

Reader-Response Criticism:
The Psychoanalytic Approach
of Norman Holland and David Bleich.

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One of the most perceptible features of postmodern literary theory is the focus on the issue of reading or what is, quite often, labelled the “problematics of reading.” This issue became, in different ways, one of the main concerns of all trends of postmodern criticism. As Temma Berg has pointed out, critics of reading incorporated much from structuralism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, communication theory, feminist criticism, speech-act theory and, in turn, they influenced all those fields.¹

These critics raise theoretical questions regarding how the reader joins with the author “to help the text mean.” They determine what kind of reader or what community of readers the work implies to create. They also examine the significance of the series of interpretations the reader experiences in the reading process.

The term reader-response criticism, which emerged during the 1970s, thus, has been used to describe a multiplicity of different approaches that focus on the reading process: affective, rhetorical, phenomenological, subjective, transactive, psychological, and psycholinguistic. According to Steven Milloux, these approaches, and others, are indiscriminately lumped together under the label of

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reader-response.² Calling it a movement, however, is misleading, for reader-response criticism is less a unified school of criticism than a vague collection of disparate critics with a common point of departure. "Reader theory" and "audience theory" are perhaps the most neutral general terms, since the more popular term "reader-response theory" refers to more subjective kinds of reader criticism, and "Reception Theory" most accurately refers to the German school of "Receptionkritik" represented by Hans Robert Jauss. However, these and other terms are used arbitrarily, and the boundaries separating them are cloudy at best.

Like the New critics, reader-response critics focus on what texts do, but instead of regarding texts as self-contained entities, reader-response criticism plunges into what the New Critics call the affective fallacy: what do texts do in the minds of readers? Thus, while the formalists see texts as spatial, reader-response critics view them as temporal phenomena. As Stanley Fish puts it, "it is not that the presence of poetic qualities compels a certain kind of attention but the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities.... Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them."³ Unlike the New Critics, who concentrate their attention on the text as an object, reader-response critics shift the concern from the text to the contexts in which it is embedded. They focus on what texts do to, or in, the mind of the reader rather than regarding a text as something with properties exclusively its own.

Indeed, they raise theoretical questions about whether our responses to a work are the same as its meanings, whether a work can have as many meanings as we have many responses to it, and whether some responses are more valid, or superior to others. More specifically, as Peter Rabinowitz argues, reader-response critics are engaged in a series of heterogeneous but interlocking debates on three related questions: Who is the reader? Where are the locus of meaning and the authority of interpretation? And what kind of experience is the act of reading? However, it can be safely argued that reader-response critics are more united by their questions than by the directions they follow in trying to answer them.⁴

The reader-response critics have succeeded in altering literary criticism as an aesthetic practice in substantial ways. The various types of reader-response criticism focus on the politics of reading. Examination of a text in-and-of-itself is replaced by a discussion of the reading process, the interaction of reader and text. They all share the phenomenological assumption that it is impossible to separate the perceiver from the perceived, subject from object. Thus, the text's autonomy, its absolute separateness, is rejected in favor of its dependence on the reader's creation and active participation. Reading is not the discovery of meaning but the creation of it. In other words, meaning is not of, about, or in the text but it is the result of the involvement of the reader. Meaning, in the final analysis, is not inherent in the text, but it is the product of the process of reading.

In their analysis of the reading process, its structure and functions, reader-response critics do not have a common or unified strategy. They adopt a

variety of approaches. Some examine individual readers through psychological observations and participation. Others analyze reading communities through philosophical speculation and literary intuition.⁵

I

Central to the reader response approach is the idea that the literary work comes into being as such only in the context of reading: the process of understanding a literary work implies a recreation of it, an attempt to grasp all the sensations and concepts which the author seeks to convey. Each reader makes new synthesis of these sensations and concepts according to his own individual experience. Several factors therefore go into the invention of a reading of a literary text. Initially, as John Karolides argues, the production of an author, the text at one level exists as a "trace" of the author's "experience and imagination." However, as soon as the text has been removed from the author's immediate control through publication, the author "is outside the immediate, intimate reading circle. A body of words exists, the author's intention threaded within them, waiting for the reader to respond to them"⁶

