

## Chapter One

### Modern Reader-Response Models

This chapter discusses the different models of modern reader-response theory which are: the inter-subjective model, the social model, and the psychological/subjective model. Each model is preceded by an introductory paragraph that specifies the early propositions that influenced it, its main theorists, and its primary focus.

#### I. The Inter-subjective Model

The inter-subjective model is the offspring of Rosenblatt's transactional theory and Husserl's Phenomenology. However, there are also traces of Macrobius' integration of the active roles of authorial intention and textual guidance into the reader's interpretative processes, as well as St. Augustine, Giraldi, and Johnson's recognition of the influence of context on the reader's interpretation. The model's propositions are primarily advocated by Jauss and Iser, and it is based on the dialogic relationship between the text and the reader. The idea that the text provides textual instructions which guide the reader through her/his processing of the text is the focal point of this model. ♦

#### Hans Robert Jauss

Jauss is the founder of the reception theory. The main emphasis in his work *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) is on the element of response. He proposes that the study of any literary work should be a study of the readers' responses to that work, and the study of literary history should be a study of the history of the readers' responses to literary works. These studies should be carried out diachronically and synchronically.

Diachronically, a study of the subsequent responses of the readers to the literary work since its production till the date of the study and the changes that trigger any variations in these responses as well as the changes that the literary work itself triggers should be carried out. Synchronically, a cross section from the history of the literary work should be dissected and studied in comparison to other texts and conventions from the same era the text belongs to (36).

There is an important implication here as well as an important outcome. The implication is the contextualization of the reader's literary experience. Jauss dismisses the claims that the study of the readers' responses will inevitably lead to "an arbitrary series of merely subjective impressions" (22), and insists that the reader's response does not emerge out of nowhere and thus cannot be predicted or controlled; rather, it is framed by what he calls the reader's "horizon of expectations". This term is of vital importance to Jauss' work. It mainly refers to the framework of expectations and assumptions with which the reader comes to the literary work, in addition to those the work "evokes" within this reader. These expectations and assumptions are triggered via the text itself, the social norms, and the historical situation of the reading experience(22). Other factors that participate in shaping this horizon of expectations include the genre to which the work belongs and the reader's experience from earlier texts, i.e. horizon of experience (20-24).

This brings us to the important out come;in the opposite direction, the reader's response to literature influences back the subjective/social context of this reader. Jauss emphasizes the special role that literature plays in the life of its reader on the personal as well as on the social level.It is not merely a mirror or a passive representative medium; it is a "formative force" that can cause social changes on a further level of response (45). In

order to understand this level of response, we have to examine Jauss' view of the literary experience.

As mentioned earlier, the reader comes to the literary work out of a context which shapes part of this reader's horizon of expectations. In addition to that, the text itself plays an essential role in the processing of the literary experience. It "predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions" (23). These signals and allusions trigger certain stimuli in the reader's contextual situation as well as her/his horizon of experience from earlier works and the general rules of the genre. Therefore, "it awakens memories of that which was already read, [and] brings the reader to specific emotional attitude" (23). Accordingly, the reader forms her/his own horizon of expectations. The ensuing mechanism of progress is even more based on textual guidance. In the beginning, the text "arouses expectations for the 'middle and end' which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled" (23). The text, in other words, manages the reader's progress by manipulating her/his expectations.

When the text refutes the expectations of its reader or challenges the established horizons of expectations, an "aesthetic distance" is created between the work and its reader's horizon of expectations. The reader may either reject the work or accept it as a form of "horizontal change"(25). This happens when the text helps modify an accepted or traditional horizon of expectations and this modification becomes part of the reader's/the society's established norms for later readings. Literature then:

is not absorbed into the function of a *representational* art. If one looks at the moments in history when literary works toppled the taboos of the ruling morals or offered the reader new solution for moral casuistry of his lived praxis, which thereafter could be sanctioned by the consensus of all readers in the society, then a still-little-studied area of research opens itself up to the literary historian. (45)

Jauss' view of the role of literature and of the literary experience at large thus is that it can bring change and metacognitive awareness to the established individual/social frameworks. This is achieved through the culmination of the individual metacognitive response into a resisting or a collective one. This view highlights two important features that Jauss stresses: the "dialogic" nature of the literary experience, and the historical flexibility of this act of communication between the work and its reader. He claims that:

A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence ... This dialogical character of the literary work also establishes why ... understanding can exist only in perpetual confrontation with the text, and cannot be allowed to be reduced to a knowledge of facts. (21)

The text then is not a monument that has an everlasting face for display; it is a dialogue between the reader and the work at hand. This dialogue entails personal as well as social origins, outcomes, and effects. This, naturally, entails that any diversifications

within the contextual origin of the dialogue, essentially result in variations in the dialogic outcomes and effects. Despite this confirmed relativity of responses, what Jauss promotes is inter-subjectivity, not utter subjectivity; since, as discussed earlier, he confines the reader's horizon of expectations within a contextual framework. This means that the horizon of expectations can be objectified, and in collaboration with textual guidance, this horizon of expectations informs the reader's proceeding on a dialogic, inter-subjective base. This inter-subjective paradigm is also proposed by another figure. This is Iser, whose ideas will be examined now.

### **Wolfgang Iser**

Iser is another inter-subjective theorist. He published many books the most significant ones for our purpose are *The Implied Reader* (1974) and *The Act of Reading* (1978), from which a comprehensive view of his propositions can be drawn. Iser suggests that the literary work has two poles the "artistic pole" and the "esthetic pole". The first is the text created by the author, while the second is the realization achieved by the reader. The literary work itself, though, is not to be identified with either; it "must lie halfway between the two" (*Implied Reader* 274; *Act of Reading* 21). The work achieved via the convergence of both poles is what Iser calls the "virtual dimension" of the text.

