

The Theory of Reading Between Aesthetics of Reception and The Act of Reading: A Theoretical and Applied Study on "The Rain Song" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and "Le Pont Mirabeau" by Guillaume Apollinaire

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Abstract: Contemporary literary criticism has witnessed profound methodological shifts, moving interest from the author to the text, and then to the reader as an active party in the production of meaning. Reading theory has emerged as one of the most important modern critical trends that rehabilitated the recipient, particularly through the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, the founders of the German Constance School. This study aims to present the theoretical foundations of the Aesthetics of Reception and The Act of Reading, analyze their key concepts, and then apply them to "The Rain Song" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and "Le Pont Mirabeau" by Guillaume Apollinaire to uncover the reader's role in constructing meaning and producing significance (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978).

Keywords: Reading Theory, Aesthetics of Reception, The Act of Reading, Jauss, Iser, al-Sayyab, Apollinaire

Introduction

The 20th century witnessed a series of methodological shifts in literary studies that affected various elements of the literary process. Initially, historical and psychological approaches focusing on the author and the conditions of textual production dominated. Then, structuralism emerged, making the text the focal point of critical inquiry, treating it as an independent structure that could be studied in isolation from its author and conditions of production (Eagleton, 2008).

However, the excessive focus on the text led to the marginalization of an essential element of the literary process: the reader. This prompted several researchers to reconsider the nature of the relationship between the text and the recipient. In this context, reading theory emerged, positing the reader as an active agent in the production of meaning and considering that the text is only completed through the act of reading and reception (Iser, 1978).

This critical orientation is linked to the German Constance School, founded by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Jauss focused on the history of the reception of literary works and how their meanings change over time, while Iser concentrated on the internal mechanisms of reading and the role the reader plays in filling textual gaps and producing meaning (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1980).

The importance of this topic stems from it reflecting one of the most significant shifts in modern literary criticism, where meaning is no longer viewed as a fixed element within the text but rather as the result of the interaction between the text and the reader within different cultural and historical contexts (Holub, 1984).

Research Problem

This study stems from the following core problem:

How did reading theory contribute to redefining the relationship between text and reader? And to what extent can the concepts of the Aesthetics of Reception and The Act of Reading be employed in the analysis of modern poetic texts?

From this core problem, a set of sub-questions emerges:

- What are the intellectual foundations upon which reading theory is based?
- What are the main concepts of the Aesthetics of Reception according to Jauss?
- What are the main concepts of The Act of Reading according to Iser?
- How has this theory influenced contemporary Arab criticism?

Research Objectives

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Define reading theory and its intellectual and philosophical backgrounds.
- Study the Aesthetics of Reception as articulated by Hans Robert Jauss.
- Study The Act of Reading as articulated by Wolfgang Iser.
- Highlight the relationship between reading theory and modern hermeneutics.
- Analyze the impact of reading theory on contemporary Arab criticism.
- Apply the theory's concepts to Arabic and Western poetic models.

First: The Intellectual and Philosophical Backgrounds of Reading Theory

Reading theory did not emerge suddenly; rather, it resulted from multiple philosophical and critical accumulations that contributed to re-evaluating the nature of the literary process. Its roots can be traced back to phenomenology, philosophical hermeneutics, and modern literary criticism (Eagleton, 2008).

1. Phenomenology and Its Influence on Reading Theory

Phenomenology is associated with the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, who sought to study phenomena as they appear in human consciousness. Husserl affirmed that knowledge is only achieved through the relationship of consciousness with its objects, opening the field for interest in the recipient's role in producing meaning (Eagleton, 2008). Reading theorists benefited from this concept by considering that the literary text only possesses actual existence through the act of reading. Meaning does not exist ready-made within the text but is formed during the interaction between text and reader (Iser, 1978). Thus, reading becomes a cognitive and perceptual process that goes beyond merely receiving the linguistic message to actual participation in the production of meaning.