Karolides goes on to explain that reading a text is "dynamic" in the sense that "what the reader makes of the verbal signs reflects shifts in the denotation and connotation of words as well as differences in the images called forth in the social and psychological attitudes and behaviors of the readers."⁷ Reading then becomes an "event" controlled by the reader's "past experiences and current circumstances, regional origins and upbringing, gender, age, past and present readings," as well as by "the given

moment-- the situation, the mood, the pressures, and reasons for reading."⁸

There are two theoretical assumptions of Reader-Response critics: the first is that literature exists only when it is read, like enacting a drama, singing a musical work or any other form of performance which exists only when it is acted out and which is affected by the performer. The second assumption of the Reader-Response critics is the idea that literary text possesses no fixed meaning or value, there is no one correct meaning. The literary meaning and value are created by the interaction of the reader and the text.

Literary critics have a variety of different views regarding to the Reader-Response approach. One can locate at least six different positions or views: the psychological, the hermeneutic, the phenomenological, the structuralist, the political or ideological and finally the post-structuralist. Those who adopt the psychological approach believe that the real meaning of the text is the meaning created by the individual psyche in response to the work, at both the unconscious and the subsequent conscious level, as the material provided by the text opens a path between the two, making richer self-knowledge and realization.

This paper focuses on two of the most prominent critics who adopt the psychoanalytic approach, namely, Norman Holland and David Bleich. It aims at analyzing their major pronouncements, showing the points of similarity and difference between them, and finally giving an assessment of their approach.

II

Norman Holland in his "The Mind and the Book," sets out from a very simple position, namely, that "literary criticism is about books and psychoanalysis is about minds. Therefore, the psychoanalytic critic can only talk about the minds associated with the book."⁹ In another article, Holland advocates what he calls "transactive criticism," which "takes as its subject-matter, not the text is supposed isolation, as the New criticism claimed it did, nor the self in rhapsody, as the old impressionistic criticism did, but the *transaction* between a reader and a text."¹⁰ He also criticizes Wolfgang Iser's reception theory on the basis that Iser does not discuss the responses of actual readers to literary texts. Holland believes that Iser's concept of the "implied reader," a term which "incorporates both the pre-structuring of [the] potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process,"¹¹ has little substance if it does not take into account empirical terms of real readers' responses. Holland contrasts Iser's approach in which the text controls the reader's response to it with his "transactive" approach in which the reader both initiates and creates the response. In Holland's version of reader-response criticism, reading is a transaction of the reader with the text in which there is no division between the text's role and the reader's role.

The basic issue in Holland's "transactive" model of reading is the fact that although the text is the same for everybody, "everyone responds to it differently."¹² Whereas Iser's concept of the "implied reader" tries to eliminate the reader's personal associations, Holland accepts them. He claims that

“the text-active theory” of reading, common to both traditional criticism and the New Criticism, which:

assumes that there is a normal response to a text, which the text itself causes.... simply does not fit what we know of human perception: namely, the perception is a constructive act in which we impose schemata from our minds on the data of our senses.”¹³

In the same way, Holland objects to Stanley Fish’s theory of affective stylistics, in which a text and its literent (reader, viewer, or hearer) act together to cause the response, advance. He argues that “it is really two theories, a new theory of reader activity plus the old text-active theory in which the text does something to the reader.... I do not first see the lines and then decide that I will interpret them as though they were perspectives of rectangle. I do it all in one continuous transaction. I never see the lines without a schema for seeing them.”¹⁴