This virtual dimension is a "configurative meaning" that results from the dynamic interaction between the text and the reader's subjective disposition "though this in turn is acted upon by different patterns of the text" (*Implied* 275). This textual guidance is achieved via the structure of the literary text itself. Each structure within a literary text has two aspects to it, the "verbal aspect", which "guides the [reader's] reaction and

prevents it from being arbitrary”, and the “affective aspect”, which is “the fulfillment of that which has been pre-structured by the language of the text”;i.e. the reader’s textually guided response (*Act 21*). This is the core of what he calls the “implied reader”. The reading experience, according to this proposition, as well as the literary work as an end product of it then, are not instant facts; rather, they are “events” that are both temporal and inter-subjective.

This reading experience works according to a certain mechanism. While writing, the writer will not provide her/his reader with the story in its entirety. What happens is that the author leaves out what Iser refers to as “gaps” in her/his narrative. These gaps are left for the reader to work out (*Implied 275*). Therefore,they trigger the creative force within the reader. What Iser stresses here and in many other instances is the argument that “the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy” (*Implied 276*). This is one of the features of the inter-subjective model as it prevents the reader’s response from being totally subjective.

The first mechanismby which the reader fills these gaps is based on the effects of the “intentional sentence correlatives”. This includes studying the ways in which sequences of sentences act upon one another; a feature which is of special importance when studying literary works as sentences within such works do not refer to any objective realities outside themselves (*Implied 276*). Sentences in literary works are considered to be component parts of a particular world evoked by the text, and they perform this task by “[making] statements, claims, or observations, or [conveying] information” (*Implied 277*). Moreover, these intentional sentence correlatives reveal subtle connections which offer disclosures with a lesser degree of clarity than statements, claims, etc. The

importance of these subtle connections is that they mark the points when the reader “climb[s] aboard” the text and starts to perform her/his active/creative role (*Implied*277).

In addition to that, a sentence within a literary text, also as a result of not referring to an objective reality outside itself, always “aims at something beyond what it actually says” (*Implied* 277). Among the aspects of this special quality is the capacity of such sentences to always act as “indicat[ors] of something that is to come”( *Implied* 277).The outcome of this feature, as well as the previous ones, is the creation, within the reader, of “expectations” and “anticipations” about what is going to happen later in the text. As reading proceeds, these expectations may be fulfilled, modified, or refuted altogether (*Implied* 278).

These expectations, while being continually modified or rejected, not only adjust the reader’s expectations of what is to come, but also trigger a process of retrospective revision of what has already been read. Such maneuvering between the past, the present, and the future has three implications. First, it further proves the dynamic nature of the reading process. Second, it further proves that this process is neither linear nor momentary; it is a temporal “event” in which the author, the text, and the reader co-work to achieve a literary work. Third, it exposes the potential multiplicity of connections between these intentional sentence correlatives as well as between what they reveal, the expectations based on them, and the subsequent destiny of such expectations.

Amidst all these implications, the reader attemptsto reacha configurative meaning and a consistent interpretation of the text. In order to achieve that end, the reader endeavors to recreate the particular world evoked by the text and the original experience presented by

the author. The factor that helps trigger this pursuit in the reader is the human tendency to project unity and consistency upon their experiences in order to find meanings in them. This search for unity is the driving force behind the whole reading event. However, as these gaps are worked out by the reader, even if the whole process proceeds under the guidance of the text, it remains a fact that, “one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust [its] full potential” (*Implied* 280). The range of configurative meanings that can be generated through working out the gaps on the bases of the givens is a proof of the polysemantic nature of literary works.

The struggle that naturally ensues between the polysemantic nature of the text and the reader’s endeavor at finding unity and consistency is resolved via the “selective” mechanism (*Implied* 280). As the reader starts out by forming expectations and attempting to create a consistent meaning, other possibilities that defy this consistency offer themselves, these are referred to as alien associations. The reader often excludes these associations and selects only the ones that contribute to her/his unified, consistent interpretation. Paradoxically, by making these selective decisions, the reader consciously or unconsciously acknowledges the “inexhaustibility of the text” (*Implied* 285-286).

One more mechanism that the reader uses while trying to create a configurative meaning or a consistent interpretation, is grouping. This is a mechanism by which the reader attempts to group together all the selected aspects that contribute to the consistency sought after in order to form a unified bigger picture that informs her/his interpretation of the text. This mechanism also allows the grouped aspects to interact, leading the reader to a certain consistency which is, in turn, projected back onto the text by this reader (*Implied* 284).

Iser accommodates two structural components into his propositions, the function of which is to further govern the reader's processing of the unified configurative meaning. The first is the context; which is "a repertoire of familiar literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with allusions to familiar social and historical context" (*Implied* 291). The second is the reader's strategies and techniques used to set the familiar against the unfamiliar (*Implied* 288). It is true that Iser locates these structural components within the text, their function, however, is carried out by the reader. The consequent result is the creation of a tension between the reader's formed expectations which are based on her/his familiar repertoire and the subsequent "negation" of these expectations. This, accordingly, means the negation of what is familiar to the reader, who "is bound to open himself up to the workings of the text and so leave behind his own preconceptions" (*Implied* 291).

What shapes the reader's experience of the text then is the extent to which the reader is ready to suspend the familiar context or repertoire that shapes her/his personality and accept the unfamiliar or alien repertoires offered by the text. This is usually accomplished when the reader consciously or unconsciously tries to recreate the original authorial experience, something that Iser claims is wrongly referred to as identification (*Implied* 291-292). The subsequent tension between the structural component that requires a certain reaction on the part of the reader, and the reader's procession of such demands by means of negating the familiar, and familiarizing the defamiliarized also entails a subjective degree of metacognition. This metacognition of the reader's personal familiar repertoire and traditional expectations highlights the dialogism of the reading experience.

