



The Possible Reader - How Can He Be 'Possible'?

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Abstract

How can it be possible that the value of a critical instrument as a theoretical category is proved as valuable in practice? In reading cases, especially during the interpretation of fictional texts, this would be an attractive ideal, at least as a methodological premise. In this work, we represent some theses on the equivalence of the Possible Reader as a theoretical instrument, with the Empirical (real) Reader of fictional texts. We are focused on presenting a hybrid Eco (Umberto) - Fish (Stanley) Model (EFM), the relevant structure and its function, its validity in implementation. The Structuralist Model of Eco (Umberto) is seen in function of text constructing, while the Phenomenological Model of Fish (Stanley) is seen as an alternative to meaning issues, as a complementary entity with Eco's model. What can be said, for now, is that not only in the ethical level, but also with concrete results, this method justifies itself. The meaning produced by the Possible Reader as a theoretical category appears almost in the same parameters with the meaning produced by a community of empirical readers. We should specify, at the end, that the model is in its experimental phase, as it will need more exhaustive theorizing in the future.

Keywords: Possible reader, meaning matrix, reader response, ethic of method, Albanian literature

1. Introduction

In one of our recent works we came upon an unexpected conclusion that required a further explanation. After elaborating data from a survey on the construction of meaning by a number of students, as empirical readers, on a random chosen novel (Kadare, 2008) and comparing them with the results on the construction of meaning by a Possible Reader (Eco, 2006) as a theoretical category on a few texts by Kongoli, F., (Xhindi, 2010), an eminent author in today's Albanian literature, we conclude that the meaning produced by the students on Kadare's work was essentially the same as that produced by the Possible Reader as a theoretical category on the texts of Kongoli "the construction of the same initial state of religion, existence in a world outside of any system of values, guided by nothing but the basic needs of existence" (Xhindi, 2015, p.136).

The survey, as synthetic formula derived from a theoretic version (Eco, 2006, p.72), contained a number of sections where data were collected on a) Reader competence; b) Perceived referential network; c) Isotopies at the discourse level; d) Isotopies at the narrative level; e) The actantial and ideological structure.

The model we used to collect data from the students (Xhindi, 2015) practically interpreted, this time, a theoretically previously used instrument. Precisely, trying to give an answer to the question

on the causes of the relative success of Fatos Kongoli's novels, respectively the cycle *Burgjet e Kujtesës (Prisons of Memory)* (Xhindi, 2010), the theoretical approach to find appropriate methodological indicators for that case led me to the patterns of interaction through reading proposed by Eco (2006) and Fish (1982) concluding to an hybrid Eco-Fish model

Let's present it, summarizing reasoning used at least twice (Xhindi, 2017) for issues of similar nature.

Eco's model was chosen mainly for structural accomplishment of the text. It formulates in poetical terms what happens between the text and the reader in time. Eco sees its meaning to be closed in interpretative relations text-reader, where the first's status remaining objective is, in the same time, open to the reader cooperation, who tries a number of interpretative choices, which even though being textually limited, still remains not exactly defined within a semantic model in the form of an encyclopedia, which fulfills the conditions for a textual pragmatism. It removes the meaning from the textual frame to offer a moving model, where meaning is not discovered, but materialized in the reader-text relation. The reader takes part in the form of using a encyclopedia, through which a possible view of the text can be build. Fish, also, explain that undoubtedly the words are meaningful or that the reader isn't free from the textual constrains. The kind of experience allowed from the text is controlled from linguistic and literary competence of the individual reader.

The reader reacts in this way not in any other to words because he acts supported by the same rules used by the author to generate them – at this point Fish (1982 b) reuses the gist of the interactive activity of the reader according to Eco (2006). For both of them meaning isn't anymore a feature of the literary text, but a product of the reader's activity, forced and limited from the text. The question looking for an answer isn't what is the meaning of the text but how do the readers make the meaning in time? From this point of view Eco's time meaning appears as a function of the reader's competence under the constrains of the text to take interpretative decisions to construct a structure, which for Fish meaning is an order of preliminary impulses motivated by text's signals and which in Fish's practice can be interpreted. The meaning to Eco is a structural function of the text, while to Fish it is a function – if it can be defined this way, pre-structural, an immediate impulse, meaning of the first level. The models have compatibility in spite of the debate about text-centrism.

As mentioned we have tried to prove it in two other cases how this instrument, the Possible Reader, works, and again it results in realization, with different intensity, of the same integral meaning, that is, a conclusion that gives seriousness to our hypothesis (Xhindi, 2015) that the meaning created by the Possible Reader - as a theoretical instrument - of any literary text, indiscriminately, in a given period, is likely to mark the relevant Meaning Matrix that empiric readers of that period would build.