Holland maintains that if readers’ free responses to texts are collected, they have virtually nothing in common and that where shared responses exist they are created by such factors as the authority of teachers. Readers should accept interpretation as a personal transaction between the reader’s unique identity and the text. Such a transactive theory of reading fits in with contemporary psychological theory, he argues, and accounts “both for the originality and variety of our responses and for our circumscribing them by conventions.” One can then go on to use psychoanalytic concepts such as identity to “connect literary transactions to personality.”¹⁵ Holland also argues that this does not

lead to relativism but to intersubjectivity: "I can give you my feelings and associations and let you pass them through the story for yourself to see if they enrich your experience."¹⁶ Whereas orthodox critics resist the idea that we read differently, the transactive critic accepts it joyfully:

Instead of subtracting readings so as to narrow them down or cancel some...let us use human differences to add response to response, to multiply possibilities, and to enrich the whole experience.¹⁷

The objection to this theory, which Holland claims he is most often confronted with, is that it has the consequences that every reading of a text becomes totally subjective. The term 'subjective' does not trouble him, but he denies that for him interpretation is purely random. Whereas for Iser text exerts controls, for Holland controls exist within the reader.

The central idea in Holland's approach is that of an "identity theme" by which he means that "we can be precise about individuality by conceiving of the individual as living out variations on an identity theme much as a musician might play out an infinity of variations on a single melody."¹⁸ Holland's model of reading proceeds from his more general theory of the relation between personality and perception. Perception is a constructive act where "the individual apprehends the resources of reality (including language, his own body, space, time, etc.) as he relates to them in such a way that they replicate his identity."¹⁹ For Holland, perception is indeed a process of interpretation, and interpretation is a function of identity, specially identity conceived as

variations upon an identity theme. In the process of reading, Holland argues, our perception re-creates and indeed re-affirms our identity. He confirms that "all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation."²⁰

Within this principle of identity re-creation, Holland identifies four specific modalities: Defenses, Expectations, Fantasies, and Transformations, which he organizes under the acronym DEFT. He argues that "one can think of these four separate principles as emphasis on one aspect or another of a single transaction: shaping an experience to fit one's identity and in doing so, (D) avoiding anxiety, (E) gratifying unconscious wishes, (F) absorbing the event as part of a sequence of events, and (T) shaping it with that sequence into a meaningful totality."²¹

The concept of "meaningful totality" is pivotal for Holland's reading model. He argues that the reader makes sense of the text by creating a meaningful unity out of its elements. Unity is not in the text, but in the mind of the reader. Meaning, Holland maintains, is the result of interpretive synthesis, the transformation of fantasy into a unity, which the reader finds coherent and satisfying. As with all interpretations, "the unity we find in literary texts is impregnated with the identity that finds that unity." Each reader creates a unity for a text out of his own identity theme, and thus "each will have different ways of making the text into an experience with a coherence and significance that satisfies."²² Therefore, Holland's model of reading accounts exceptionally well for variable response.

Holland assumes that perception of a text is a constructive act: we interpret as we perceive, or rather perception is interpretation. As soon as we read, we interpret; and thus the interpretive strategy of the reader creates the text that he later discusses in critical exchange. Holland claims that "a literary text, after all, in an objective sense consists only of a certain configuration of specks of carbon black on wood pulp. When these marks become words, and when those words become images or metaphors or characters or events, they do so because the reader plays the part of a prince to the sleeping beauty."²³

The difficulty with this argument is that it regards interpretation as constituting the text, and ignores the simple fact that the text lives independently of and prior to interpretation. Actually, Holland seems to be aware of the paradox in his position and thus he tries to solve it. In one place he states that, "[a] reader reads something, certainly, but if one cannot separate his 'subjective' response from its 'objective' basis, there seems no way to find out what that 'something' is in any impersonal sense."²⁴ However, in another place, Holland writes, "the reader is surely responding to something. The literary text may be only marks on a page- at most a matrix of psychological possibilities for its readers. Nevertheless only some possibilities, we would say, truly fit the matrix."²⁵ The implication of Holland's argument here is that the text sets limits to response, that a "matrix" exists separate from the reader, not created by the reader's interpretation and somehow restricting that interpretation.