2. Modern Hermeneutics

Modern hermeneutics significantly contributed to the development of reading theory, especially through the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who rejected the idea of fixed meaning in texts, arguing that understanding is a historical process influenced by the reader's background and cultural context (Gadamer, 2004). Gadamer emphasizes that the reader does not approach the text devoid of preconceptions but carries a set of cultural and cognitive references that influence the process of interpretation. Therefore, every reading represents a dialogue between the text's horizon and the reader's horizon (Gadamer, 2004). This concept directly influenced the "horizon of expectation" later developed by Jauss within the framework of the Aesthetics of Reception (Jauss, 1982).

3. The Crisis Faced by Structuralism

Despite the significant contributions of structuralism to studying literary texts, it faced numerous criticisms due to its neglect of the reader and its exclusive focus on the text's internal structure (Eagleton, 2008). Structuralists treated the text as a closed system of linguistic relations, whereas reading theory argued that the text can only perform its aesthetic function through interaction with the recipient (Tompkins, 1980). This critique contributed to the emergence of new directions interested in studying reception and reader-response, including Reception Theory and Reader-Response Criticism.

4. Towards the Centrality of the Reader

As a result of these shifts, the reader occupies a central position in modern literary studies. No longer viewed as a passive recipient consuming ready-made meaning, the reader has become an actual partner in the production of meaning (Fish, 1980). This shift led to the emergence of new concepts such as: horizon of expectation, implied reader, textual gaps, and the historicity of reception. These concepts now form the theoretical foundation for modern studies in reading and reception (Holub, 1984).

If the preceding philosophical backgrounds have paved the way for the emergence of reading theory, Hans Robert Jauss was the first to transform these ideas into an integrated critical project through what became known as the "Aesthetics of Reception" (Jauss, 1982).

Second: The Aesthetics of Reception According to Hans Robert Jauss

The Aesthetics of Reception is one of the most prominent critical trends emerging in the second half of the twentieth century, fundamentally linked to the works of Hans Robert Jauss, who sought to rehabilitate the reader after the dominance of approaches focusing on the author or the text. Jauss presented his theoretical project in his famous lecture "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," where he called for rewriting literary history from the perspective of reception rather than limiting the study to the conditions of textual production (Jauss, 1982). Jauss argues that literature cannot be understood through the text alone, because the literary work only achieves its actual existence when it enters into a relationship with the reader. Hence, the study of literature should include the history of its reception and its influence on recipients across different ages (Holub, 1984).

1. The Concept of Aesthetics of Reception

The concept of the Aesthetics of Reception is based on the premise that the aesthetic value of a text stems not only from its linguistic or artistic characteristics but from the nature of the relationship it establishes with its audience. The literary text does not impose a final meaning on the reader; rather, it offers multiple interpretive possibilities that vary according to different cultural and historical contexts (Jauss, 1982). This concept formed a significant shift in literary studies, moving interest from the text as a closed structure to literary communication as an interactive activity between the text and the recipient (Eagleton, 2008).

2. Horizon of Expectation

The concept of the "horizon of expectation" is among the most important introduced by Jauss. It refers to the set of knowledge, experiences, and aesthetic criteria the reader possesses before encountering the literary text (Jauss, 1982). The horizon of expectation consists of multiple elements, including: knowledge of the literary genre, experience with prior texts, cultural and social references, and prevailing aesthetic standards in society. When a recipient reads a new text, they compare it, consciously or unconsciously, with what they already know, and through this comparison, the nature of their response to the literary work is determined (Holub, 1984). The horizon of expectation varies from one reader to another and from one era to another, which explains the differences in readings and the multiplicity of interpretations.

3. Aesthetic Distance

The concept of aesthetic distance relates to the relationship between the reader's expectations and what the text actually offers. If the text perfectly matches what the reader expects, its aesthetic

impact is limited. However, if it succeeds in surpassing these expectations and creating a sense of surprise, it achieves greater artistic value (Jauss, 1982). Hence, Jauss argues that great literary works are those that effect a transformation in the prevailing aesthetic taste and push the recipient to reconsider their prior conceptions about literature (Holub, 1984). The importance of this concept appears in explaining the status acquired by pioneering literary works, which often faced initial resistance before becoming part of the recognized literary heritage.

