Review

Stanley Fish with respect to the reader

Ruzbeh Babaee1* and Iraj Montashery2

1Department of Communication and Modern languages, University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia.
2Department of Communication and Modern languages, University Putra, Malaysia.

Accepted 10 December, 2011

The present study is an investigation of the reader-response theory on three works of Fish. In "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" (1970), "Interpreting the Variorum (II)" (1976), and "Normal Circumstances" (1978), Fish charts the progress of his evolving interpretive method. For this study, first, a comprehensive reading is done on Stanley Fish's three major works as well as on different attitudes toward the reader-response theory. Then, Fish's contribution to the development of reader-response theory is traced and the concurrence and contradictions of his ideas are shown with other critics such as William Wimsatt, Monroe Beardsley, and Norman Holland. Finally, the relevance and impact of his ideas in contemporary society are drawn.

Key words: Reader-response criticism, interpretive community, affective stylistic.

INTRODUCTION

Stanley Fish (1938) is one of the chief proponents of a school of literary criticism known as the reader-response criticism, rejecting the new critical position which concentrates on the text and thus excludes the reader, reader-response "focuses on readers' responses to literary texts" (Tyson, 1999: 153).

Fish's position has undergone considerable development since his important essay of 1970, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics", in which he emphasizes the temporal nature of the reading process and argues that the meaning of a literary text cannot be seen as separate from the reader's experience of it. In his later works, he confronts the objection that a reader-based theory inevitably leads to relativism by arguing that totally subjective responses are impossible since they cannot exist in isolation from sets of norms, systems of thought, etc., all of which are inter-subjective. Thus, he argues that the subject-object dichotomy breaks down, as there are no pure subjects and no pure objects. The object, including the literary text, is always constructed by the subject, or more exactly, by a group of subjects or what Fish calls an "interpretive community" that is composed of different sets of reading strategies and norms produce different communities of interpreters.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: rbabaei30@yahoo.ca.
an autonomous entity. But the arrival of reader-response unleashed different kinds of view points and unsettled the old assumptions and overturned the old established beliefs by Wimsatt and Beardsley. Another comparison is done with Norman Holland who explains the exuberant multiplicity among individual readings, while Stanley Fish believes in interpretive communication in reading. Finally, the relevance and the impact of Fish’s ideas in contemporary society are drawn.

**FISH’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF READER-RESPONSE THEORY**

**Literature in the reader: Affective stylistics**

One of the most persistent, if not always explicit, differences which have informed the evolution of critical methodology during the past several decades is the opposition of literature’s spatiality to its temporal extension. On the one hand, critics’ intent on stabilizing meaning through an objective analysis of its formal correlates within the text has viewed the literary work as a permanent form or structure whose signification is a function of its intrinsic configuration or architecture. This gesture, typical of the New Criticism, gives a high degree of autonomy upon the text and defines meaning as a property of a spatially conceivable object. At the other extreme, proponents of subjective criticism ascribe meaning to the experience of the reading subject who, through the progressive assimilation/transformation of the text, generates a signification, which is always radically personal. Such an approach deprives the text of both its autonomy and its spatiality, since it cannot be said to possess any single, stable, intrinsic, and significant configuration.

A superficial overview of the theoretical tendencies common to the influential critical programs of the past twenty years reveals an apparent shift towards this latter view. The incompatibility of the spatial / objective / autonomous and temporal / subjective / contingent models of the text is put into question by the act of reading.