Holland's discussion of response assumes some aspects of the text prior to interpretation. He talks about some elements of the story, such as language, dialogue, character and plot that are combined according to the reader's identity theme. However, he does not focus on how these elements are constituted. He does not say whether these elements are in a text as 'matrix' or they are constructed in the transaction. Indeed, Holland's discussion of the process of interpretation takes place at a higher level of the reader's activity. That is, the story as a combination of pre-existent elements is recreated by the reader's identity through the modalities of DEFT, and interpretation or what he calls "the making sense" is a unity that the story takes on for the reader. In other words, for Holland, meaning is an output of a psychological process; the input is the story. In this way, meanings are created, not extracted. Hence, the text is constituted by the interpretive process and is not prior to it.

Holland uses the interpretive strategy he describes for readers as a validation for the interpretive strategies used by critics. In other words, Holland sees no significant difference between a common reader and a critic. The critic is no more than a "professional reader." He views critics "as simply another group of readers operating under special stringencies."²⁶ In reading and criticism, the process is simply the same: recreation through identity. For Holland, the critic's interpretation is merely an extension of the reader's interpretive activity or synthesis. Since "all interpretations express the identity themes of the people making the

interpretations,” the interpretations made by critics are also manifestations of their identity themes.²⁷

Obviously, Holland uses the label of literary criticism for what certainly amounts to little more than psychoanalysis. In his article, entitled “Unity Identity Text Self” Holland reiterates his position:

at the Center for the Psychological Study of the Arts, we have found that we can explain... differences in interpretation by examining differences in the personalities of the interpreters. More precisely, interpretation is a function of identity, specifically identity conceived as variations upon an identity theme.²⁸

Ultimately, he would suggest, every time we read we simply recreate ourselves--or more specifically are “condemned to reenact [our] own particular ‘identity theme’ over and over, regardless of the texts [we] encounter.”²⁹ This theory is not merely limiting in terms of its approach to literature--no matter what we read, we will continue to be reacting only to our own, unchanging inner theme--but it is also very limiting as a psychological paradigm. Holland suggests that we are born with these identity themes, and that despite the stimulus of living we do not change these themes. His theory most unfortunately neglects the highly gratifying experience of a reader who is changed by a text, the very human experience of growth and development.

Holland’s approach gives absolute priority to the individual as a the creator of the text. He does not see the reader’s response as guided by the text, but rather as one motivated by deep-seated, personal, psychological needs. The fault with this approach is that it simply writes off or at least ignores any

existing standard of right and wrong, with the reader determining the interpretation of the text according to his "identity theme." If the text is an object which the reader creates, then there is no way one can differentiate the text from the reader. In other words, there is no text before there is a reader. Hence, if the reader or the interpreter does not conceive the text's meaning to be there as an object for contemplation, he will have nothing to think or talk about.

Hollands' approach has little use as a critical method because it does not allow the reader to qualify his subjective responses. Such responses, those quite important, are not an end in themselves. They need to be incorporated into a larger conversation on literature in a way which significantly contribute to better understanding of texts. He does not mention how such responses should be utilized as a tool for better awareness, not only of oneself, but, more significantly of the literary text.

III

David Bleich and Norman Holland have exchanged views on each other's work: Their interaction reveals not only the points of affinity and difference between their approaches, but also it demonstrates their shared differences from other reader-oriented critics³⁰.

