

Acts of Reading: Actual Or Virtual Agency?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to identify a range of changes, challenges and possibilities that character literary theory, particularly in relation to the meaning-making process. It problematizes a number of reader-response theories, in particular German Wolfgang Iser's 'implied reader' and American Stanley Fish's 'interpretive community' as dominant interpretive frameworks. We intend to raise questions vis-à-vis the degree, kind and scope of agency that the reader is allowed, as well as the pluralistic possibilities of meaning potentially available in texts. The paper, therefore, is a call for opening up fresh avenues of critical discussion; hence, a contribution to present-day debates in contemporary epistemology.

أفعال القراءة: فاعلية حقيقية أو افتراضية؟

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الملخص

يهدف البحث إلى الكشف عن مجموعة من التعقيدات والتحديات والإمكانيات التي تميز النظرية الأدبية، لا سيما بما يتعلق بعملية "صناعة المعنى". يطرح البحث تساؤلات حول مفهومين مركزيين . للمفكر الألماني فولفغانغ آيزر . للمفكر الأمريكي ستانلي فيش، كأطر تفسيرية ذات أثر بالغ في صناعة المعنى. يركز الباحثان على درجة ونوعية ومدى الفاعلية التي منحت للقارئ في هذين المفهومين . يسعى البحث للكشف عن الإمكانيات الكامنة في "معنى النص"، ويُعد دعوة لفتح آفاق جديدة من النقاشات النقدية والمساهمة في محاور علم المعرفة المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية : النظرية الأدبية , فولفغانغ آيزر , ستانلي فيش

I. INTRODUCTION

The conceptual framework of the contemporary era crystallizes the radical processes through which the whole domain of human experience, investigation, and engagement are made to go. Qualitative changes characterize all walks of life—social, cultural, political, economic, and intellectual. The rise of some visions occurs at the collapse of others. In *The Moment of 'Scrutiny'* (1981), Francis Mulhern states that such manifestations as disruption of cultural life, invalidation of inherited values, dissolution of religious faith, neutralization of nature, and enlargement and diversification of the intelligentsia are products of the accelerated tempo of historical changes, the pervasive spread of scientific thought, and the collapse of the pre-World Wars intellectual universe (26). Designated as a Copernican revolution in thought, the paradigm shift that occurs at the turn of the twentieth century is philosophically underpinned by an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, an attack on the metaphysics of presence, a disillusionment with the centre, an abandonment of placelessness, and a general substitution of spatial for temporal coordinates (Hebdige, 1988: p. 184). Thus conceived, contemporary literary theory espouses relativist pluralism and cognitive groundlessness in the face of totalitarian practices and metaphysical mystique of the realist approach in the humanist paradigm.

As a result, the long-held realist framework, which projects language as isomorphic with reality; privileges reality over representation; emphasizes the mind-independence of objects to be known; and establishes meaning as already there; completed, closed, and finalized; awaiting unproblematic re-experience by the reader, is interrogated and is now replaced by an anti-realist epistemology. This epistemological paradigm stresses that “human language and thought do not correspond to objective realities or stable meanings” (Vanhoozer, 1998: p. 49). Meaning is viewed here not as pre-given in mimetic correspondence but as a product of a certain socio-historic matrix, a context, or a location of a knowing subject. Contemporary epistemology ‘enacts a retreat from referentiality, recognizing “reality” as an intellectual and even ideological construct’ (Habib, 2008: p. 567). Human language, too, is not a transparent medium but an ideological tool with a constitutive role in the perception of reality, acts of representation, and the diverse ways of living in and seeing the world.

As a vital life-force of the major movements in contemporary literary theory, the hermeneutics of carnivalesque suspicion calls into question all forms of “monologic” voice out for a “dialogic” or “polyphonic” discourse, affiliated towards the cause of marginalized “difference”. Roland Barthes's “The Death of the Author” (1977) and W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's “The Intentional Fallacy” (1967) constitute a major critical assault on authorial meaning as the

exclusive site of the meaning of the literary text. Unlike the passive reader of the realist hermeneutics, the reader is now provided with an epistemic space that empowers him or her to emerge as an active agent in the sense-making process. Anchored in revisionist pluralism, this shift of emphasis from author-centred to reader-centred practices of interpretation represents the recent move from the status quo to the poetics of progressive constructivism as the underlying dynamic of most currents in contemporary acts of theorization in criticism.

II. READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

The recent valorization of the reader as an active participant in the meaning-making process culminates in the advent of reader-response criticism. Under this banner, there arise different acts of theorization, ranging from the moderate to the extreme vis-à-vis the boundaries of readership.

To elaborate on such boundaries, Andrew Bennett, in *Readers and Reading* (1995), explains how reader-response criticism subsumes basically three perspectives. Firstly, critics like Norman Holland and David Bleich base their perspectives on American Ego Psychology and focus primarily on the particular response pattern of the individual reader. Secondly, structuralist critics like Michael Riffaterre emphasize the ways in which the texts themselves direct, coerce, or compel the act of reading; it is the text itself that controls the production of meaning. The third perspective, that includes critics like Wolfgang Iser, attempts to develop an interactive negotiation between the text and the reader (Bennett, 1995: p. 4).

Bennett also provides a survey of the reading theory and lists the various ways by which critics conceive and conceptualize readers in recent theory.

- The reader is a hypothetical construct with all possible knowledge and interpretive skills at his or her disposal (Riffaterre).
- The reader is an individual subject, and reading is determined by his or her 'identity theme' (Holland).
- The reader is not an individual but a community of readers functioning through the reading strategies as designed by that community (Fish).
- The reader is a series of moves and responses more or less predetermined by the language of the text itself but 'concretized' in the act of reading (Iser).
- The reader is an individual in a particular historical and social situation whose responses are available to empirical investigation through written

records (Chartier).

- The reader is a woman, a gay, a member of an ethnic minority, or some other marginalized person whose responses involve a certain resistance produced by ethnic, sexual, or social difference (Fetterley) (Bennett, 1995: p. 3).

Furthermore, Bennett furnishes the various labels usually attached to the figure of the reader: 'the mock reader' (Gibson), 'the implied reader' (Booth, Iser), 'the model reader' (Eco), 'the super-reader' (Riffaterre), 'the inscribed or encoded reader' (Brooke-Rose), 'the narratee' (Prince), 'the ideal reader' (Culler), 'the literant' (Holland), 'the actual reader' (Jauss), 'the informed reader or the interpretive community' (Fish), 'the virtual reader and the real reader' (Prince), 'the resisting reader' (Fetterley), 'the actual, authorial, and narrative audience' (Rabinowitz), 'the embedded reader' (Chambers), 'the Lacanian reader' (Felman), 'the female reader' (Schweickart, Flint), 'the gay or lesbian reader' (Koestenbaum), and 'the mind reader' (Royle) (ibid).

In "Reader-Response Criticism," Vincent B. Leitch presents an overall survey of the ideas, influences, and implications of reader-response criticism in the United States during the 1970s and early '80s. He provides the major tenets of this type of criticism. According to him, reader-response criticism dismantles the text-centred criticism of Formalism, advocating instead a reader-oriented poetics. It often stresses the temporality of reading, resisting tendencies towards spatial or organicist hermeneutics. Reader-response criticism, as Leitch continues to elaborate, pioneers accounts of textual discontinuity over doctrines propounding literary unity. It also investigates the epistemological, linguistic, psychological, and sociological constraints on the activity of reading and on the labour of readers in the acts of construing the literary texts and the realities around them. Moreover, reader-response theory does not tamper with the canons of scholarly style, while this criticism pushes critical inquiry towards pedagogy, typically locating the text and the reader in the classroom. Reader-oriented criticism, as Leitch continues to explain, fosters various didactic poetics in its move towards a politics of liberal pluralism, which advocates the rights of readers against the prescriptions and dogmas of doctrinaire methodologies. Reader-response criticism, according to Leitch, casts New Criticism as a scapegoat, responsible for many of the ills and errors of contemporary literary criticism. Unlike some other groups, reader-response critics do not constitute a tightly-knit cadre or circle of colleagues with access to certain journals, presses, institutes, or universities. Instead, the movement has an increasingly broad geographical and intellectual base (Leitch, 1995: pp. 33-4).

In the current paper , we principally attempt to review two prominent stances in the area of reader-response criticism and to address their wider implications: Wolfgang Iser's 'Implied Reader' and Stanley Fish's "Interpretive Community". The selection of these perspectives is largely premised on their widespread influence on, and prominence in, the manifold approaches of reader-oriented criticism. Both critical approaches to reading will be problematized and compared. The aim in here is to offer a critique of such approaches in terms of their reading strategies and orientations towards the figure of the reader.