This dialogism suggested by the inter-subjective model theorists brings forth a summary of the core of this model, and of their arguments against both subjectivism and objectivism. The emphasis throughout their arguments is that despite the claim that the reader does contribute subjectively to the experience, this is always done within the limits of the text. Moreover, the inter-subjective theorists state that the very nature of meaning when debating a literary text declines any claims of uncontrolled subjectivity. Meaning, as argued earlier, is a temporal, dynamic event. Meaning thus triggers the affective aspects of the reader's response, which are in turn controlled by the verbal aspects of this fictional structure. In addition to that, this structure is contextualized which again entails an inter-subjective response. This last element, contextualization, takes a different form in the propositions of the following model; the social one.

## **II. The Social Model**

The social model is mainly proposed in the later works of Fish and in the works of Culler. The model primarily stresses, to varying degrees, the notion that one, more, or all of the constituents of the reading experience is/are socially/conventionally/culturally/institutionally constructed entities. In other words, there is some sort of a collective context that informs the reader's interpretive strategies, as well as the meaning made out of the text by her/him. There are traces of Hume's propositions concerning competence and taste, both individual and collective, Bacon's idols of the theater, as well as Johnson and Rosenblatt's notions of contextualization in the propositions of this model.

### **Stanley Fish**

Fish's work can be divided into several phases based on his propositions and subsequent revisions of them. His early works settle comfortably within the inter-subjective model while his later works fit more within the territory of the social one. His most important publication during the earlier phase is the extensive study of Milton's *Paradise Lost; Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (1967). In this study, Fish applies most of the propositions of the inter-subjective model to the reading experience of *Paradise Lost*. In 1980, he published a collection of essays titled *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* which demonstrates his gradual development from the earlier model proposed in *Surprised by Sin* to the later model which manifests itself in the essay bearing the same title as the later book.

In one of the essays in this later book, "Interpreting the *Variorum*", both the text and the reader "fall together". The essay is divided into three parts; the first part is mainly an emphasis on his criticism of the formalist notion that meaning is imbedded in a self-sufficient text, and that it is a spatial instant incident. He criticizes the formalists' disregard of the temporal dimension of the reading experience which blinds them to what really happens during this experience. That moment, for instance, when the reader's expectations are doubted or reversed "disappear[s], either because it has been flattened out and made into an (insoluble) crux or because it has been eliminated in the course of a procedure that is incapable of finding value in temporal phenomena" (*Interpretive Communities* 147).

The importance of this discussion for our purpose resides in the second part in which Fish explains his consequent discovery; that moment, which disappears as a result of formalist strategies, is "made" to appear by his own interpretive strategy. He announces

that “the text as an entity independent of interpretation and (ideally) responsible for its career drops out and is replaced by the texts that emerge as the consequence of our interpretive activities” (13). In other words, whatever features accounted for in a literary text, even the formalist features themselves, are the products of the reader’s interpretive strategies.

The importance of what Fish writes here is that it amounts to an announcement of the disappearance of the text. The text, including its constituents, is a construction of the very activities that were thought to be produced by it. The relationship between the reader’s interpretation and the text is thus reversed; texts do not trigger interpretations, they are themselves the products of interpretive strategies. Moreover, the features, whether formal or otherwise, that supposedly either trigger actions on behalf of the reader, or receive certain kind of attention as the bearers of interpretations, are products of these interpretive strategies. The very constitution, status, function, and implications of these features are products, outcomes, or dictations of the interpretive strategy at work.

Fish claims that one would imagine that the direct outcome at this moment is a sound defense on behalf of the reader as the constructor and executive agent of this very experience, the agent whose interpretive strategies “make” the text. The third part, however, dislodges the reader as well. These strategies, announces Fish, are not the reader’s, they “proceed not from him but from the interpretive community of which he is a member” (14). Fish confesses that both the model which causes the suppression of what is happening during the reading experience and his own model which accounts for what is happening during this experience are both just two more interpretations rooted in the

shared interpretive community each interpretation belongs to. These interpretive communities:

are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round. (171)

The very fact that these interpretive strategies are for writing texts entails the subsequent assumption that these strategies are prior to the texts and to the meanings literary experiences entail in the reader. Also, the reading process is itself a writing process, the reader writes the text according to the interpretive strategies of the interpretive community she/he belongs to. More importantly, what this definition proposes not only dislodges readers and texts, but also the notion of authorial intentions and the guiding effect these intentions have on the reader's response.

His theory of interpretive communities, claims Fish, has the power to account for two persistent dilemmas. The first dilemma is the explanation behind the fact that different readers may agree or come up with similar interpretations, or that there may be a failure to achieve such an agreement at other times. The second is the fact that the same reader may come up with different interpretations. Earlier, Fish distinguished between two levels of experiencing a text. The first, which is the primary or the basic level, is almost equivalent to perception itself. This is the actual experience of the text and one which is uniform. The second, which is the reaction level, can either be emotional; whether the

reader likes or dislikes the experience, or it can be intellectual; what the reader makes out of this experience. Both reactions are personal, and retrospective, thus they are subjective and idiosyncratic and should be disposed of in order to actualize the meaning of the text (5). Fish later withdrew this proposition. However, the data analysis in the following chapter proves that most of it is justified by real readers as a representative of two possible levels of response (see below p. 69).

During the later stage of his theoretical development, Fish simply explains that readers who are members of the same interpretive community come up with similar interpretations as they apply the same strategies. Members of different communities apply different strategies and thus come up with different interpretations. This is the answer to the first question. Regarding the second question, Fish maintains that these interpretive communities and the strategies that they apply are neither universal nor fixed, they are subject to change. Furthermore, members of any interpretive community can unsubscribe to it at any given moment and join another. In both cases their interpretations will change. Fish confesses that there is no mechanism by which members of the same interpretive community can recognize one another. “The only ‘proof’ of membership is fellowship, the nod of recognition from someone in the same community” (173). This is the criterion of validation according to his model: the acceptability of the proposed interpretations by others who share the same institution or community.