Bleich, following Holland, believes that "the perception of the poem is a subjective reconstruction rather than a simple recording of facts." He discusses a reader's "style of perception," the forms of "individual perception created by the particular biases of the reader." A reader's report of perception tells "what he sees in the poem or what he thinks the

poet says," while reports of affective response describe "the actual affect [fear, satisfaction, indignation, etc.] he felt while reading the poem."³¹ Associative response embodies those aspects of the reader's previous experience that are stimulated by the affect derived from his reading experience. Similar to most reader response approaches, Bleich's "subjective criticism" posits that meaning is not in texts but in readers. However, the distinguishing characteristic of his work is its emphasis on the emotional response of the reader. Meaning itself becomes "a direct outgrowth of the reader's emotional grasp of the story."³²

Bleich is of the view that there is no such thing as an objective world, but rather a world in which we assume subjective truths as objective facts. Thus, he dismisses the notion of an objective text completely independent of the reader. However, he does not wrestle with the question of interpretation's relation to the text during the reading process. Instead, Bleich refers primarily to critical interpretation, an activity subsequent to the reading experience: "for the reader, the interpretation is the response to his reading experience."³³ Once again, the emotional response comes into play: it directly influences the critical interpretation. "The reasons for the shape and content of both my response and my interpretation are subjective."³⁴

The subjective approach, which he holds presumes that each individual's most pressing motivations are to understand her/himself. Bleich presupposes that any utterance is motivated to indicate an intention. Thus, any given text driven by motivation offers its readers an intention.

Since the reader is primarily motivated to understand her/himself, he is now caught in-between this need and the need to figure out the intention of the text. Bleich argues that this conflict is resolved by the reader in two ways of reacting to the text. First, the reader reacts spontaneously or subjectively to what he/she reads and then in a second step he/she tries to give the text an objective meaning. Subjective criticism tries to come to terms with the first reaction a reader gives to a text, though the second reaction might be superficially seen an objective one. According to this argument, the second or objective reaction to a given text stems from and is influenced by the first. Following this rationale there would be no such thing as objectivity. Thus, the first reaction to the text is central to Bleich and his subjective criticism. In the end a text will work as a mirror to flashback the reader's own psyche while he is engaged in the reading process.³⁵ In this process the object of the text at hand becomes more than the sum of its words and pages. Bleich criticizes the New Critics for doing exactly that: counting the words and naming them. By naming the words in a text one starts to judge the text as well. But to judge a text the critic establishes a subjective set of values, which depends on his selective perception. Using a selective perception is, of course, a subjective process. Thus, even the interpretational instruments used by the New Critics were in themselves already beyond the mere collection of data within a text. Bleich assumes that a work of literature is by itself an object but becomes a symbolic object as soon as it is received by the reader. Since the sheer existence of a book depends on someone who writes it and someone who reads it, Bleich proves that the New Critics wrong if

they refer to a work of literature just in terms of an object: "The Fallacy of the New Criticism is its assumption that a symbolic object is an objective object."³⁶

Bleich, like Holland, focuses on the unconscious responses of the reader to the text: the emotional responses, the infantile, adolescent, or simply "gut" responses. However, while Holland seeks the identity theme of the individual, demonstrating how our infantile responses form our mature ways of relating to the other, Bleich denies that we can ever find another's identity theme: "Even if we explore many responses and in depth, they have to be conceived as local phenomena and related not to permanent character structure, but to immediate motives, preoccupations, and characteristics. A response always helps us find out something about ourselves."³⁷ Bleich wants us to know ourselves, but insists we do not come to know ourselves by trying to determine identity themes. Rather, we should try to understand our feelings and motivations.

In his first book, *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*, Bleich focuses on adolescents and how their responses to texts are a result of their developing sexuality, a development which goes on with life itself but which becomes increasingly anxiety-ridden during college years. Bleich seeks to show how personal conflicts the reader is undergoing as he reads motivate his feelings about texts. For example, adolescent sexual anxieties aroused by fear of body inadequacy, concern with sexual identification/differentiation, and the American society's insistence on a prolonged

adolescence have a lot to do with adolescent reading responses.