4. Historicity of Reception

Jauss rejects the idea of a fixed and final meaning for the literary text, affirming that the meanings of a literary work change with changing readers and historical contexts in which the text is read (Jauss, 1982). A single text may be received in different ways across various time periods because each generation reads it based on its own interests and values. Therefore, the history of literature is not merely the history of authors and texts; it is also the history of successive readings of these texts (Jauss, 1982). This concept contributed to the development of comparative literary studies, as it allowed for understanding the shifts in the reception of literary works over time (Holub, 1984).

5. The Reader in Jauss's Project

Jauss does not view the reader as an isolated individual but as part of a reading community belonging to a specific cultural and historical context. Therefore, his interest centers on how different groups receive literary works and on the changes affecting collective taste over time (Jauss, 1982). This perspective differs from Iser's, who later focused on the individual reader and the internal mechanisms of reading (Iser, 1978).

6. The Importance of the Aesthetics of Reception

The significance of Jauss's project lies in its rehabilitation of the reader after a long period of author- and text-centric literary studies. It also helped explain the changes in critical judgments and the shifting status of literary works across different ages (Holub, 1984). The concepts of horizon of expectation, aesthetic distance, and historicity of reception have become fundamental in modern literary criticism, used in studying various literary genres, from poetry and the novel to theatre and cultural criticism (Jauss, 1982).

Summary

It becomes clear through Jauss's project that the literary work does not possess a fixed aesthetic value independent of readers; rather, its value is determined by its history of reception. The concepts of horizon of expectation, aesthetic distance, and historicity of reception have contributed to building a new conception of literature based on continuous interaction between the text and its audience (Jauss, 1982; Holub, 1984).

Third: The Act of Reading According to Wolfgang Iser

Wolfgang Iser is one of the most prominent theorists of the German Constance School, associated with what became known as the "theory of the act of reading," which focused on studying the dynamic relationship between text and reader. While Jauss focused on the history of the reception of literary works and the changing responses of readers over time, Iser was preoccupied with how meaning is formed during the reading process itself (Iser, 1978). Iser started from the fundamental idea that the literary text does not contain ready-made, final meaning but offers a set of semantic possibilities that are realized through the interaction between text and reader. Therefore, reading is not a passive reception of meaning but a creative activity in which the reader participates in producing meaning (Iser, 1978).

1. The Concept of The Act of Reading

Iser argues that the literary work does not exist in a complete form within the text alone but is realized through the act of reading. The text offers signals, signs, and linguistic structures, but these elements only become meaningful when the reader interacts with them, reorganizes them, and interprets them (Iser, 1978). From this perspective, reading becomes a continuous process of constructing meaning, where the reader moves from one part of the text to another, constantly revising their previous understanding in light of new information discovered during reading (Tompkins, 1980). Iser emphasizes that meaning does not pre-exist within the text but is generated gradually during the interaction between text and reader, which makes each reading a unique and distinct experience (Iser, 1978).

2. The Artistic Pole and the Aesthetic Pole

Iser distinguishes between two essential aspects of the literary work:

a. *The Artistic Pole*: This consists of the text written by the author, i.e., the linguistic and artistic structure materially present in the literary work (Iser, 1978).

b. *The Aesthetic Pole*: This consists of the actual realization of the text during reading, i.e., the image formed in the reader's mind as a result of their interaction with the text (Iser, 1978).

Iser argues that the true literary work does not exist in either of these poles in isolation but is realized through the interaction between them. Thus, the written text does not represent the literary work in its final form but constitutes a basis for producing meaning that is realized during reading (Freund, 1987).

3. The Implied Reader

The concept of the "implied reader" is among the most famous introduced by Iser. It refers to the reader presupposed by the text itself, to whom its narrative and linguistic strategies are directed. Every text constructs an implicit image of a reader possessing certain cognitive and cultural abilities that help them understand and interpret the work (Iser, 1980). The implied reader does

not represent an actual specific person but is a textual structure determined by the text's own characteristics. When an author writes a literary text, they implicitly place a set of assumptions about the expected reader, such as: their cultural level, interpretive ability, knowledge of symbols and cultural references, and readiness to participate in producing meaning. Thus, the implied reader serves as the link between the text and the actual reader (Iser, 1980).