Fish’s “Affective Stylistics” appears unique in many respects. Rather than locating the significance of a work in the eventual knowledge, we can derive through assimilating its referential field or identifying the signified that corresponds to every signifier; Fish redefines “meaning” as the experience, which the reader undergoes during the progressive apprehension and comprehension of the text. He displaces the burden of significance from the information content of the language in a given work to the activity, which that language provokes in its reader. For Fish, reading is an act based on the reader’s personal experience and specifying for that experience a meaning. Naturally, in such a perspective, the critic’s account needs no longer focus on the work as form or configuration. Left free to concentrate on the effects of the reading, producing “an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time” (Fish, 1970: 126). Affective stylistics can avoid the major danger of the formalist approach which “transforms a temporal experience into a spatial one [...] steps back and in a single glance takes in a whole (sentence, page, work) which the reader knows (if at all) only bit by bit, moment by moment” (Fish, 1970: 140-1). Clearly, Fish considers the temporal dimension of the literary experience: “the basis of the method is a consideration of the temporal flow of the reading experience, and it is assumed that the reader responds in terms of that flow and not to the whole utterance” (Fish, 1970: 127).

Fish suggests that all responses of the reader to a given piece of literature develop within a “regulating and organizing mechanism, pre-existing the actual verbal experience” (Fish, 1970: 143). This mechanism allows us to devote a semantic value to a given lexical unit according to its context: “a backlog of language experience which determines probability of choice and therefore of response” (Fish, 1970: 142).

Now, for Fish, the temporal reading is seen by these competences: “the temporal flow is monitored and structured by everything the reader brings with him, by his competences; and it is by taking these into account as they interact with the temporal left to right reception of the verbal string, that I am able to chart and project the developing response” (Fish, 1970: 143). In fact, Fish suggests such a competence model “would be a spatial model in the sense that it would reflect any system of rules pre-existing, and indeed making possible, any actual linguistic experience” (Fish, 1970: 141). In short, meaning occurs only when the reading is formed by “something other than itself, something outside its frame of reference” (Fish, 1970: 143). Meaning is found in an experience that can be seen in one’s past, which are permanently present in the act of reading. Fish combines a subjective view of meaning with an autonomous view of the text, which invites the reader to respond.

In “Affective Stylistics”, Fish acknowledges that the act of reading is something “you do” (Fish, 1970: 123). He wants to assert that reading is impossible in the absence of the reader as, “how can you tell the dance from the dancer” (Fish, 1970: 123)?

Fish is considered as the originator of the affective stylistics. His “Affective Stylistics” is regarded as a key essay where he argues for a view of reading as a process and for a method which continually questions what happens in a reader’s mind. Meaning for Fish is an event that is happening between the words and in the reader’s mind. The revolutionary nature of Fish’s criticism is obvious from his initial statement, “That Judas perished by hanging himself, there is no certainty in Scripture: though in one place it seems to affirm it, and by a doubtful word hath given occasion to translate it; yet in another place, in a more punctual description, it maketh it
improbable, and seems to overthrow it" (Fish, 1970: 123). Fish sees a range of possibilities for that "Judas perished by hanging himself" and predicts the uncertainty in the act of reading for the reader. When he cannot get a straight "answer" from the text, the reader is envisioned as lost: "rather than following an argument along a well lighted path [...] he is now looking for one" (Fish, 1970: 124). Also, "the prose is continually opening, but then closing" (Fish, 1970: 125); it is to "give the reader something and then take it away, drawing him on with the unredeemed promise of its return" (Fish, 1970: 125) and the something that is taken away and promised is certainty.

Fish uses "the" reader to consider the responses to complex sentences word-by-word, "[...] the reader is passed back and forth between them and between the alternatives—that Judas did or did not perish by hanging himself—which are still suspended [...]"(Fish, 1970: 125). He has turned to real differences among real readers. He explores the reading tactics approved by different critical schools, by the literary professoriate, and by the legal profession, introducing the idea of "interpretive communities" that share particular modes of reading.

Fish emphasizes the temporal nature of the reading experience as opposed to the spatial one proposed by other critics: "[...] it [the opposing school] transforms a temporal experience into a spatial one; it steps back and in a single glance takes in a whole (sentence, page, work) which the reader knows (if at all) only bit by bit, moment by moment" (Fish, 1970: 140-1). He finds the meaning of the work to reside in this bit by bit knowing, the experience that an "informed reader" has as he reads, rather than from anything imbedded in the actual text. He defines his "informed reader" as having the following qualities: "the informed reader is someone who 1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; 2) is in full possession of the semantic knowledge that a mature [...] listener brings to his task of comprehension; [...] ; and 3) has literary competence" (Fish, 1970: 145).