Bleich offers a detailed account of his teaching techniques. He states that before analyzing any work of literature, he introduces himself to the class and discusses the way he wants his students to look at literature. He wants them to feel free to give their own unique responses to literature. The first few classroom sessions are designed to help students become aware of and communicate their subjective feelings. Their idiosyncratic personal responses are not attacked but discussed sympathetically. After a sense of trust has been established, the class turns to poetry. Bleich wants his students to be as personal as possible when they discuss poetry. He wants to articulate their affective responses, their free associations, and any anecdotal material that occurs to them. 'The protocols' of Bleich's students turn out to be exceedingly personal.³⁸ After they have finished working with poetry, Bleich's class turns to short stories. When he is using short stories, Bleich focuses mainly on such questions as the most important word, the most important passage, or the most important aspect of a story. His students' protocols on short stories by D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, and Henry James focus on those questions. Thus, Bleich believes he moves his class from the personal to the interpersonal. The movement from the interpersonal to the social is then accomplished by reading a novel instead of a short story and by analyzing student responses to the novel to see if a communally held value can be found in them. Temma Berg argues that though Bleich's movement from poetry to short story to novel would seem to say something about the way in which he views these three categories of literature,

it is clear that what guides the movement from personal to interpersonal to social is not the change in genre. Rather, it is due to the tenor of the questions Bleich asks. Therefore, the movement from personal to interpersonal to social is something that Bleich has decided beforehand will happen, and he creates a situation which he believes enables it to happen.³⁹

The psychological background of Bleich plays an important role in presenting his model of reading. In *Subjective Criticism*, he assumes that any act of interpretation is motivated. Thus, it is quite significant to understand the motives behind interpretation. In addition, the only way to determine the motivations behind interpretations of texts is to look at subjective responses to texts in the supportive environment of a democratic classroom, where each reader's response receives the same respect. In general, however, we are all, according to Bleich, motivated by a desire to increase our self-understanding:

The logic of interpretation is that its resymbolizing activity is motivated and organized by the conscious desires created by disharmonious feelings and/or self-images; the goal of these desires is increasing the individual's sense of psychological and social adaptability.⁴⁰

We interpret in order to gain some kind of knowledge which will resolve some difficulty we may have had or explain something that was puzzling us.

Though many of his critics have accused Bleich of being left with an infinite number of idiosyncratic readers reading idiosyncratically, that is not where Bleich wants to be left. He seeks ways to negotiate new knowledge by collective consensus. Bleich's movement is always away from the individual toward the group. In *Subjective Criticism*, Bleich introduces the idea of negotiation: new knowledge is the result of free negotiation by members of the group. In other words, in the classroom—or in whatever community of which one is a member—all bring forth their individual responses. Then the group reaches a consensus.

Bleich assumes that interpretive knowledge “is subjective... not a formulation of some unchanging ‘objective’ truth, but the motivated construction of someone’s mind.” He argues that “interpretation is the creation of fiction,” which “always tests its viability in ongoing interpersonal relationships.” In other words, interpretive judgment “is a subjective act, framed in objective terms, whose...success, rather than truth, is measured by its capacity for re-assimilation by other readers.”⁴¹

Bleich finds fault with argument advanced by E.D.Hirsch that when a reader shares the meaning of words with the author, this makes the meaning of the words in the text objective and determinate. He rejects Hirsch's argument that literary forms and conventions also create meaning, which to him is a mere triviality in interpretation since it does not amount to a dispute. To Bleich, Hirsch's argument fails when there is verbal ambiguity. Bleich says:

By deciding on a purpose in common and in advance, and by then pursuing this

purpose in dialectic with the response statement, the knowledge developed is understood as one sort among many likely interests of each reader. The ethical precepts formulated from the dialectic between the reading experience and one's own life experience represent genuine, usable, consequential knowledge, as opposed to ritual locutions or sanctimonious declarations of having discovered the true moral purpose of the author.⁴²

Hence, Bleich is inadvertently saying that there is no existing standard of right and wrong, with the reader determining the interpretation of the text most suitable to his or her needs. In this case, there is no clear distinction between the objectivity of the text and the subjectivity of the reader.