4. Textual Gaps

One of the most important concepts developed by Iser is that of "textual gaps" or "blanks." These refer to places where the text does not provide complete information or definitive explanations, prompting the reader to intervene to complete the meaning (Iser, 1978). Iser argues that successful literary texts are not those that present everything directly but those that leave open spaces for the reader to help fill. The functions of textual gaps include: stimulating interpretive activity, engaging the reader in constructing meaning, creating polysemy, and enhancing interaction between text and recipient (Iser, 1978). Through these gaps, the reader becomes an actual partner in producing the literary text.

5. The Dynamics of Reading

Iser emphasizes that reading is a dynamic, moving process, not a static activity. The reader does not perceive the text all at once but reads it gradually, and with each new part, reconsiders their previous understanding (Iser, 1978). A reader might form a certain expectation at the beginning of the text, only to discover new elements later that force them to revise that expectation. Thus, reading involves a continuous movement between expectation, discovery, revision, and reconstruction. This movement is what makes literary meaning renewable and capable of evolving during reading (Tompkins, 1980).

6. The Production of Meaning

Iser rejects the concept that meaning is a fixed element existing within the text. He argues that meaning is produced through the interaction between the textual structure and the reader's interpretive activity (Iser, 1978). The text offers a set of semantic possibilities, while the reader converts these possibilities into actual meanings based on their experiences, knowledge, and culture. For this reason, different readers may produce different interpretations of the same text without necessarily implying that one reading is correct and another is wrong (Freund, 1987).

7. The Impact of Iser's Theory on Literary Criticism

Iser's ideas have broadly influenced modern literary studies, as they shifted attention from the text as a fixed object to reading as a process of producing meaning (Holub, 1984). The concepts of the implied reader and textual gaps have helped develop narrative studies and the analysis of literary texts from an interactive perspective. Many researchers in literature, cultural criticism, and narratology have utilized these concepts to explain the relationship between texts and their audiences (Tompkins, 1980).

Preliminary Comparison Between Jauss and Iser

Although Jauss and Iser belong to the Constance School, each focused on a different direction. Jauss focused on the history of reception, the horizon of expectation, reading communities, and the development of literary taste (Jauss, 1982). Iser focused on the act of reading, the implied reader, textual gaps, and the production of meaning during reading (Iser, 1978). Nevertheless, the two projects are complementary in their affirmation of the reader's centrality and their fundamental role in realizing the literary work.

Summary

Wolfgang Iser redefined reading as a creative process in which the reader participates in producing meaning. The concepts of the implied reader, textual gaps, and the artistic and aesthetic poles have contributed to building a new conception of the literary work based on continuous interaction between the text and the recipient. Thus, reading became an essential element in understanding literature and analyzing its meanings, not merely a stage subsequent to the writing process (Iser, 1978; Iser, 1980).

Fourth: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Its Relationship to Reading Theory

Philosophical hermeneutics represents one of the most important intellectual foundations upon which contemporary reading theory relied. This trend is associated with the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, who sought to develop a comprehensive theory of human understanding, starting from a critique of traditional conceptions that viewed interpretation merely as a means to extract a fixed meaning from texts (Gadamer, 2004). Gadamer argues that understanding is not merely a technical or methodological process but a historical human experience in which language, culture, and the reader's personal experience intertwine. Therefore, every reading represents a new encounter between the text and the recipient, producing a new meaning that cannot be reduced to the author's original intention (Gadamer, 2004).

1. The Concept of Understanding According to Gadamer

Gadamer rejects the belief in the possibility of reaching an objective and final meaning for the text because the reader does not approach the text neutrally but carries a set of experiences, ideas, and preconceptions that influence the process of understanding (Gadamer, 2004). He affirms that these preconceptions are not an obstacle to understanding, as was believed in some earlier philosophical trends, but rather represent an essential condition for every interpretative process. The reader does not start reading from a vacuum but sets out from their cultural and historical background, which makes every act of understanding linked to the context in which it occurs (Ricoeur, 1976).

2. Fusion of Horizons

The concept of the "Fusion of Horizons" is among the most important introduced by Gadamer. A horizon refers to the totality of experiences, knowledge, and conceptions that determine an individual's worldview. When a person reads a literary or philosophical text, they enter into a dialogue between their own horizon and the text's horizon, which belongs to a different time and culture (Gadamer, 2004). Through this dialogue, what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons occurs, where a new understanding is formed that matches neither the text's horizon alone nor the reader's horizon alone, but is produced by their interaction. This idea directly influenced reception theories, which affirmed that meaning is generated during the reading process, not before it (Jauss, 1982).