In the essay “Is There A Text in This Class?” Fish criticizes his own phrase “those who share interpretive strategies” as it implies an independence or a distance between the reader and the interpretive community of which she/he is a member. However, since “the thoughts an individual can think and the mental operations he can perform have their

source in some or other interpretive community”, the reader herself/himself is also a product of the same interpretive community (14). This argument is a defense aimed against the criticism that Fish was subjected to as a proponent of indeterminacy of meaning. Fish argues that this fear would be legitimate only if the indeterminacy is the result of the idiosyncratic and personal disposition of the reader. However, Fish insists that any utterance is always embedded within a context which is socially and institutionally conventional. Therefore, each producer of an utterance talks from the territory of an institution which in turn constrains the implications to be considered “normative” in that specific context. The constraint then is not imposed by inherent properties of language, or personal dispositions of the reader, but by the context of the utterance. If the reader happens to occupy the same institution of the producer, or if it shapes part of her/his repertoire, then the reader is supposed to understand the utterance.

Moreover, the terms and categories used by a certain institutional community are themselves conventional constructions, neither self-inherent nor self-sufficient entities (326). He writes, commenting on the progress of some of his students analyzing a list of names that was presented to them in the form of a poem: “[i]t was almost as if they were following a recipe ... for by directing readers as to what to look for in a poem, [it] instructs them in ways of looking that will produce what they expect to see” (327). Accordingly, the act of recognizing any piece of language as a specific literary genre, and the interpretive strategies applied to this literary genre are both conventionally bound.

Fish announces that his model is thus at once objective and subjective. It is objective as the interpretive communities and the institutional contexts of the utterances are not

idiosyncratic or personal but conventional. It is also subjective because no institution enjoys a universal recognition so as to stand for a once and for all determinate objective meaning. This same argument also finds its way to the works of the other social model theorist; Culler.

### **Jonathan Culler**

The other contributor to the social model of reader-response theory is Culler. In his book, *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), Culler insists that social conventions contextualize and shape the readers' experiences of literary texts. He maintains that a person who is given a poem while she/he has no repertoire of the conventions that constitute a poem, or about the conventional strategies of how fiction is read may only be able to infer the meanings of the linguistic constituents. However, he would fail to recognize it as literature (132).

According to Culler, the failure to carry out such transition is due to the lack of "literary competence"; which he defines as "a set of conventions for reading literary texts" (137). This competence is essential since there is a distance between the language of the poem and the critical interpretation of that poem. If the questions posed are about the mechanisms adopted by the reader to reach an interpretation or a meaning out of the literary language, the result would be a poetics of the literary experience (134). For instance, he maintains that there are certain conventions that constitute the experience of reading a poem. Such conventions can be regarded as the mechanisms by which the reader's interpretation is achieved. Naturally then, interpretations cannot be subjective since "they are public and can be discussed and justified with respect to the conventions

of reading poetry – or ... of *making, sense*” (134; emphasis in original). Furthermore, these conventions of reading are not fixed and universal; rather, they are subject to evolution and modification (143). Accounting for this publically based poetics of conventions is namely what he calls for.

Moreover, since the poetics of conventions aims at making explicit what the reader implicitly does when reading, it triggers consciousness and self-awareness of the “nature of literature as an institution”(150). This awareness or metacognition of the existence of a variety of conventions and of their ability to change makes readers even more open to the most challenging and innovative texts. Those are texts that challenge being processed against the existing modes of understanding and that make any processing a conscious operation (150-151). On a higher level of response, this “refusal to comply with one’s expectations” leads the reader to question not only herself/himself, but also the social modes of understanding. When literature offers sequences and combinations that challenge the reader’s perceived modes of understanding by defamiliarizing and dislocating her/his appropriated language, it defies the limits she/he puts for herself/himself. The reader is thus forced to “an expansion of the self”. She/he also becomes aware that the interpretive models are but informants of one’s culture (151).

Lastly, Culler provides his criticism of the subjective model, and his view of the criterion for the acceptability of an interpretation. The initial stance in his argument against the subjective model is an acknowledgement that when it comes to literature there will be an experience or even an enjoyment on behalf of the reader without having to do with competence. He even acknowledges that a text can be enjoyed and appreciated even in cases of extreme misreadings and misunderstandings. However, to deny the fact that

there is a misreading excludes the ability to find out where one went wrong and the reasons behind such mistakes. Moreover, whereas it is true that a literary text can yield various meanings, to dismiss the notion of misreading essentially entails that there is no need for any discussions of/writing about literary works. In addition to that, the facts that the second poem to read is easier to go through than the first, and that the tenth novel to read facilitates the eleventh, mean that there is some sort of an acquired convention for reading (140).

Regarding his proposition about the criterion of judging a response or an interpretation, Culler proposes that there is but one criterion which is the readers' acceptance of what is proposed by a respondent. Any critic, when discussing or analyzing a literary work, offers a perspective that is supported by what the work itself offers and that she/he deems the readers able to identify with or at least find acceptable or plausible. Likewise, what the analyst proposes should be judged according to the way readers react to it. Readers will only accept those analyses in which they find echoes of their experiences of the text (144-146). This very criterion of judgment is also proposed in the last model to be discussed, the psychological model.