Bleich views the subjective/objective distinction as absolute and therefore criticizes Holland's transactive paradigm, which denies that absoluteness. Holland claims that "objective reality" and 'pure experience' are themselves only useful fictions, vanishing points we approach but never reach. The problem, then, is not to sort out subjective from objective but to see how the two combine when we have experiences."⁴³ Bleich rejects this view and criticizes Holland's "set of auxiliary concepts and constructs" which are aimed at "affirming both the subjective and the objective and the space in which they combine."⁴⁴

In reply, Holland claims that he "could flesh out David Bleich's proclamation of 'the primacy of subjectivity,' providing both a theoretical base and a wider application for his intuitions about response."⁴⁵

This statement does not answer Bleich's charges, however, since that "fleshing out" is what is at issue. A more effective response is Holland's counter charge: "Bleich's failure to take advantage of these new discoveries about identity replication and DEFT perception leave him no way at all to count for recreation of private experience into intersubjective consensus. ... How can there be a consensus like 'darwinism' or 'New Criticism' if each member of the consensus is responding only to his own inner promptings? What an extraordinary coincidence they would represent!"⁴⁶ At the level of critical exchange, Holland provides the strongest argument for a more complex model of reading and criticism than the model Bleich presents. As Holland further explains, "each of us accepts external knowledge or the opinions of others as we find we can use them to recreate our several identities (a transactive account of Bleich's 'interpersonal and inter-communal negotiation')"⁴⁷

IV

David Bleich's model, which he terms "subjective criticism," more adequately provides for emotional response to literature. His model focuses on three major responses - perceptive, affective, and associative - along with the critical judgment of assigning importance. Nevertheless, the problem with Bleich argument lies in its relativism. In his model, there are as many possible responses to literature as there are people reading. While it is difficult to suggest that any reader's response is unimportant, it is equally difficult to encompass them within the domain of serious and genuine literary criticism. However, Bleich is to be thanked for encouraging

readers to note and value their responses, but unfortunately he fails to offer any advice on what to do with these responses. The reader may examine his affective response by neatly articulating the emotional reaction he has to a text, he may explore his associative response by carefully describing the memories and images which a text evokes in him, but if that reader does not say anything beyond what those affective and associative responses are, then he has little to offer a reader of criticism.

Bleich's model is inappropriate because it does not specifically provide a useful way to apply those responses to the text. He does not provide a useful way of talking about the text. The affective and associative response seem to have much more intellectual value in terms of psychoanalysis of the reader than in terms of a critical analysis of the text. By privileging the emotional response above the intellectual, Bleich misses the opportunity to effectively apply the reader's response to a deeper understanding of the text, and his method of criticism leaves us with more psychoanalytic information than literary knowledge.

Bleich's models of perceptive response and assigning importance do offer the critic somewhat more value in helping to apply response to the text itself--that is, it remains necessary in these two areas to at least maintain a connection to the text itself as the focus of response. Perceptive response, however, does not offer a great deal of added insight to either the critic or to the reader of criticism. Roughly, in the process of paraphrasing the text at hand, perceptive response allows the reader to express her or his own perspective of what is happening in the text, but it does not require the reader to justify the validity of

that perspective nor to explain the significance of seeing the work from that perspective. Again, Bleich stops short of legitimate or viable critical discussion.

For instance, Bleich spoils his own analysis of Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" because instead of discussing structural significance, he discusses his own sexual frustrations and his associations to the teacher who influenced his liking of the story. The reader of his analysis is left with a great deal more knowledge about Bleich but not very much insight into the text.