II.i. 'Implied Reader'

Wolfgang Iser, the most celebrated reader-theorist of the phenomenological school, examines the nature of the interactivity between the literary text and the reader. With the exception of his colleague at the University of Constance, Hans Robert Jauss, Iser is the only reader-oriented literary theorist and critic from the Constance School, and indeed from most of the European Continent, who has had an influential impact on American literary thought. Drawing upon Russian Formalism, phenomenology, and other theoretical approaches including speech act theory and Gestalt psychology, Iser develops a coherent model of reading literary fiction that gets adapted by numerous critics.

Despite being mostly aligned with the phenomenological model of Roman Ingarden, Iser differs from him in empowering the reader with more active and creative powers in the “concretization” of the literary text. Modelled on Wayne Booth’s “implied author” of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Iser’s “implied reader” is defined as a textual condition and a process of sense-making. According to him, "the implied reader”

embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect - predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has its roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with the real reader.

(1976: p. 34)

Iser’s “implied reader” does not refer to any actual reader, but is a phenomenological textual syndrome, the ideality of the semantic possibility along with how the text has to be read. In this model, the reader is inscribed within, and instructed by, the text. That is, the meanings produced by the reader are not formulated by the text per se, but are intended (Iser, 1976: p. 35). The

relationship between the text and the reader is thus symbiotic: the text conditions the reader to respond in certain directions, producing an “ideation” of the text, whose very existence is predicated essentially upon that reader.

For Iser, meaning is produced or assembled by a process of interaction in which the two parties (text and reader) play quite different yet interdependent roles. The role of the text is to “designate instruction for the production of the signified” (Iser, 1978: p. 65), while the reader is to follow these textual guidelines in order to “concretize” and produce the meaning of the text. Moreover, Iser’s aesthetics of reception represents reading as a creative process of concretization that bridges the “gaps,” “blanks,” or “indeterminacies” of the text and actualizes its schematic potential (ibid). This concretizing activity, though governed by textually determinate aspects, draws on the reader’s personal experience and requires both skill and imagination.

In the attempt to engage with the literary text, the reader, in Iser's theory, works to build “gestalt,” or unified views of the world, as represented in the textuality of the text (1978: p. 119). Gestalt groupings “contain traces of illusion in so far as their closure... is not a characteristic of the text itself, but only represents a configurative meaning” (ibid 124). Moreover, whenever there is a break in “the good continuation” of the text, the reader seeks to transform this break into a consistent view that is “the indispensable basis for all acts of comprehension” (ibid 125). However, it is worth noting that in constituting a certain “gestalt” there emerge certain other excluded possibilities, “alien associations” (ibid 188). The presence of such "alien associations" implies the fact that all interpretative forms are but “virtual” as any account of meaning is “selective” in approach and perspectival in angularity (ibid). Likewise, the presence of the “alien associations” reflects the unfathomable depth and the inexhaustible potential of the text.

Besides, Iser represents reading as a “living event” (ibid 128), a performative act that occupies a space in the temporality of human existence. The reading process, as he elaborates, involves the “dialectic between illusion-making and illusion-breaking,” the “oscillation between involvement and observation” (ibid 127). He states: "Every moment of reading is a dialectic of pretension and retention, conveying a future horizon yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled" (1976: p. 112). Designated as a “kaleidoscope” (ibid 279), much enjoyment and thrill of the reading experience results from such surprises and betrayals of expectations.

In addition to the temporality of the reading experience, Iser introduces linearity and sequentiality as textual syndromes that indicate the impossibility of having a simultaneous experience of the wholeness of the text. The interpretive activity proceeds along “changing

viewpoints,” each of which modifies and qualifies the other (Iser, 1976: p. 68). In this process, the reader is a wandering viewpoint in the time flow of the novel, while his or her consciousness merges memories and expectations and undergoes a dialectical activity, culminating in producing a “decentred” self, "virtually" alien. The encounter of the actual (familiar) and virtual (unfamiliar) selves of the reader in the reading experience is regarded as a healthy act of interrogation and a valuable opportunity for self-discovery, self-reorientation, and change (ibid 158). It seems apt here to quote C. S. Lewis: “In reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself... I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do” (1961: p. 140).

