Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to presenta comprehensive view of the role played by the reader in the reading process, especially when reading literary texts, or what is labeled as reader-response criticism. It starts with a diachronic study tracing the instances of attention paid to the reader across the history of literary criticism and whatever fields it became attached to during its history of evolution. After that, the thesis displays the diverse models encompassed under the umbrella of what is modernly labeled reader-oriented theories. These models are: the inter-subjective model, the social model, and the psychological model (or the subjective model). The diversity of outlooks which these models exhibit is due to the fact thateach model comes from a different disciplinary background.The next part of the thesis is an applicationof these models to selected parts fromDaniel Pollock's novel *Precipice* (1997). The application is carried out from the perspectives of real readers through studying 23 different responses to the same text. The responses are acquired through a questionnaire which is prepared by the researcher. This application also aims at assessing the models' theoretical propositions, and providing a plateau on which a synthesis between their conflicting outlooks can be built. The lastpart of the thesis includes the proposition of the attempted synthesized model which provides the desired comprehensive view, and in the end comes the conclusion that such a synthesis is possible on two bases, the common grounds provided by the theoretical propositions of the three models, and the real-readers' justification of such propositions. The main core of this synthesis is a five-leveled hierarchy of responses which succeeds in integrating the validated propositions of each model into a responses matrix.

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Preface

Reader-response criticism is not based on a single theory, rather it comprises several theories ormodels – as Steven Mailloux calls them (*Interpretive Conventions*1982) – all of which focus on the role of the reader as an agent who both imports and imparts meaning to any given text. However, the attention paid to the reader is not confined within these modern models, nor did it start with their debut on the scene of literary criticism. Therefore, this thesis does not start its study of the readers' responses from the sixties when established reader-response theorists ventured onto the literary scene. Rather, it starts with some insightful declarations about the reader made by critics, rhetoricians, philosophers, … etc., throughout history all the way toinclude what presently came to be known as reader-oriented criticism.

After covering the various, and often conflicting, modern models, an application of these models' propositions to selected parts from Daniel Pollock's novel *Precipice* (1997) is carried out. This application is carried out from the perspectives of real readers by qualitatively analyzing the responses of 23 readers to one text. This response is secured through a simple questionnaire that was devised by the researcher and given to the participants in order to measure their responses to the given extracts from the novel. This questionnaire is conducted with the sole purpose of ensuring that all required aspects of response are covered by all participants especially those that never received any sort of literary criticism training. The application thus also serves the purpose of testing the validity of the main principles proposed by each of the models under discussion. Finally, there is an attempt to see if it is possible to reach a common ground or a synthesis between these conflicting models. The results of this experiment will act as the primary

advocates for the processing of the desired synthesizing model. This model being synthesized based on the results of the questionnaire, entails that it is assessed via the same mechanism used to evaluate the other models.

The thesis is made up of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and two appendices. The introductory chapter provides an overview of the historical roots of the theory ending with an account of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory. It provides a concise chronological account spanning across the diachronic axis of literary criticism history, displaying some of the most influential propositions that hailed the reader as a member of the reading experience.

Chapter one is divided into three major sections. This chapter illustrates the different models which constitute modern reader-response criticism. The chapter discusses each model through primary sources of information. The first model covered in this chapter is the inter-subjective model, which is the natural offspring of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological theory as well as Rosenblatt's transactional theory. It is thus a model with a philosophical orientation. This model is advocated primarily through the works of Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. The second model is the social model, whose main promoters include Jonathan Culler and the later works of Stanley Fish. This model has a sociological orientation with traces of a structuralist influence. The last model discussed in this chapter is the psychological model which is sometimes referred to as the subjective model, and which displays ample Freudian influence. This model is advocated mainly by David Bleich and Norman Holland and has a psychological/psychoanalytic orientation.

Chapter twoperforms the double role of a critical application and an assessment process of the proposed models. It provides an application of the models'propositions to the selected parts of Pollock's novelfrom the perspective of real readers through a questionnaire which covers –in a mainly indirect fashion – all the aspects that each model proposes. In chapter three, the researcher presents the results of the experiment carried out in chapter two, then she draws on these results to create a full image of the three models discussed in the thesis as a whole. The chapter tries to provide a synthesis between these three conflicting models.

After that comes the conclusion,which is as an evaluation of all the questions raised in the thesis, and a summary of the arguments that finally lead to concluding that there is, indeed, a possibility of reaching a synthesizing model. The thesis ends with two appendices, the first of which provides a copy of the questionnaire used during the application/evaluation phase, and the second provides the tables which present the data gathered by the questionnaire.