Despite their differences, Holland and Bleich can be grouped together when compared to other reader-response critics. Holland's "transactive criticism," and Bleich's "subjective criticism," more adequately provide for emotional response to literature. They define their critical paradigm (subjective or transactive) from a psychological perspective. They emphasize the individual rather than the group; reading, for both of them, is a function of personality not a shared strategy. Furthermore, Bleich and Holland study the reported responses of readers in developing their theories. As Holland remarks, "it is the close analysis of what readers actually say about what they read that differentiates."⁴⁸

Notes

- 1 Temma Berg, "Psychologies of Reading," in Tracing Literary Theory ed. Joseph Natoli (Urbana & Chicago Univ. Ill Press.1987), p. 248.
- 2 Steven Milloux, "Reader-Response Criticism?" Genre 10 (Fall 1977) p.413.
- 3 Stanley Fish, Is There A Text in This Class? Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980, pp.326-327.
- 4 Peter Rabinowitz, "Whirl Without End: Audience Oriented Criticism" in Contemporary Literary Theory ed. G. Douglas Atkins & Laura Morrow. London: Macmillan, 1989, pp.82-83.
- 5 Steven Milloux, "Reader-Response Criticism?" p.414.
- 6 N.J.Karolides. Reader Response in the Classroom: Evoking and Interpreting the Meaning in Literature (New York: Longman, 1992) pp.24-25.
- 7 Ibid., p.25.
- 8 Ibid., p.23.
- 9 Norman Holland, "The Mind and the Book: A Long Look at Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies 2.1 (January 2000): 13
- 10 Norman Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Recreation Through Identity," Criticism, 18 (Fall 1976). 334.
- 11 Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns Of Communication in Prose Fiction From Bunyan To Beckett. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. xii.
- 12 Holland, 'Recovering "The Purloined Letter": Reading as Personal Transaction', in Susan Suleiman and Inge Crossman (eds.), The Reader In The Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.356.
- 13 Holland, "Transactive Criticism," p. 364.
- 14 Ibid., p. 366.
- 15 Ibid., p. 367.
- 16 Ibid., p.368.
- 17 Ibid., p.370.
- 18 Norman Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," In Jane P. Tompkins (ed.) Reader Response Criticism: From

- Formalism to Post-Structuralism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). P.122.
- 19 Norman Holland, "The New Paradigm: Subjective or Transactive?" New Literary History, 7 (Winter 1976), 343.
- 20 Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," p.123.
- 21 Holland, "Transactive Criticism," 342.
- 22 Holland, "Unity," p.124.
- 23 Holland, 5 Readers Reading (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p.12.
- 24 Ibid., p.40.
- 25 Ibid., p.12
- 26 Holland, "A Letter to Leonard," Hartford Studies in Literature, 5 (1973), p.21.
- 27 Ibid., p.28.
- 28 Holland "Unity Identity Self Text," P.124.
29 Ibid., p.110
- 30 Steven Milloux cites a number of articles dealing with this critical exchange between Holland and Bleich. For a list of those articles see Milloux, "Reader-Response Criticism," p. 421..
- 31 David Bleich, Readings And Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism (Urbana, Ill.:NCTE,1975),pp.27,32,31,33.
- 32 David Bleich, "The Subjective Character Of Critical Interpretation," College English, 36 (March 1975),746.
- 33 Ibid., p.745.
- 34 Bleich, Readings and Feelings, p.62.
- 35 See Chris Bladick, Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present., p. 170.
- 36 K.M. Newton, Twentieth -Century Literary Theory. (Macmillan,1988), p.233.
- 37 David Bleich, "Pedagogical Directions in Subjective Criticism," College English, 37 (January 1976), 463.
- 38 The term 'protocol' was first used by I.A. Richards in his pioneer study on students responses. See his Practical Criticism,(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) First published in 1929..
- 39 See Temma Berg, "Psychologies of Reading," pp. 268-9.

- 40 Bleich, Subjective Criticism, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). pp. 83-84.
- 41 Bleich, "The Subjective Character," pp. 743-44, 751-52.
- 42 Bleich, Subjective Criticism., p.158.
- 43 Holland, Poems In Persons, Poems in Persons: An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) p.2.
- 44 David Bleich, "The Subjective Paradigm in Science, Psychology, and Criticism," New Literary History, 7 (Winter 1976) 332.
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