3. Historicity of Understanding

Gadamer argues that all understanding is historical understanding because humans live within a specific cultural and temporal context that influences their worldview (Gadamer, 2004). For this reason, literary texts do not possess fixed and final meanings; rather, their meanings change with changing times and readers. This concept supported Jauss's ideas on the historicity of reception, making it possible to explain the differences appearing in the reception of literary texts between one generation and another (Jauss, 1982).

4. Language as a Medium for Understanding

Language holds a central place in Gadamer's philosophy, as he argues that human understanding is always achieved through language. Language is not merely a tool for conveying ideas but is the field within which human experience itself is formed (Gadamer, 2004). Hence, the reading process is not just decoding linguistic symbols but participating in the world of meanings the text makes available. This concept has helped develop literary studies focusing on the relationship between language, interpretation, and reception (Ricoeur, 1976).

5. The Influence of Hermeneutics on Reading Theory

The influence of Gadamer on reading theory can be observed through several key concepts, including: historicity of understanding, multiplicity of interpretations, dialogue between text and reader, rejection of final closed meaning, and the centrality of the recipient in producing meaning. These ideas have become part of the theoretical foundation upon which the Aesthetics of Reception and the Theory of the Act of Reading are based (Holub, 1984).

Summary

It is evident through Gadamerian hermeneutics that literary understanding is a historical and dialogical process formed through the interaction between text and reader. The concepts of fusion of horizons, historicity of understanding, and the centrality of language constitute the philosophical foundation upon which reading theory relied in affirming the recipient's role in producing meaning (Gadamer, 2004; Holub, 1984).

Fifth: The Impact of Reading Theory on Contemporary Arab Criticism

Since the 1970s, contemporary Arab criticism has witnessed increasing openness to modern critical approaches, including reading theory, which found wide resonance among several Arab critics and researchers (Fadl, 2002). Arabic translations of works by Jauss, Iser, and Gadamer have contributed to spreading the concepts of reception and interpretation, leading to the emergence of new critical studies focusing on the reader's role in producing meaning (Lahmidani, 2008).

1. The Reception of Reading Theory in Arab Criticism

Arab interest in reading theory began with the translation of several foundational texts related to the Aesthetics of Reception and the Act of Reading. Arab critics found in this theory an effective tool to transcend some of the constraints imposed by rigid structuralist approaches (Fadl, 2002). This theory also helped rehabilitate the humanistic and communicative dimension in the literary process, after focus had largely been on textual structure alone (Al-Masdi, 2006).

2. Rereading Arab Heritage

One of the most important results of employing reading theory in Arab criticism is the rereading of heritage texts from a new perspective. Researchers have become interested in how ancient texts were received across different ages and how their meanings changed according to different cultural and historical contexts (Lahmidani, 2008). This approach has allowed highlighting the vitality of the Arab heritage and its ability to produce new meanings in every era.

3. The Reader in Arab Critical Studies

The spread of reception concepts led to a growing interest in the reader's role in contemporary Arab criticism. The reader is no longer viewed as a passive recipient but has become an active agent participating in producing meaning and reshaping the text during reading (Fadl, 2002). This has been reflected in numerous studies dealing with poetry, the novel, and narrative discourse from the perspective of reader response and interpretive mechanisms (Al-Masdi, 2006).

4. Limits of Applying Reading Theory in Arab Criticism

Despite the importance of reading theory, its application in the Arab context has faced several challenges. Some studies merely transmitted Western concepts without considering the specificity of Arabic texts, while others sought to reconcile modern reception concepts with concepts from the Arab critical heritage such as tasting (*tadhawwuq*), interpretation (*ta'wil*), and understanding the addressee (*fahm al-mukhatab*) (Lahmidani, 2008). Nevertheless, this theory has contributed to enriching Arab critical practice and opening new horizons for studying literature.