### III. The Psychological Model

This model is mainly preached through the works of Bleich, who is the formal instigator of subjective criticism, and Holland, who started out with a rather inter-subjective, psychoanalytically based model that is largely Freudian, only to modify it later and embrace subjectivism. This model preaches a subjective outlook of the reading experience; a subjectivity which entails the dismissal of such notions as misreadings and misunderstandings as mere symptoms. The propositions of this model are mainly based on Freudian epistemology and psychoanalysis. However, there are also traces of Horace's subjectivity, of Plotinus' notion of identification, of Bacon's idols, and of Coleridge's proposition about the willing suspension of disbelief.

#### David Bleich

Bleich is the pioneer of subjective criticism. His main propositions are included in his two books *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*(1975), and *Subjective Criticism*(1978). Bleich's arguments display his strong opposition to the idea of treating literature as a science, and insists that even those who preach this approach, if pressed, would confess "that they believe in critical pluralism; i.e., many interpretations of the same work may [be] obtain[ed] simultaneously"( *Readings and Feelings* 3; "The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation"). The adverse consequence of this scientific attitude is that it constructed the dangerous perception that a literary work is an objective entity, independent of both its reader and its writer (*Readings and Feelings*3). What he preaches in response is that since each reader is unique emotionally and intellectually, and due to the unique nature of literary texts as symbolic objects that

depend on their receiver for existence, the reading experience is essentially subjective (*Readings and Feelings* 3-5; “The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation”).

Bleich argues that among the aspects of this literary subjectivism is its link to the human tendency to ascribe value to any object that touches upon consciousness, even if this process is unconsciously done. Two points in the discussion of this evaluative process form important bases for his study of the reader’s response. The first point is that the evaluation offered is rearticulated “objectively” due to the human beings’ tendency to shift emphasis away from themselves. Applying this to literature, Bleich proposes that the reader’s interpretation or response is an essentially subjective evaluation that is masked by an objective mask. The second point is the natural yearning of human beings for the validation of their responses. Once more, applying this to literature reveals that the reason readers offer their objectively masked subjective responses in the first place is the inclination to have their dispositions accepted and validated by others (*Readings and Feelings* 9).

The reading experience, as Bleich proposes it, is divided into four phases. The first phase; “Thoughts and Feelings” explores “the nature of feelings ... and how to distinguish between a feeling and a thought” (11). He examines the two “basic components which contribute to any reader’s emotional response to the text – affect and association” (11). The affective responses are the raw emotions that are easily labeled under familiar terms such as love, anger, or indignation. The example he provides is that of a teacher who writes something provoking, or outrageous on the board like “men are smarter than women”. The sort of immediate response that she/he gets, indicates “... the instantaneous feeling evoked ... [This feeling] is not easily distinguished from the

respondent's intellectual opinion" (10); the two levels of response (emotional and intellectual) are intertwined, and these emotional reactions may develop to lengthy discussions, for instance, of social injustice and male chauvinism. They do not however, explain the personal roots of the expressed dispositions. This is where association comes in; associative analogies are necessary for that purpose. They reveal the subjective root of both the emotional as well as the intellectual response of the reader. (12).

Bleich takes this general argument and applies it to literature in the second phase, which he calls "Feelings About Literature" (20-21). Both the reader's emotional response to the work, and her/his interpretation or intellectual response to the same work thus stem from subjective dispositions that can only be revealed through free-association. The point is that the objectivity of the reader's interpretation or intellectual response is shattered. Moreover, the objective status of the text is overthrown. The mechanism by which this response is achieved requires the reader to engage in an act of *subjective* recreation of the symbolic object, the literary work at hand, resulting in an emotionally rooted intellectual act of evaluation. This process of recreation is divided into three phases: perception, affective response, and associative response. He studies these phases in actual responses and claims that not only do subjective dispositions cause such actions as omissions, insertions, exaggerations ... etc., by the readers; the very form of the written response is also affected. The most important point in his comments, however, is his dismissal of the notions of error or misreading. His argument is that they are parts of each individual's perceptive style (32).

He also stresses that all personal input is but "personal embellishments of something perceived in the poem and which most professional critics would agree is there"(32).

Ironically, Bleich resorts to the text as a criterion of judgment and even resorts to the most professional critics' consent to the presence of the roots of such misinterpretations in the text. These are two criteria for judgment that he repeatedly dismisses; he refuses to acknowledge that the text possesses any authority or any self-contained truths. He also refuses to accept critical accounts as anything other than other subjective responses. However, he uses the two very same mechanisms to prove the distorted interpretations some of his readers give.

A significant point reveals itself in his comments while examining the associative response of the recreation process. The pattern that is revealed in the response of Bleich's reader shows a gradual expansion of perspectives. The main theme of this gradually expanding pattern is this respondent's feeling that she is a victim (43-45). Later, it seems that the poem, by triggering that association in this reader's mind, allows her to realize that may be it was her own aggression that led to her victimization (44). The conclusion of this point is that it reflects the ability of the reader's response to literature to allow her/him to take a metacognitive stance and to reflect on her/his subjective dispositions and maybe even take a resisting attitude toward such dispositions.

Building on these propositions, Bleich moves on to the third phase, "Deciding on Literary Importance". He maintains that despite the fact that "critical judgments are implicit in emotional reactions", it is also true that these judgments are made consciously. Therefore, any attempts to separate these two types of literary responses are "false and artificial". The basic aim then is not to separate the two reactions, but to show that they are both parts of a more general responsive process, one which starts out with complete subjectivity then is transformed into judgments that appear to be objective (49). Bleich

attempts to prove this single and more general pattern of response by showing the causal relationship between the critical judgment and its earlier subjective roots in actual responses. He examines some responses, including his own, to D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse". What Bleich notices is that readers adopt the selective mechanism while responding to literary works. For instance, he only responds to the elements in the text that prove of subjective relevance to him, and he responds to each of these elements independently either with pleasure or with anxiety depending on the subjective association/psychological influence of each (57-59).