2. Methodology: A Structural Analyze

Our study aims the justification and consequently the usage as a theoretical instrument of the hybrid Eco-Fish model, which will replace in a satisfactory manner the actions of the real reader, thus providing a practical vantage in critical evaluation of the literary text.

The methodological premise for the study is the equivalence of the function fulfilled by two different critical instruments: on one hand this instrument, The Possible Reader, is given as a theoretical category, as the implementation of Eco-Fish model, while on the other hand, The Possible Reader is the practical implementation of empiric, real reader actions. As long as they fulfill the same function in the same way, they can substitute each other, which gives the right to the Eco-Fish model to also represent the interpretative action of empirical readers, at least of that Model Community we chose for our study.

From survey data the Community of Readers in that case had these relative features: the number of respondents is 60, out of which 58 female; 8 of them aged 18 years old, 37 of the age 19 years old, 10 of the age of 20, 2 of the age of 21, 1 of the age of 22, 1 of the age of 23, 1 of the age of 26 years old. Geographically, the group consisted of students from the southwestern part of Albania: Vlora (30), Fier (20), Berat (4), Lushnje (2), Tepelenë (2), Skrapar (1), Gramsh (1). The

cultural construct representing the sample can be considered relatively homogeneous. We can talk about a sustainable representation of a psycho-cultural district that includes the southwestern corner of Albania.

To the overwhelming extent, the religious origin of the families from the group's representatives was Muslim (48); 9 of them came from families of Orthodox Christian origin; 3 did not present religious origin. When respondents were asked by which religion they culturally were identified, despite the practice of religious rites, 34 of them felt Muslims, 14 Christians, and 12 were not culturally united with any religion. In terms of the social status of the sample income, the sample appeared somewhere at the relative level of poverty. By relative measure (20), the family situation of the respondents was aggravated for various reasons. 10 of the respondents worked part-time. The preferences of the respondents for the most part (13) related to a mix of art-reading-sports-music; 13 others dedicated to education, 12 sports, 7 reading, 3 music, 1 politics, 1 travelling, 1 collection, 1 media, 1 painting; 6 were not expressed. When asked for their political preference, 24 said they opted to the left, 9 right, and, optimistically, 27 of them said that they felt neutral.

Reassuring: The Model Community represented a sustainable cultural construct of southwestern Albania, overwhelmingly 18-20 years old, almost entirely female, overwhelmingly by low-income families, deriving from 80% of Muslim-religion families but feeling culturally identified with Islam in 56% of them, 23% felt culturally united with Christianity and 21% culturally unrelated with no confidence. The political trends of those who politically choose went to the overwhelming left to 72%; 18% went to the right. Out of the total number of respondents, 45% did not lean either to the left or to the right.

In the following reasoning we tried to define theoretically through the structural analyze the compatibility of the components of the Eco-Fish hybrid model, describing and scrutinizing the nature and function of each component during their possible implementation in the context of results taken from the aforementioned Model Community of readers.

As a methodological solution, our model is placed in the context of an epistemological revolution inside the platform of the reader's response criticism. In the case of Kongoli's texts as our first case of study, objects are commented on an existence given in time and space (Xhindi, 2010) where they are materialized, interpreted, through a process met by the reader, which completely corresponds the time and specific space of existence of the object. In its core this principle is phenomenological.

We thus stand for the thesis articulated by Iser (1974) at the beginning of the *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach*, which, however, is more inclusive than a limited pattern in the timely implications, necessary in the case of our study:

The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text. Thus Roman Ingarden confronts the structure of the literary text with the ways in which it can be konkretisiert (realized). The text as such offers different "schematized views" through the subject matter of the work can come to light, but the actual bringing to light is an action of Konkretisation. If this so, then the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact lies between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader. (p. 274)

2.1 Eco's model implications

The most representative model of this interpretive interaction was that of Eco (2006). He presents his model initially in a theoretical framework of the opposition of two generations of textual

semantics: the first, is polemical with the linguistics of the phrase, and the second, is a compromise version between language study as a structured system that precedes the actualizations of discourses and a study of the discourses and texts as products of a spoken language.

Eco (2006) puts its own project in the context of the debate on a code theory and encyclopedia's competence for which an interconnected language-system code has its own level of institutionalization that allows it "to predict" all possible discourse actualizations, all possible uses under specific circumstances and contingencies and a theory of generation and interpretation of the current discourse actualizations. According to Eco (2006) the two generations theories have shown that there are components of a text that aren't part of phrase. Both theories accept that the interpretation of a text is also due to pragmatic factors and furthermore, than one text can't be analyze on the basis of a grammar of phrase that functions on clearly semantic syntactic basis. Thus, the prospect of constructing a theory of discourse with a visible pragmatic component produced the decline of any textual analysis carried out on terms of elementary components, whether semes, semantic signifiers, or others, or constructive elements of a closed set with universal features or language units used to define other language units.