Synonymous with Roman Jakobson’s “code,” Iser’s “repertoire” constitutes the criterion of intelligibility and the condition that legitimates and underpins the text-reader relationship (1976: p. 184). The decipherability of the repertoire of the literary text calls for a rigorous reading experience and a confrontation with the unfamiliar of the text. Representing art as a creative transgression of literary norms, Iser writes:

The literary text performs its function, not through a ruinous comparison with reality, but by communicating a reality which it has organized itself.... As a structure of communication, it is identical neither with reality it refers to, nor with the disposition of its possible recipients, for it virtualizes both the prevailing concepts of reality (from which it draws its own repertoire) and the norms and values of its prospective readers. (ibid 181)

Pregnant with “unformulated” possibilities, art figures as a luminous halo of creative space that takes the reader out of the skeleton of habit, which rigidly "upholds the human frame, all the way into a fresh awareness that “catalyzes a more critical view of our identities” (Eagleton, 1983: p. 79). Stepping outside the frame and celebrating the unknown, the text interrogates and transforms the implicit beliefs one brings to it, disconfirming familiarized habits of perception and calling in question normative ways of seeing reality all around us.

In a nutshell, Iser's critical stance valorizes the cross-fertilization that arises out of the interface of different epistemic interiorities of the text and the reader. And that the reading experience is represented as a power, transformative of the held assumptions of the geography of readership, perhaps sums up the Iserian critical orientation as a reader-response theorist.

II.ii. 'Interpretive Community'

Stanley Fish is a major American proponent of the reader-oriented literary theory. His theory is not predicated upon the psychologies or processes of individual readers, but valorizes the process of literary interpretation and the constraints that are dictated on such process by the matrix or situation in which the reading activity occurs.

In *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (1972), Fish argues that, to view the text as a thing-in-itself is to spatialize and formalize what is essentially an ephemeral and temporal experience; it is to claim objectivity and autonomy for what is subjective and contingent (400). Anti-realist in perspective, the text is no longer deemed an autonomous entity; meaning, as Fish holds, does not consist exclusively in the architectonics of the text, since “the objectivity of the text is an illusion” (ibid).

Within such an anti-realist interpretive strategy, meaning occurs as an “event” (ibid, p. 383), for it is, as Fish contends, couched in “a consideration of the temporal flow of the reading experience” (ibid, p. 388). Reading is theorized in here as an active, creative, and temporal engagement with the text; a dynamic reflection on the developing, modifying, shaping, and re-shaping of one’s responses. As Fish writes:

Analysis in terms of doings and happenings is ...truly objective because it recognizes the fluidity, the “movingness,” of the meaning of experience and because it directs us to where the action is-the active and activating consciousness of the reader. (ibid, p. 401)

In *Is There a Text in this Class?* (1980), Fish underlines the urgency to shift the object of interpretive analysis from “what does this mean?” to “what does this do?” (p. 3). Reading, as his argument runs, is a process of experiencing what the text does to the reader, whose act of interpretation brings the text into view. This leads Fish to one of his major premises: texts are not found but made (ibid p. 11). The active construing consciousness of the reader thus breathes a fresh lease of life into the text.

Fish's empowerment of the reader is grounded on certain “interpretive strategies” that inform, direct, and orient the reader's consciousness as to see particular shades of meaning. As such, literature has nothing to do with either a sense of fictionality, propositional truth, or tropes. Literature is rather “what we put into it” (ibid).

Despite his contention that literature is what readers choose to see as literature, Fish is not a relativist. Literary discussions, as he goes on to argue, do not dissolve into a chaos of solipsism

and conflicting, infinite interpretations. Such relativism is hedged against here by the second term in Fish's formulation: "community." That is, the act of construing the text is essentially a collective decision, made by communities that share specific conceptual assumptions. As members of such communities, readers perform activities in conformity with such communally interpretive schematic guidelines (ibid, p. 5), that function as "the shape of reading" (ibid, p. 13). Therefore, Fish's theory represents interpreters as extensions of specific interpretive communities (ibid 321), that qualify the meaning-making process and ensure its stability (ibid, p. 268).

Ultimately, it is worth noting that the function of criticism, as Fish holds, is to determine the possible perspectives from which reading has to proceed (ibid, p.16). Redefined in terms of the degree of conformity the reader can display with regard to the "strategies" of the "interpretive community," the end of criticism, as he advocates, is not a matter of demonstration, but is rather a question of persuasion (ibid).