In addition to that, he finds that the reader's intellectual response sometimes includes elements that are alien to her/his original emotional response. For example, he notices that the tragic ending of the short story is always overlooked in his emotional response. However, when he comes to offer an intellectual interpretation, he finds that it is present. The justification he provides is that it is important for him to ignore this ending which only provides him with anxiety and proves alien to his subjective association of the text. However, he has to lie about the true oedipal origin of this ignorance. Therefore, he adds an alien part to his intellectual response to help set the two levels of response apart. Moreover, Bleich asserts that both responses, the emotional and the intellectual, are incomplete; there are elements in the text that are overlooked in both. The conclusion he draws is that "one never speaks only *about* the story. Rather, we speak of the story only as it is a function of our reading experience" (61; emphasis in original). That is, a critical judgment comes as a consequence to a subjective one; a personal importance, or an emotional value or need.

Bleich also differentiates between two criteria that the reader can adopt while applying the selective mechanism: the “Subjective Criteria of Importance” and the “Objective Criteria of Importance”. The first he defines as being based on the personal relevance of the element. The second is based on the author’s opinions or judgments and the relevance of the word to the text, that is, what it does (50-57). This proposition, he argues, requires a change of “the function and authority of those in literary profession”. The priestly role the critics have appropriated is essentially discarded; critics are thus no more playing the role of the “self-appointed intermediary between the author and the reader” (63). The best the critic can claim is that she/he is just another reader whose authority rests in her/his ability to offer a “forthright but systematic presentation of his own responsive capacities and tastes. ... The whole activity of reading – and literary involvement – becomes an interpersonal affair with genuine give and take, ... from the personal integrity and *persuasive capacity* of the critic-reader” (63; emphasis in original).

This is the core of the final phase: “Interpretation as a Communal Act”. In this phase, Bleich tries to account for similar responses, especially in the light of the subjective outlook he adopts. He tries to answer a question: “... how much of such responses are common on a larger scale – in a class, in a certain age-group, in a society, and so on?” (81). On the first level, the essentiality of this argument rests in its importance for the readers. As explained earlier, commonly held values play a special role in the repertoire of responses due to the fact that knowing that one’s opinions and feelings are shared, validated, and accepted by others is of vital importance (81). On the second level, these commonly held values, as parts of the reader’s repertoire, influence the orientation of her/his response.

Bleich examines the responses of some readers to William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* in which they are supposed to infer from the text the features that signify its being Victorian. Bleich notices that the comments repeated the most in the responses are the ones concerning the absence of sexual scenes and the ones concerning authorial intrusions. The recurrence of these particular comments, maintains Bleich, reflects a psychological obsession typical of the age group of his respondents. It also reflects a specific social and cultural orientation to be found in society, culture, literature, and everyday life of the specific era and of the society that contextualize these responses (87-89). Moreover, the readers' responses to the same feature reflect a wide range of variations. For instance, some respondents found the author's comments "amusing", others found the intrusions intolerable (90-93).

Furthermore, Bleich notices that readers tend to respond to different stimuli that in the end trigger the same feature. Bleich takes these points as further proofs of the subjectivity of the readers' responses which are not to be wrongly attributed to the text itself or to any "objective" facts it contains. Rather, such responses stem from a "relationship between the reader and his feelings, a relationship that is regulated by the author, who will either facilitate or prevent the reader from having a satisfactory experience" (93). Once more Bleich, in this argument, offers a contradictory proposition to his general orientation. Despite the fact that he is the formal defender of subjectivity, and in spite of his acceptance of all responses no matter how distorted they prove to be, Bleich, in his discussions of this point, allows a considerable amount of readers manipulation by the author to take place.

Bleich ends his discussions by tackling the criteria of validation of subjective responses. The first criterion tackles the validation of the *individual* response. He asks if any of the values inferred by his readers is really Victorian. It is never to be imagined, he claims, that a Victorian woman would complain about a novel due to the absence of sexual scenes. Moreover, a respondent may provide such sexual comments if reading, for example, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but to offer such comments in response to *VanityFair* suggests an essential conclusion: a particular response is not to an objective fact that is present or absent from a particular text, it is the subjective response of the reader which can expand to prove itself a collective subjective response of a community (age, gender, social class, era, culture, etc.) (88-89). The validation of the individual subjective response thus is carried out with reference to the subjective/collective context of the response, not with reference to any objective textual element.

The second criterion tackles the validation of the *collectively* reached consensus of subjective responses. The question that is usually asked is the extent to which this collective consensus is true. However, Bleich argues that the question that should be asked is true to what? Even such group responses are nothing but the results of “the objectification of what is happening in the collective subjectivity .... The fact emerges that a sense of what is meant by ‘Victorian’ can only be defined as a reaction to unspoken, contemporary, collective, and subjective values” (94). The key here is the word context, especially the word “contemporary”. This means that the collective reference does not itself represent an objective truth or value; rather, a collective agreement or consensus that is true only with reference to this particular group.

Furthermore, even such collectively established values are subject to change over time. What maybe presently established as Victorian for a particular group, may not be considered so a hundred years from now. The result then is further subjectivity, not only is this congregation socially, culturally, and psychologically oriented, it is also time oriented. The notion of an objective reference of validation thus is totally shattered on all levels and replaced by these multi-oriented subjective congregations which constitute both the consequences and the shaping forces of similar responses (*Readings and Feelings*94-95). The discussion now moves to the other psychological model theorist Holland who adapts this subjective paradigm to Freud's works.