His objections seems reasonable when in front of criticizing attempts to a componential analyze in the form of vocabulary and which refuses to include the encyclopedia's competence in the theoretical framework. He sees the last connected with contextual circumstantial selections that includes in the first case as an abstract opportunity the emergence of a term given in other terms, while in the ulterior case they include the possibility that a term appears in relation to the circumstances of the pronouncement.

Eco (2006) links the theory of codes with the theory of textual competence. He notes that a textual theory needs pragmatic rules that determine how and under what conditions the recipient is authorized to be co-textualized, to cooperate for actualization what can only exist in the co-text, but that already exists virtually in sememe.

He notes that there are co-textual collaborations that function semantically only in relation to the co-text, but whose contextual perspective can be decided on the basis of a componential analysis in the form of an encyclopedia. Eco (2006) offers the concept of sememe as a virtual text and text as an extension of the sememe - it tries to verify how encyclopedia register can derive from over-coding elements through the recording of normal and intertextual scenarios.

2.1.1 *From The Model Reader to The Possible Reader*

The textual pragmatics of Eco (2006) involves terms like the Model Reader which - in front of a text filled with "white" spaces, gaps that need to be filled up as the text is a lazy mechanism - takes the interpretative initiative. The text foretells and guides him, encourages the reader through the concept of the textual strategy. In an analogous and reciprocal manner the Model Reader and the Model Author are just textual strategies.

Eco represents levels of textual cooperation at the limits of the artificial narrative where the reader applies to the discourse a given code to transform the expressions into a first level of content, which for Eco are the discourse structures: in parallel, he observes the circumstances of pronunciation as an indicator of extra linguistics codes at the level of competence.

Eco (2006) presents a system of codes and sub codes which include: 1) a basic vocabulary, 2) pronunciation codes, occasionally contextual and circumstantial ones, 3) cooperation rules, 4) decodifying skills of the reader 5) interference from ordinary scenarios, 6) interference from intertextual scenarios, 7) ideological decoding skills. In time, the actualization of this code and subcodes system produces: a) the topic-oriented discourse structures to the isotopies, a hierarchical orientation entity. Eco sees the actualization of the discourse isotopies and further of narrative isotopies into a macrostructure model.

Macrostructural decisions by which the reader constructs the story – main narrative isotopie - do not depend on arbitrary decisions - they update story promoted by the text through predicting possible worlds (Eco, 2006). This timely design is driven by ordinary and intertextual scenarios during whose implementation they are verified on the basis of coherence as well as the essential or necessary ingredients, the possibility of designing these possible worlds. At the end of the model

proposed by Eco, but not at the end of the reading process, stands the actantial and ideological structures; even though linearly presented they do not reflect the linear logic of the model. Eco who feels the difficulties of his model sees them installed quickly while reading, whereas the ideological structure appears as an axiological connotation that accompanies the actual textual poles.

The construction of a systematic reading at the level of textual pragmatics requires, first, the completion of certain prerequisites with functional content: at the beginning, it is important the definition of the model, of the first configuration with which the text is subjected to reading. Further, we think that is important the definition of the reader, of the actual role of the latter in relation to the text on a clear implicit norm, which we call competence and constitutes the potential model reader, and finally, the author's definition, which in a written text is presented as the subject of the speech (discourse). In this the author is presented stylistically through a textual idiolect, as an actantial role sometimes, as an illocutional coincidence, as interference from a outsider subject.

This is in general the taxonomy proposed by Eco (2006). A text is a pragmatic semantic-syntactic artifact, the interpretation of which is part of its generative project. It is presented as a system of joints to which the reader's cooperation is expected or encouraged. When proposing an ideal or a type text model, contemporary theories usually present it in terms of structural levels understood as the different levels of production / interpretation of the text. The concept of textual levels is problematic and has often become the subject of debate: as it appears in its linear form the text has no levels.

However, it isn't necessary to have symmetry between the textual expression plan and the interpretative movements that update the contents of the text. The notion of the text levels could just be a theoretical notion, a meta-textual scheme that depends on the theoretical designs that support it. Eco refuses to define the directions and hierarchy of the stages of the interpreting process, claiming that in the concrete process of interpretation all levels and sub-levels can reach one another through overcoming, without necessarily encompassing, obligatory strategies. Eco also thinks that in the generative process it does not happen otherwise: he notes that in the interpretive realization of textual levels there is no logical process but rather a process of interdependence between meta-text divisions.

