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## Reader's Response Theory and its Representation in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

**Mousumi Das**

Guest-Lecturer

PDC Girls' College

Bolpur, Birbhum.

West-Bengal.

The term reader-response criticism means not only a theory but also a range of approaches in which the focus of critical attention is how a reader responds to a text. Its development was a reaction in which there is an emphasis on the text and the reader gives an ultimate source of meaning.

In literary criticism, reader-response theory means for the first time, the reader began to come into focus as the determiner of meaning. The canon of reader-response criticism was depicted by a series of retrospective collections, overviews and reading lists of the early 1980s and the texts included in the canon. The authors of the text were-

David Bleich, Norman Holland, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Jonathan Culler, these five critics gave emphasis on theoretical assumptions, pedagogical practices, critical strategies and explicitly rejected the New Critical Formalism.

One may begin with David Bleich's Subjective Criticism. In his books such as "Readings and Feelings" (1975) and "Subjective Criticism" (1978), Bleich insists that teachers and critics should start their talk about literature with the individual reader's response. He argues again and again that literary text exerts no constraints on the individual reader and there is no such thing as an objectively correct interpretation.

He rejects formalism and accepts alternatives of New Criticism: his subjectivism which simply reverses its objectivism. Another critic of subjective criticism is Norman Holland. Holland sees that the reader's 'identity theme' producing a text's meaning. For Holland, the identity of a reader is unique to that reader, just as for a new critic the unity of a poem is unique to that poem.

In case of Iser, he borrows from Ingarden's phenomenology and Gadamer's hermeneutics to propose a theory of reading that attempts to avoid the extremes of reader's subjectivity and textual objectivity. He often figures the reader as a creative gap-filler who fills textual gaps of various kinds.

Fish explores the reading tactics endorsed by different critical schools, by the literary profession and by the legal professions introducing the idea of 'interpretive communities' that share particular modes of reading. In his detailed interpretations, he constructs intricate narratives of how a text guides its readers step by step through the syntax of sentences and describes how a text's rhetoric creates a temporal pattern of

responses which puzzles revelations, corrections, lessons, surprises and a wealth of other effects often passed over by critical perspectives focusing on holistic meaning.

Gerald Prince's 1975 *Study of the Narrate* is widely regarded as a classic in the Reader-Response field. The narrate is the same thing as the implied author. The narrate is a full-fledged fictional person, whether or not "he" is a name referred to in the text.

Another important German reader-response critic was Hans Robert Tauss. For Tauss, readers have a certain mental set, a "horizon" of expectations from which perspective each reader at any given time in history reads.

Thus Reader-Response criticism allows for variegated types of readers ranging from the subjective Reader of Holland or 'informed' reader of Fish, the competent reader of Culler and the super reader of Riffature, each with his individual (subjective) or transactive (inter-subjective) modes of reading.

In the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the admixture of past and present tense keeps the action or progress of the poem in "temporal limbo"- Fergusson argues that rime creates a kind of apparent relation between cause and effect for the reader to discover a kind of clear sense in the rime which is actually the moral value of the poem.

In the very beginning of the poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the Ancient Mariner stands before one of three young men about to participate in a marriage feast and one of them is spell bound by the eyes of the Mariner and the guest is constrained to listen his tale and at the same time the reader is thrown into an entranced state. In the trance-like state, reader probably wants to listen the story. When the story begins, "There was a ship" and it departs from the harbour and sails south across the equator until a storm drives the ship "for days and weeks" (1798 1.47) into the Antarctic region.

The presence of Albatross is seen by the fog which is greeted by crew, the ship is bounded by ice and when the ice splits and the ship goes towards the north, the Mariner sees that an Albatross follows the ship and the Mariner "shot the ALBATROSS" (1817 1.82) after nine days and nights.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> part, there was sunshine and south wind. At first the crew blames the Mariner as he has shot the Albatross and at the same time praises the Mariner as the good weather persists replacing fog and frost. Here the reader may response as he wants to know what is more important- shooting of the Albatross or persistence of good weather? The reader probably will give the answer themselves.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> part, there is an approaching ship which is tacking and veering as it nears. The Mariner sucks the blood by biting his arm and cries, "A sail! A sail! " When the ship comes close, two characters were present in the ship.

A plankless Spectre – and it mov'd  
Like a being of the Sea!

The Woman and a fleshless Man  
There in sate merrily.

The male figure is a skeleton with bits of charnel crust attached and his bones are black with crack while the garishly painted female is an image of syphilitic prostitution- her lips are red, her looks are free, her locks are of golden colour, her skin is as white as leprosy. These two characters create a kind of terror in the readers' mind. Readers probably want to ask the question- Is this two characters are from real world or from world beyond? Readers become surprised and horrendous and they think- these two characters are the representations of Life-in-Death and Death-in-Life or not?

In the fourth part when the wedding guest professes the Mariner as a ghost, the reader becomes excited as they think him as 'ghost'. The Mariner observes the "moving moon" and in the light of the moon he becomes fascinated by seeing the sea creatures and "bless [es] them unaware" (1817 1.267). As the Mariner loves the creation of nature, he is removed from the curse of nature. Reader gives response to nature's justice on the Mariner. One who commits crime or sin, he or she obviously gets punishment from nature. It is an education learned by the Reader from the Mariner's activity and Reader accepts this.

In the fifth part there is loud wind and storm. After deep sleeping, the Mariner awakens when it is raining. With the Sun at zenith, the ship goes forward and the Mariner falls in a swoon. Before awaking, he listens that two voices are discussing about his crime in the air.

Here the reader is also discussing the crime of the Mariner simultaneously. The first voice asks what makes the ship move and the second voice speaks of harmony between the ocean and the moon. When the first voice asks a question, the second voice answers that the air is "cut away" in front of the ship and it closes behind it. (18171.428).

He is mesmerized by the crew where the ship sails into the harbour and the illuminated dark-red shadows rise out of the calm water. When the ship advances, a boat appears and its Pilot shouts. The Mariner watches the Pilot and the Pilot's boy is approaching and sees a Hermit abroad and the Hermit sings religious songs. Now the reader probably wants to know who is the Hermit and what is the real identity of the Hermit? But now the reader gets no answer.

In the concluding part of the poem Hermit is described as a woodland dweller. The Hermit marvels at the decrepit appearance of the Mariner's ship and the pilot thinks that it looks "fiendish." A sound is listened under the deep water and the ship sinks-as did the Albatross-"like lead" (1817 1.553), spewing the Mariner up to the surface of the whirlpool.

Despite these stabilizing tendencies, the poem is an amalgam of voices in subtle discord and reader's voice is also assimilated here. The hypnotic cadences of the Mariner has a great deal of pre-reformation religiosity, (with "Jesu," the saints, and Mariolatry at

every turn), which the Church of England and the readers of Coleridge's time can scarcely be expected to share. In the Hermit's voice, there is the accent of religion modulated and enriched by admiration of the natural world. Hermit is totally different from the abject superstition of the Pilot and Pilot's boy.

In this poem Reader can explain so many interpretive issues. Reader thinks that the Mariner is not the person on whom they can believe to explain the supernatural events. The Wedding Guest speaks with immature petulance as it is guessed by the reader. The Reader imagines that the Mariner's cross is similar to that of Everyman who casts adrift in an unredeemed natural world.

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