Reader-centred approach

‘Is there a text in this class?’ – Stanley Fish

“Words will only be intelligible if [the reader] already has the knowledge they are supposed to convey, the knowledge of the assumptions and interests from which they issue.” (p.581)

Fish’s theory is linked to the “philosophical tradition in which the stability of objects has always been a matter of dispute.” (p.581)

“The change from one structure of understanding to another is not a rupture but a modification of the interests and concerns that are already in place.” (p.582)

“Authority [in a classroom] depends upon the existence of a determinate core of meanings because in the absence of such a core there is no normative or public way of construction what anyone says or writes.” (p.582)

“In literary criticism this means that no interpretation can be said to be better or worse than any other.” (p.583)

“How does communication ever occur if not by reference to a public and stable norm? The answer [is that] communication occurs within situations and that to be in a situation is already to be in possession of a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place.” (p.583)

Fish does not believe that there is “a distance between one’s receiving of an utterance and the determination of its meaning – a kind of dead space when one only has the words and then faces the task of construing them.” (p.583)

“Language is aways perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. That structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social.” (p.583)

“When [a reader’s] beliefs change, the norms and values to which he once gave unthinking assent will have been demoted […] that attention will itself be enabled by a new set of norms and values.” (p.584)

“The point is that there is never a moment when one believes noting, when consciousness is innocent of any and all categories of thought.” (p.584)

‘Reader-response theory and the literary transaction’ – Louise M Rosenblatt

“A story or poem does not come into being simply because the text contains a narrative or the lines indicate rhythm and rhyme. Nor is it a matter simply of the reader’s ability to give lexical meaning to the words.” (p.268)

“Reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances.” (p.268)

“A literary work of art, depends, then, not simply on the text but also on the stance of the reader.” (p.268)

“In order to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts.” (p.270)

“’The sense of a word,’ Vygotsky reminds us, ‘is the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word. It is a dynamic, fluid, complex whole…’” (p.271)

“Along with […] the public meaning of the word, there are the private kinesthetic and affective elements that comprise the complex, fluid matrix in which language is anchored.” (p.271)

“Words are primarily aspects of sensed, felt, lived-through experiences.” (p.271)

“Understanding the transactional nature of reading would correct the tendency of adults to look only at the text and the author’s presumed intention, and to ignore as irrelevant what the child actually does make of it.” (p.272)

“Responsibility to the total text and the question of ‘the author’s intention’ comes later.” (p.273)

“We need to see that the reader’s stance transcends the distinction between the real and the fictive.” (p.273)

“The formalists and post-structuralists are [interested] in identifying literature with its system of conventions, its technical traits. My reply is that, by focusing on these components of the text, they fail to do justice to the total aesthetic experience.” (p.276)

“The transactional theory avoids concentration solely on the reader’s contribution or on feeling for its own sake, but centres on the reciprocal interplay of reader and text.” (p.276)

“Every aesthetic reading of a text is a unique creation, woven out of the inner life and thought of the reader.” (p.277)

‘The reading process – a phenomenological approach’ – Wolfgang Iser

“The literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two.” (p.279)

“The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized […] The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence.” (p.279)

“This convergence [of text and reader] can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual.” (p.279)

“[The reader] sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself.” (p.280)

“Reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character.” (p.280)

“Sterne’s conception of a literary text is that it is something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination.” (p.280)

“The reader is able to ‘climb aboard’ the text.” (p.282)

“The literary text needs the reader’s imagination, which gives shape to the interaction of correlatives foreshadowed in structure by the sequence of the sentences.” (p.282)

“The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the ‘reality’ of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written.” (p.283)

“The reading process always involves viewing the text through a perspective that is continually on the move.” (p.285)

“The ‘stars’ in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable.” (p.287)

“The author of the text may exert plenty of influence on the reader’s imagination […] but no author will ever attempt to set the *whole* picture before his reader’s eyes.” (p.2870

“With a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things.” (p.288)

“This ‘gestalt’ […] is not given by the text itself; it arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook.” (p.289)

“The process [of reading] is virtually hermeneutic.” (p.290)

“As we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and the breaking of illusions.” (p.293)

“Reading reflects the structure of experience to the extent that we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text.” (p.296)

“George Poulet […] says that books only take on their full existence in the reader.” (p.297)

“Text and reader no longer confront each other as object and subject, but instead the ‘division’ takes place within the reader himself.” (p.298)

“[When reading,] although we may be thinking the thoughts of someone else, what we are will not disappear completely.” (p.298)

“We can only make someone else’s thoughts into an absorbing theme for ourselves.” (p.299)

‘The horizon of expectations’ – Hans Jauss

“The literary experience […] describes the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance.” (p.22)

“A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions.” (p.23)

“A corresponding process of the continuous establishing and altering of horizons also determines the relationship of the individual text to the succession of texts that forms the genre.” (p.23)

“The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts.” (p.23)

“The reader of a new work can perceive it within the narrower horizon of literary expectations, as well as within the wider horizon of experience of life.” (p.24)

“The way in which a literary work, at the historical moment of its appearance, satisfies, surpasses, disappoints, or refutes the expectations of its first audience obviously provides a criterion for the determination of its aesthetic value.” (p.25)

“[A text] first experienced as a pleasing or alienating new perspective, can disappear for later readers.” (p.25)

“The relationship between literature and audience includes more than the facts that every work has its own specific, historically and sociologically determinable audience, that every writer is dependent on the milieu, views and ideology of his audience.” (p.26)