III. THE PENDULUM OF THE READER

In *The Return of the Reader* (1987), Elizabeth Freund charts the range within which the pendulum of the reader is made to swing:

Beginning with a swerve away from the orthodox New Critical view of the reader as extrinsic to the text, it moves towards an enquiry into the complications and complicities of the reader inscribed in and produced by the text, then to a revisionary relocation of the textual meaning in the reader's 'experience' and finally to an escape from the text / reader dichotomy in the monistic concept of 'interpretive community'- the concept which designates the always already given systems and institutions of interpretive authority that engender both readers and text. (p. 91)

An engagement with the figure of the reader in both Iser and Fish may show their concerns with the reader as an active participant in the knowledge-making process; each adopts a particular approach to conceive and conceptualize the status as well as the role of the reader. In both the models, a fresh lease of life is claimed to be breathed into the readers to resurrect them from the dormant sense of common sense passivity into a dynamic world of epistemic spaces that are granted to the readers in their critical exploration of the literary texts. Yet, it is this very reviving power itself, as one may argue, that suffocates and strangles its very object. The space provided to

the readers in order to exercise their cognitive powers and deepen their literary sensibility in the acts of reflection on the literary text is perhaps too qualified, or rather restrictive, in both the models that the autonomous individuality of the reader as a free agent is diminished considerably into yet another illusion of critical liberation of readership.

In every analysis, Iser describes the reader as being “guided,” “controlled,” “induced,” and even “jerked” by textual signposts (1978: p. 130). Such textual elements, as Fish comments, are “themselves the product of interpretation (1989: p. 84). That is to say, the space of freedom provided to the readers, in Iser's model, is so virtual that it does not really empower as much as it restricts the readers' acts of critical exploration by dint of its accent on the need for a strict adherence to the textual signposts and signals.

Furthermore, one can point out that Iser's contention of the textual elements as objectively verifiable, “givens,” and existing prior to the interpretive activity invites interrogation. As Terry Eagleton notes, there is nothing like “given”; it is only an “objectivist illusion” (1983: p. 85). Eagleton continues to demonstrate the view that these very textually determinate elements are nothing more than one's own concretization (ibid., p. 84). The implication is that the readers' engagement with the literary texts needs not to be theorized as a value-free interaction so far as the reading process itself implicates other extrinsic conditioning factors that can take the readers into unexpected horizons of thought. Iser's model, as Fish concludes, does not pose any threat to the reader's assumptions and, hence, “no one will ever be afraid of Wolfgang Iser” (1989: p. 86).

Similarly, Fish's model of reading does not promise much to the figure of the reader, either. The readers here are stripped off all sense of individual agency. Ironically enough, Fish himself puts it:

There is no subjectivist element of reading because the observer is never individual in the sense of unique or private, but is always the product of the categories of understanding that are his by virtue of his membership in a community of interpretation. (1989: p. 83)

Fish's “interpretive community” does not account for the peculiarities and singularities of individual experiences. His concept of “interpretive community” plays down or cancels out the different and divergent forces that give shape to one's identity— mental, socio-cultural, and private experiences. Moreover, within the same community there can be a clash or struggle of interpretations (Eagleton, 1983: p. 89). Therefore, the passivity of the reader (in Fish's model) is a consequence to the shackles imposed upon him or her by the “interpretive community”; the

reader is represented as a mere object of indoctrination, a puppet in the hands of this community. As a “product of abstracted performance” (Holub 100), the reader merely reproduces what he or she is spoon-fed with, thus portrayed as a hapless sufferer caught between aspiration and fate.

Besides, Fish does not sufficiently qualify his concept of the “interpretive community” in terms of the processes, protocols, politics, and history of such constituencies. Apt in here to refer to *After New Criticism* (1980), in which Frank Lentricchia writes:

At the very least Fish might have pointed out that the consolidated interpretive community he is talking about is situated on the northeastern seaboard of the United States, and that most of its members are “at home” in the English departments of Yale and Johns Hopkins. (p. 147)

With the “interpretive community,” the act of criticism is rendered redundant and monotonous: there can be neither surprises nor frustration of expectations, or modifications of memory. Not only are the readers enslaved by the protocols of this “community,” but they are also denied a great deal of self-knowledge and self-reorientation as the ultimate meaning of the reading experience as a whole. In the words of Freund,