### **Norman Holland**

The foundation of what Holland proposes is mainly presented in his book *The Dynamics of Literary Response* (1968). His proposition is based on the contention that the literary work and the reader's response to it resemble a specific life-like mental process in which an unconscious fantasy is transformed into a conscious, intellectual meaning. The text itself is held as a "discrete collection of words" (*Dynamics* 28). The reader responds to this text on two levels. On the first level, the unconscious level, constellations of recurrent images, events, and characters conjure up several unconscious, "pre-logical" fantasies. Such fantasies should be worked through via a series of abstractions to a central core fantasy which is disguised but that can be "elaborated" by the processes of primary-thinking to become what we call "the text". On this level, the text does not absorb the reader; rather, the reader "introjects" the text. The important point is that the fantasy is provided by the text, yet it is also shared by the reader (*Dynamics* 90).

On the second level, the conscious level, similar processes of abstractions lead to the discovery of a set of various minor themes. Some readers take the extra step through one final process of abstraction to reach a central meaning or a conscious theme which informs the whole text. This central meaning is identified through secondary-process thinking (*Dynamics* 364). On this level, the reader finds meaning by separating herself/himself from the text, viewing it as an independent entity. This enables the reader to find an intellectually acceptable meaning (*Dynamics* 92). Between these two levels, the reader is busy perceiving the text. More importantly, these two levels of response are not independent; they are, in a sense, continuous. The link between them is a process of “transformation”; a term which Holland claims to use as “a generalized term for the alteration of an infantile fantasy into a meaningful series of words acceptable to the ego” (*Dynamics* 365). This process of transformation goes along the following steps.

The reader has to go through a process of introjection, in which she/he takes what is in the text as her/his own. This process can only be achieved if “the transformation in the literary work is ‘congenial’ ... if it matches the reader’s genius or spirit or basic psychological patterns” (*Dynamics* 96). If the text fails in this respect, the reader will react to its foci as independent of hers/his. This process of introjection can also fail due to other reasons. The reader comes to the text with two basic expectations; that it will give pleasure, and that there will be no demand of “motor actions” in response to the introjected fantasies (*Dynamics* 98). If the text fails to give pleasure, or if the reader finds that she/he is expected to act in any way, the reader, defensively, progresses on conscious alert to what is going on “out there” (*Dynamics* 95-99).

If the process of introjection is accomplished, however, the reader perceives what is going on “out there” as happening “in here”. The reader now indulges in a hypnotic state where she/he, as Coleridge states, willingly suspends her/his disbelief. The mind is regressed to a state similar to that of the oral phase. The reader takes in what the text offers without being expected to act on it and with the conditional feelings of trust and fusion (*Dynamics* 82). The mind, however, is not totally regressed, a “persisting rind of unregressed ego” continues to put letters together to form words, remembers what has already been read, and guesses what will happen next (*Dynamics* 87).

This processing of expectations/modifications is not the only function of this rind of unregressed ego, its most important function is to monitor the introjected material which has become like a “subsystem within the ego”. The mechanism along which this process goes is identical to Freud’s wish fulfillment mechanism. It works to inhibit and reject the infantile fantasies conjured by the text. Holland refers to this function as the censor function (*Dynamics* 92). Moreover, during this phase the reader starts to “analogize – [to] bring to the work [her/his] own highly individual fantasies” (*Dynamics* 91). These are subjective associations that the reader imports from her/his personal reservoir.

Just like real-life, the drives and desires conjured by these fantasies, the reader’s and the text’s, need gratification and, also just like real life, they won’t be allowed any gratification in this “raw state” since they are unacceptable for the ego. They do become acceptable, however, via two means: the form of the text, and the “overall thrust of the work [which] transforms the fantasy content toward meaning” (*Dynamics* 92). Holland claims that “form in a literary work corresponds to defense; content, to fantasy or impulse” (*Dynamics* 92). It works in the same manner a defense mechanism manages a

real life fantasy or drive; it “alters the contents in a defensive way”. Form as defense can also be regarded on two scales. First, on its larger scale; that of structure, it manages the content via defenses such as “point of view, juxtaposition, omission, cross-cutting, splitting”. It controls, through these processes what the reader is aware of at each and every instance of the poem. Second, on a smaller level, elements such as sounds, rhythms, and rhymes manage the content in a more detailed manner. This manner is what engages language as a mechanism of displacement. The conscious attention diverts its focus from the content, “fraught with fear and desire”, to the verbal level and its particulars (*Dynamics* 157-158).

This, according to Holland, weakens the reader’s involvement with the content and withdraws “cathexis” from the “deep” fantasy level towards the “higher” level of verbal activities (*Dynamics* 157-158), thus pushing towards the higher level of conscious meaning. This is the overall thrust of the work; once the process passes the censor, and enters the realm of consciousness, the reader has already separated herself/himself from the text, it is now perceived as an independent object. The reader then consciously identifies recurring patterns of themes and, via abstraction, reaches an overall meaning which informs the text as whole.

Meaning thus is yet another source of pleasure. “We supply meaning in order to permit expression of and pleasure from the core fantasy” and to get engaged in a “socially, morally or intellectually responsible enterprise” (*Dynamics* 183). Moreover, Holland argues that what gives pleasure is not the moral of the story; it is the transformation process itself (*Dynamics* 30). More importantly, meaning is not something that is just

there “in” the text, but something “we construct for the text within the limits of the text. And even inconsistent readings may be appropriate” (*Dynamics* 25).

The significance of this proposition is in its implications on the authority of the text. Early in the book, he suggests clearly that despite the reader’s construction of meaning and that it is not simply there in the text, the whole process is carried out within the limits of the text (*Dynamics* 25). However, midway through the book we come across a controversial quotation in which he claims that, “[i]n one sense, ... it does not matter whether the meaning is ‘in’ the text or whether the reader supplies it – either way, meaning opens up a kind of sublimatory path for fantasy gratification” (*Dynamics* 185). Holland, while discussing this last quotation, assumes that meaning-as-defense has only to offer the mastery of fantasy content and to make sense of the text, thus allowing for the gratification of the unconscious fantasies. The text’s authority in this sense is relegated to that of informing the fantasy and offering defenses that allow it to pass the censor towards gratification (*Dynamics* 185).