2.1.2 *Within the text's limits*

In this way, the precondition for a textual pragmatic is the linear presentation of the text. A text just as it appears on its linguistic surface represents an expressive chain of zigzags to be updated by the reader. As for the actualization, a text is incomplete for two reasons:

First, an expression remains *flatus vocis* for as long as it does not merge into a given code. In this sense, the reader is postulated as an actor capable of organizing in a context of predetermined syntactic rules, the mutual functions of terms in the context of the phrase. It can be said that the text postulates a sort grammatical competence on the part of the reader.

Second, a text differs from other types of expression due to its complexity in writing. The main motive of his complexity is the fact that it is weaved by the untold: it is precisely this unattainable, which needs to be updated at the level of content actualization. For this reason, the text activates interaction by the reader. A text is woven out of empty spaces, from the pit to be filled, which the one who produced it predicted (or not) that would be filled: first of all, because a text is a lazy mechanism that lives by promoting the interaction of readers; further, because the aesthetic function that qualifies the text gives the reader the interpretative initiative. A text is produced for someone who will update it, although it isn't meant that this person exists specifically and empirically.

A text is a product whose interpretive destiny must be part of its generating mechanisms: the production of a text implies the application of a strategy, part of which is the prediction of each other's movements. In the organization of its own textual strategy, the author begins on a series of competences that orient the content: it starts from the belief that the entirety of the competences it refers to is the same as that of the reader.

Moreover, it envisions a Model Reader, capable of collaborating in textual actualization, as the author thinks, and who moves into interpretation as the author moves into production. The means

by which he realizes this are: language, choice of an encyclopedia type, choice of a given textual and stylistic fund etc. The author, on one hand, foresees, and on the other hand, builds the competence of his reader. So the forecast of the model reader does not just mean to be hoped that he exists, but it means moving the text in such a way that he is built.

The text helps to change the competence, however at different levels, in "open" or "closed" texts, and in terms of the difference between a interpretation driven by text, or its usage within the bounds of what Barthes (1999) calls the 'text of pleasure'. In this way, boundaries are set, which include the notion of interpretation as dialectics between author's strategy and model reader response. Whenever a model reader is in play, it implies his realization of the empirical (author) textual strategies, which materializes as a style; the model reader is defined as the presence of a set of "maximizing conditions" that are set out in a textual way that must be met to "make a text fully updated in its possible content". The model author is also a case of textual strategy: his shadow is built during the hypothetical prediction on the Model Reader, which, converted into "strategy" terms, defines the author as the sole subject of speech as a way of textual action.

However, the Possible Reader, as the concrete subject of the co-operation act, should design a hypothesis on the author, based on his textual strategy. The seriousness of the reader's hypothesis is more credible than that of the author on the Model Reader: the actualization of the text is not a fulfillment of the speech subject's intentions but one of the virtually contained goals in the text.

From a phenomenological view of the existence of the object, the Eco's model (2006) is sufficient, but the meaning of the structure produced by it is not a function of the model: the reader uses the competence to construct the structure and not the other way round. Moreover, the structure during its production has elaborated the competence to such an extent as not entitling the reader to decide on its meaning.

2.2 *Fish and the question of "the meaning"*

The question of the meaning of the structure we think is solved by Fish (Tompkins, 1980), who proposes an original reading theory: the attention focuses on instant instinctive reader response, or in Fish's words, in developing reader responses related to with words as they follow each other in time. Fish puts the spotlight on the sequences of reviews, predictions, returns, sentence after sentence and phrase after phrase, because "... what the method does is slow down the reading experience so 'events' one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attentions" (Tompkins, 1980, p.74).

What distinguishes Fish from its predecessors is the clearly articulated concept of reader activity as essential in understanding the reading process. Understanding, according to Fish (1982 b), is not something that someone derives from the text as the essence of the peel, but an experience of the reader during the reading process. The text, consequently, is not a focused object, but a sequence of events unfolding within the mind of the reader.

Namely, the purpose of literary criticism becomes the faithful description of the reader's activity. Redefining literature is no longer an object, but as an experience it turns the reader's response into focus literary attention. Fish's reader, unlike Iser's, does not fill the "cracks" created by the text by extrapolating from these cracks the meaning. The text is not an indication of possible meanings because "... the place where sense is made or not made is the reader's mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of a book" (Tompkins, 1980, p. 81). Fish argues that obviously the words make sense or that the reader is not free of textual constraints.