Fish’s subject, imprisoned in communal norms of interpretation and coerced by their authority, has no means of engaging with the more recalcitrant features of texts, with their rhetoricity, with the infinite regress of figuration, with doubt, uncertainty, or irony, with strangeness and ‘otherness’ of poetry or language.... He cannot even know the present conditions of his knowing or his blindness; he can only repeat them. (1987: p. 110)

IV. CONCLUSION

Concluding her book, Freund raises the question of whether reading is a transitive or intransitive verb: “Does the reader control the text or the text control the reader?” (104). This problematization of the figure of the reader raises more questions than answers. The proposed reading strategies of Iser and Fish, though critically legitimate and theoretically valuable, are not enough for empowering the reader to competently address the ever increasing changes and challenges of the times. Iser and Fish's reading practices do not help to sensitize the readers to the profound subtleties of thought or the intricacies of aesthetic expression as essentially discursive

formations, nor do their strategies of interpretation promote social awareness of historical exigencies or vicissitudes as prerequisite for developing a critically informed and integrated self-knowledge of rights and roles in the wider culture sphere.

Motivated by the desire to call for a fresh frontier of critical inquiry, the present study seeks to propose an alternative track of thought of an integrated modality. Central to this approach is the stress on complementarity and interdisciplinarity as cornerstones to establishing proper channels of communication within and without the three axes in the reading experience—author, text, and reader. The exercise is comprised of the following:

- i. A deliberate consideration of the dynamics that frame and condition the context of production as a whole,
- ii. A critical analysis of the text in terms of form and content, taking into account the textual and historical factors,
and
- iii. A culturally-based pragmatic reflection on the relevance of the text to the context of reception.

The ability to critically assemble relevant elements out of the context of production in all its specificities can provide useful insights to the reading experience and help to lend the experience a measure of historical validity, too. The engagement with the text as a medium constitutes the centre of gravity that pulls together both the contexts of production and reception into an epistemic dialogue over textual premises, all considering in view the text as a site for negotiating cultural poetics. The reader here emerges as an agent in the knowledge-making process, taking into consideration questions of the relevance of the reading experience to his or her context of reception in all its singularities. Thus, the reading experience is a stimulating exercise of critically integrating thematically, formalistically, discursively, and experientially related assumptions. And the direction of critical inquiry, as proposed in here, espouses an inclusive perspective that invites rigorous acts of critical exploration of literature and celebrates thinking together differently.

This white-heated cross-fertilization of the divergent assumptions of author, text, and reader has a number of advantages that can be stated as follows:

- i. The experience of reading literature gets deepened.
- ii. Education in literature fructifies more meaningfully when it provides the learners with opportunities to “respond specifically to the conditions, formations, and problems that arise in various sites in which education

- takes place” (Giroux, 2003: p. 99).
- iii. This education also turns into a lively intellectual and cultural festival of ideas whose repercussions are lived and felt in the learners’own experiences. In so doing, the learners come to realize the relevance of knowledge to their actual lives.
 - iv. Enlivening the classroom culture with fresh insights and diverse styles of thinking that can challenge assumptions and introduce rigorous reading activities.
 - v. Expand the syllabus and widening the scope of the education in literature.
 - vi. The introduction of cultural perspectives to literature is vital to enhancing the efficacy of the discipline and promoting its real mission of humanization beyond all sectarian imperatives and narrow ideologies. In “Work Experience,” Roger I. Simon writes of such a noble mission:

We view educational practice as a form of cultural politics. For us such a practice is centrally concerned with the moral and analytical task of assessing whether specific forms encourage and make possible the realization of differentiated capacities, or whether they disable, deny, dilute, and distort those capacities. Equally, such a practice is for us concerned with the educational and political task of constructing new forms that would expand the range of social identities that people have the possibility of becoming. These twin tasks are both the problem and the project: to expand what it is to be human. (1987: p. 177)
 - vii. Initiating wider cultural negotiations and exchanges of perspectives as a platform for the construction of knowledge and for promoting acts and voices oriented towards cultural dialogue and civilizational interactivity is healthy to the growth of one and all.

Predicated upon such a multidimensional view of the reading experience, the critical activity can redraw fresh avenues for critical exploration and redefine the geographical territory of readership. By virtue of such critically grounded, multidisciplinary, complementary approach, the voice of the reader can affirm its epistemic worth, so can literature do with its relevance to the human existence.

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