art*, p. 249. See also how I argued this elsewhere, Mahmoud Salami, *John Fowles's Fiction and the Poetics of Postmodernism* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992), pp. 29-33.
- 18 - Iser, *The Act of Reading*, p. 173.
- 19 - Ibid., p. 10.
- 20 - Ibid., p. 143.
- 21 - Ibid., p. 167.
- 22 - Ibid. p. 195.
- 23 - Ibid., p. 197.
- 24 - See Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1982); also his, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
- 25 - Eagleton, pp. 78-79.
- 26 - Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 7; see also his *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost, Second Edition, With a New Preface by the Author* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- 27 - Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* p. 158.
- 28 - Ibid., p. 32.
- 29 - Ibid., p. 44.
- 30 - Ibid., p. 11.
- 31 - Ibid., p. 14.
- 32 - This is so close to what Fredric Jameson has argued in his excellent book, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981).
- 33 - See how Umberto Eco, in his book *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), and in his novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980), illustrates how the reader engages in constructing meanings when reading texts. Like Roland Barthes and others in the field of semiotics Eco draws upon Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and Claude Levi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology*. Eco recognizes that meaning is not merely governed by structure, but also interactively constructed by the reader/interpreter, who often inserts or fills-in missing meaning to construct a coherent picture. See also Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text*.
- 34 - See Jane P. Tompkins, ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Graham McGregor and R. S. White, eds., *Reception and Response: Hearer Creativity and the Analysis of Spoken and Written Texts* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 35 - Norman Holland, *5 Readers Reading* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); see also his *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); and his

*Holland's Guide to Psychoanalytic Psychology and Literature-and-Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

- 36 - David Bleich, *Subjective Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); see also his *The Double Perspective: Language, Literacy and Social Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 37 - Susan Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text*, pp. 22-23.
- 38 - Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 142.
- 39 - Ibid., p. 146.
- 40 - Ibid., p. 145.
- 41 - Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 108.
- 42 - Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," p. 147.
- 43 - Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), p. 70.
- 44 - Ibid., p. 280.
- 45 - Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 104-5.
- 46 - Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 285.
- 47 - Ibid., p. 278.
- 48 - Ibid., p. 279.
- 49 - Ibid.

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