Summary

Reading theory has contributed to renewing contemporary Arab criticism by rehabilitating the reader and rereading heritage and modern texts in light of reception and interpretation concepts. Despite the challenges of applying Western critical frameworks to Arabic literary contexts, Arab critics have found in the concepts of the horizon of expectation, textual gaps, and the implied reader effective tools for enriching literary analysis and opening new interpretive horizons (Fadl, 2002; Lahmidani, 2008).

Sixth: Applying Reading Theory to "The Rain Song" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab

"The Rain Song" is considered one of the most prominent foundational texts of modern Arabic poetry. Since its publication, it has become a landmark in the trajectory of Arabic poetic renewal. This poem gains special importance from the perspective of reading theory because it represents a model of the open text that does not offer one single, final meaning but allows multiple interpretive possibilities depending on different readers and their cultural and historical contexts (Jayyusi, 1977).

1. Horizon of Expectation in the Poem

When the poem appeared in the 1950s, the Arab reader was accustomed to the traditional model of vertical (*'amudi*) poetry. However, al-Sayyab presented a different poetic experience based on free verse (*shi'r al-tafila*), symbolism, and semantic openness, causing a "breach of the horizon of expectation," as Jauss terms it (Jauss, 1982). This breach contributed to reshaping the modern Arabic poetic sensibility, as the reader became required to participate in producing meaning instead of merely receiving it directly.

2. The Aesthetics of the Poetic Image

Al-Sayyab opens his poem with the famous lines:

عينك غابتنا نخيل ساعة السحر
أو شرفتان راح ينأى عنهما القمر
عينك حين تبسمان تورق الكروم
وترقص الأضواء كالأقمار في نهر
يرجه المحداف وهنا ساعة السحر
كأنما تنبض في غوريهما النجوم أنشودة المطر
مطر.....مطر.....مطر

*Your eyes are two palm groves at dawn,
Or two balconies from which the moon recedes...
When you smile, your eyes make the vines leaf,
And the lights dance like moons in a river...
Rippled by an oar at lazy dawn,*

*As if stars throb deep within them... The Rain Song...
Rain... Rain... Rain...*

This image constitutes a clear example of the text's openness to interpretation. The grove, palms, and dawn are not merely descriptive elements but transform into symbols allowing the reader to produce multiple meanings ranging between love, fertility, dream, and rebirth (Moreh, 1976). Thus, the aesthetic of the image lies not in its direct meaning but in its ability to stir the reader's imagination and motivate them to participate in constructing meaning.

3. Symbolism and the Production of Meaning

Rain is the central symbol of the poem. Its meanings multiply between fertility, renewal, hope, resurrection, and collective salvation. The text does not impose a single meaning for this symbol but leaves the field open for the recipient to determine its meaning according to their own experience (Jayyusi, 1977). From Iser's perspective, these symbols represent incomplete semantic elements that only acquire meaning during the act of reading (Iser, 1978).

4. Textual Gaps

The poem abounds with textual gaps that drive the reader to participate in producing meaning. The poet does not definitively specify the nature of the salvation rain heralds, nor does he offer a direct interpretation of the relationships between the different symbols (Iser, 1978). These gaps allow for multiple interpretations, explaining the poem's continued presence in the Arab literary memory. What makes the poem rich with deep meanings is the abundance of metaphors and tropes, turning it into a field for semantic work. Hence, the role of the implied reader emerges in exploring the poem's depths.

5. Historicity of Reception

"The Rain Song" reveals the validity of Jauss's concept of the historicity of reception. The generation of the 1950s read it in light of issues of colonialism and national liberation, while the contemporary recipient reads it from a more aesthetic, existential, or broadly humanistic perspective (Jauss, 1982). Thus, the poem continues to produce new meanings with changing times and readers.

Summary

The application of reading theory to "The Rain Song" has demonstrated that the poem represents a model of the open text, rich in symbolic possibilities and textual gaps that invite the reader to participate actively in the construction of meaning. The breach of the horizon of expectation achieved by al-Sayyab through free verse and layered symbolism has ensured the poem's continued relevance across successive generations of readers, each producing new meanings from it according to their own cultural and historical contexts (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978).

Seventh: Applying Reading Theory to "Le Pont Mirabeau" by Guillaume Apollinaire

"Le Pont Mirabeau" is among the most famous poems by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire, published in his renowned collection *Alcools* in 1913. It stands as a prime example of modern symbolist poetry open to multiple interpretations (Apollinaire, 1965).