The type of experience that the text allows is settled by the literary and linguistic competence of the individual reader. The reader reacts in a way rather than another to words because it works based on the same rules that the author uses to generate them - at this point Fish reiterates the essence of reader interaction activity according to Eco.

So, as Fish states if meaning is no longer the feature of the literary text, but the product of the reader activity, the question that needs answers is not: what is the meaning of the text, but how the reader creates the meaning. In a certain way this question is answered by Eco's work on the structure of codes, semiotic conventions, however from a text-centric point of view.

In "*Interpreting the Variorum*" Fish (1982 b) argues that no one can decide what the meaning of a text is, which one of two contrasting readings best organizes textual data: moreover consulting the reader's experience as it is done in the critical course. If the line appears ambiguous then the meaning is neither A nor B, but the fact that the reader has to decide himself what is the meaning. Meaning is now defined on terms of experience. Although the place of meaning is the mind of the reader and not the pages of a book, the mental process of literary exchange is acknowledged as an effect of specific textual qualities, especially the end of the line.

Later Fish (1982 b) states that these specific categories of text disappear; they are no longer autonomous but constructed by the critic-readers. There is no pre-existing text to which the reader answers, nor does it have a reading in the traditional sense. The texts are not read but written by the reader since the formal text categories, the authoritative intentions they support, and the reader's interpretative strategies are mutually interdependent. But, how? To describe the qualities of a literary text is to make an interpretation of it. However, any element that promotes the response is the product of a particular interpretative framework. This framework creates the data and the responses.

The question that comes naturally is: do the texts have specific categories that promote the response. If the texts do not have such categories, then what stimulates the reader's response. Is this the case of the interpretation of interpretation? Fish (1982 b) responds that our perceptual habits are so automatic that we see them as facts, facts that in fact are a reality of interpretive conventions.

The text does not disappear, the data is there, but they have no objective status. Rather than interpreting it in response to what has already been said by the author or on the paper, it should be noted that it is the result of the interpretive strategies the reader owns. The change is as Fish states between a self-conscious interpretation as such and an in absence of this specific consciousness. As Fish argues meaning becomes more and more a function of the conscience of the reader, the power and creations of this consciousness become the subject of critical debate.

3. Results: Toward the Compatibility

Following the respective explanations, we come to the question of the compatibility of the models: can Fish's skepticism be compatible with the lack of specific categories of text with the structural epistemology proposed by Eco? Can the experience gained during the implementation of competence according to Eco on a given text, be involved with the notion of 'sense' according to Fish?

Fish (1982 b) speaks of 'perceptual habits', which itself is a reinterpretation. He remains at the limits of a descriptive term, which is not given in its content. We think, however, that this is just another term for competence: these perceptual habits are just applications of experience in a certain communicative circumstance. During the construction of structures, we do realize the detection of the application of a perceptual habit and the stimulation of another perceptual habit: the structure is simultaneously their consequence as well as their cause.

Perceptual habits, therefore, are given as a limited, classified (psychological) category of responses for a virtually unlimited literary sequence (series) of reading literary probabilities. Being limited is in their nature: in this way the reader's response (s) or meaning (s) of the structures would have to be reduced considerably, but it should be emphasized that the value of the reader's response as an entirety state of the reading makes it possible to formulate a relief of meaning out of the atomistic nature of the small discourse sequences.

Moreover, the term perceptual habit can be used too for large discourse units, even in their context. So the definition of a contour of meaning moves through an almost mathematical interval of combinations. In any circumstance, the fact that we use the structure produced according to Eco to give meaning according to Fish removes any intervention to formulate the meaning at the level of structures according to the ideological competence of the reader.

Despite the non text-centrist orientation of the model, we think that the text affects with its relief according to Eco, the correction of the meaning of an integral that characterizes the reader, a sort of preliminary structure of his perceptual habits.

Why the construction of the structure and relevant meaning is an action of the Possible Reader and not an action of the User of this Instrument (The Possible Reader)? How does the critic use this instrument?

We think that this model is justified ethically: the method is impersonal because the possible reader's competence (or perceptual habit) is verifiable, is a sort of language of experience where the signifying objects exists as a system for the potential signified objects - although limited - a system that can be described, which makes it possible to be explored from outside, even from a non-critical eye, any decision of the reader with the possible presence of the respective sign in the encyclopedia.

This is also relevant for the meaning of the structure: in this case, the language of experience (encyclopedia) would be a reduced, even specific, system (i.e., psychological) but with the ability to dynamically interconnect the action of the perceptual habits of the reader.

An open method, therefore, based in advance on a clear definition of the Possible Reader system of experience, so, his Competence.

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