This takes him to the question of objectivity and subjectivity. He proposes the notion that there is a range of sensible responses, he claims that it can be established, for instance, that *Hamlet* is better than *Titus Andronicus* (*Dynamics* xiv-xv). However, within this range of sensible responses everybody has her/his own response. If we expect everybody to react in a different way, we would be disappointed, a viewer who laughs his way through *Hamlet*, would most probably be thought off as mad. On the other hand, if we expect everyone to react in the same way, again we will be disappointed for everybody has her/his own personal response, since even if the core fantasy is provided

by the text and shared by the reader, part of the response still involves analogizing personal, highly subjective material into the work (*Dynamics* 93).

These two key points need to be born in mind now while we are making the transition to his modified version of this model: the authority of the text, and the subjective versus objective nature of response. In his other book: *The Nature of Literary Response: Five Readers Reading* (1975), Holland starts out by putting this previously discussed model, which he refers to as the “transformation model”, under experimentation. He announces that his first model “stood up rather well, requiring only the modification – or reminder, really – that psychological processes like fantasies or defenses do not happen in books but in people” (*Five Readers* xvi-xvii). Accordingly, the modification is mainly concerned with the authority of the text; Holland has withdrawn all authority from the text. It does not even possess the fantasy or the defense mechanisms because texts do not possess such things, readers do.

His analysis of the data provided by his experiment leads him to base the reading experience on four principles. The core of these phases, and of the experience as a whole, is what he refers to as the “identity theme”. He defines it as “the totality of a person’s several styles, a style of walking, of talking, of making love, of writing, of relating to others, and if we put them all together, a style of styles or a style, simply, of being, a sameness – an identity” (*Five Readers* ix). He allots the principal role in the reading experience to this concept of identity theme which “controls and directs these brain-based processes to create an individual response to a story, poem, movie, play, or, indeed, any work of art” (*Five Readers* x). However, unlike his previous propositions, Holland argues that to limit this theme to the typical psychoanalytic characterology seems inadequate at

this point. The reason behind this revision is that depending on drives solely ignores other important aspects that also add “more complex traits we associate with character or personality” These aspects include defenses and adaptations (*Five Readers* 53-54).

Having discussed the concept of identity theme which governs the reading experience, Holland discusses what he calls “The Four Principles” of the reading experience. The First of these principles is “Style Seeks Itself”. The reader may react positively or negatively to the material the work provides. It should be remembered that the response may not be to the work as a complete entity, the work is examined word for word, reacting to each positively or negatively. On the one hand, what the reader reacts positively to is what matches her/his expectations from any external entity. On the other hand, what the reader responds negatively to is what fails to match these expectations and thus instead of providing pleasure, triggers anxiety (*Five Readers* 114-115).

The second principle, “Defenses Must Be Matched”, requires that the reader finds in the work a match, partly or completely, with her/his own defenses and adaptations. She/he must identify in the work something to handle pain and anxiety similar to what her/his identity theme has created as her/his defensive style (*Five Readers* 116-117). The third principle is “Fantasy Projects Fantasies”. Each reader creates out of the material found in the work a wish-fulfilling fantasy typical of her/his unique identity theme. This fantasy is not in the work itself, only the material to create it, it can differ from one reader to another, and may not even match what the writer had transformed while writing (*Five Readers* 117-121).

Once the reader has matched his defenses and created her/his unique fantasy, the fourth principle comes in. This principle “Character Transforms Characteristically”, is more or less the same as what he has explained in his earlier model. The reader now proceeds to “makes-sense” of the work. This is achieved through providing an interpretation or a theme through “higher” functions of the ego such as the interpretive skills, literary experience, or experience of the human character. This interpretation is achieved according to the social, moral, political, etc. ideas that seem congenial to the reader (*Five Readers* 121-122).

The whole process is subjective now that the text is without authority. Moreover, allowances for misreading reach an even higher level in this revised version of the model. However, having reached the rankest level of subjectivity, Holland now has to account for similarities of interpretations. Despite this utter subjectivity, there are similarities to be found. These similarities, however, are not based on any objective facts to be found in the text or elsewhere, they are essentially based on the consensus between a number of subjective entities. This consensus is reached through sharing. This, he summarizes:

When one thinks in terms of a total style this way, it becomes possible to group together themes of behavior for a nation just as one would for an individual. Thus, we can understand them as part of a consistent national myth of identity analogous to the identity themes of individuals ... a mental national product (MNP) analogous to the economic GNP or gross national product. One would arrive at a national style (or the style of any definable group) through the analysis of its MNP, that is, its shared documents, behavior, and thought (as one groups

the behavior of an individual or the words of a story into themes or traits culminating in a central theme). (*Five Readers* 236)

This proposition he simplifies by giving an example of what may happen in a class, each student reaches a subjective response, then after sharing responses, each person makes a “synthesis out of the observations and statements made by others until a certain degree of agreement is reached. Working this way, one would, in a free market of ideas, sum different analysts’ syntheses of a society, taking what they share as their conclusion” (*Five Readers* 238). When a reader shares her/his response, other readers may accept it or internalize the parts of this response that match their styles and that pass the censor of their defensive mechanisms. Similarly, this reader may internalize whatever matches her/his identity theme from their responses. This concept of sharing confirms that individual responses are different. And paradoxically, this subjectivity is what makes readers reach the consensus that makes the illusion of objectivity (*Five Readers* 231).

With this point, the propositions of the psychological model and with it the discussions of the three models that constitute the bulk of modern reader-response theory come to an end. In the following chapter, an application of the propositions of each of the three models is carried out from the perspective of real readers. This application also serves as an assessment of these conflicting propositions, with the results of this assessment acting as propositions of a synthesized model.