1. Horizon of Expectation

The text begins with a simple spatial image represented by the Mirabeau bridge and the Seine River, but the reader gradually discovers that the place transforms into a symbol of time, memory, and lost love. Here, the aesthetic distance discussed by Jauss is achieved, as the text moves from realistic description to existential meditation (Jauss, 1982).

2. The Symbolism of the River

The Seine River represents the central symbol of the poem. It signifies not only flowing water but also symbolizes time that never stops and memories that pass without return (Apollinaire, 1965). The meaning of this symbol is determined through the reader's interaction with the text, affirming the role reading theory grants the recipient in producing meaning (Iser, 1978).

3. The Implied Reader

The text assumes a reader capable of grasping the poem's symbolic nature and connecting its different elements. Therefore, the implied reader addressed by the text possesses the ability to interpret and complete what the poet does not state directly (Iser, 1980).

4. Textual Gaps

Apollinaire does not clarify the nature of the emotional relationship he discusses nor the reasons for the separation, leaving wide spaces for interpretation. These gaps lead to engaging the reader in reconstructing the poem's emotional experience (Iser, 1978).

5. Historicity of Reception

As with al-Sayyab's poem, readings of "Le Pont Mirabeau" have changed over time. Some readers received it as a love poem, while others saw in it a philosophical meditation on time, existence, and memory (Jauss, 1982).

Summary

The analysis of "Le Pont Mirabeau" has confirmed the applicability of reading theory to Western modernist poetry. Through the concepts of the implied reader, textual gaps, and the historicity of reception, it becomes clear that Apollinaire's poem does not confine itself to a single fixed meaning but opens itself to multiple readings ranging from romantic elegy to philosophical meditation on time and loss. Each reader brings their own horizon of expectation to the text, producing a unique and distinct experience (Iser, 1978; Jauss, 1982).

Eighth: A Comparative Study of the Two Poems

The comparison between "The Rain Song" and "Le Pont Mirabeau" reveals several points of similarity that affirm the universality of reading theory. In both texts, the poets rely on symbolism and semantic openness, leaving the reader an essential role in producing meaning. Both poems also contain a significant number of textual gaps that prompt the recipient to participate in the interpretative process (Iser, 1978).

However, the fundamental difference lies in the nature of the central symbol. Rain in al-Sayyab's poem is associated with resurrection, renewal, and collective hope (Jayyusi, 1977), while the river in Apollinaire's poem is associated with time, memory, and individual loss (Apollinaire, 1965). Furthermore, al-Sayyab employs the symbol within a collective framework related to the issues of the homeland and the Arab individual, whereas Apollinaire focuses on the subjective and emotional experience.

Despite these differences, both texts highlight the crucial role of the reader in realizing the literary work and producing its ever-renewed meanings.

Summary

The comparative reading of the two poems has revealed the universality of reading theory's concepts and their applicability to both Arabic and Western literary traditions. Despite the differences in the nature of the central symbol — rain as collective renewal versus river as individual loss — both texts share an openness to interpretation and a reliance on the reader's active participation to complete their meaning. This confirms that the literary text, regardless of its cultural origin, is always an invitation to dialogue between the author, the text, and the reader (Iser, 1978; Jauss, 1982).

Conclusion

This study has shown that reading theory represents one of the most significant shifts in contemporary literary criticism, moving attention from the author and text to the reader as an essential element in the production of meaning. Jauss's Aesthetics of Reception demonstrated that the history of literature is also the history of its reception, and that the value of a literary work is determined through readers' responses to it over time (Jauss, 1982).

Iser's Theory of the Act of Reading explained that the literary text does not contain a ready-made, final meaning but offers semantic possibilities realized through the interaction between the textual structure and the reader's interpretive activity (Iser, 1978).

The applications to "The Rain Song" and "Le Pont Mirabeau" showed that great literary texts remain open to multiple readings and are capable of producing new meanings according to the different historical and cultural contexts of recipients.

Thus, the study affirms that the reader is not a consumer of meaning but an active partner in its construction, and that literature remains a space for continuous dialogue between texts and their readers across different ages.

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