In "Affective Stylistics", Fish argues that any school of criticism that sees a literary work as an object, claiming to describe what it is and never what it does, misunderstands the very essence of literature and reading. Literature exists and signifies when it is read, Fish suggests, and its force is an affective one. Furthermore, reading is a temporal process, not a spatial one as formalists assume when they step back and survey the literary work as if it were an object spread out before them. No longer is the reader the passive recipient of those ideas that an author has planted in a text. Fish makes the same point in "Affective Stylistics": "Reading is [...] something you do" (Fish, 1970: 123).

The focus of the present paper is on section II. Fish in "What is Stylistics?" (1973) claims: "I am calling not for the end of stylistics but for a new stylistics, what I have termed elsewhere an 'affective' stylistics, in which the focus of attention is shifted from the spatial context of a page and its observable regularities to the temporal context of a mind and its experiences" (Fish, 1973: 143-4). However, in "Interpreting the Variorum", he retreats from this position and follows a rather direct course. Fish is a revolutionary critic who has made many changes in his critical position; from the claim that people read this way, using this interpretive strategy; to the qualification, all people interpret but interpretive strategies differ; to the conclusion that no critical interpretive strategy has priority over any other.

In "Interpreting the Variorum", Fish argues that people read in different ways because they belong to different interpretive communities. Fish just emphasizes that different critical models are equally valid. Even he believes that different critics belong to different interpretive communities of readers. However, Fish makes no distinction between interpretive act of reading and interpretive act of writing. He says; "Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing text [...]" (Fish, 1976: 466).

In "Interpreting Variorum", Fish asks the question "If interpretive acts are the source of forms rather than the other way around, why is it not the case that readers are always performing the same acts or a sequence of random acts, and therefore creating the same forms or a random succession of forms?" (Fish: 1976: 469) He continues, "[...] both the stability of interpretation among readers and the variety of interpretation in the career of a single reader would seem to argue for the existence of something independent of and prior to interpretive acts [...]"(Fish, 1976: 469). Fish assert that both stability and the variety in the reading are functions of interpretative strategies rather than of text.

Fish raises a question about reading Milton's Lycidas, he asks; "What is it that I'm doing?" and goes on, "what I am not doing is simply reading", an activity in which he does not. He thinks reading is just "the possibility of pure perception" (Fish, 1976: 469). Rather, he is concerning on two interpretive decisions: "1) Lycidas is a pastoral and 2) it was written by Milton" (Fish, 1976: 469). "Patrol" and "Milton" are two interpretations that cannot be understood as a set of objective facts, as if they were, a great number of essays and books would not be written on them. Fish discusses that the act of reading is based on reading experience and "a set of interpretive strategies, which, when they are put into execution, become the large act of reading" (Fish, 1976: 469). Fish asserts that interpretive strategies give texts their shape: "Interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading, and because they

Interpreting the variorum

"Interpretive the Variorum" (1976) is in three sections.
are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them" (Fish, 1976: 470). Fish brings an example about reading Lycidas and The Waste Land differently:

"If I read Lycidas and The Waste Land differently, it will not be because the formal structures of the two poems...call forth different interpretive strategies but because my predisposition to execute different interpretive strategies will produce different formal structures. That is, the two poems are different because I have decided that they will be" (Fish, 1976: 471).

He again raises another question that "Why will different readers execute the same interpretive strategy when faced with the same text" (Fish, 1976: 471)? He answers immediately himself, "[...] the notion same text is the product of the possession by two or more readers of similar interpretive strategies" (Fish, 1976: 471). Fish raises similar kind of questions and finds one answer for all of them; "interpretive communities". The notion of an interpretive community is so important to Fish. It is at all of them; "interpretive communities". The notion of an interpretive community is so important to Fish. It is at once objective, in the sense that it is the result of an agreement, and subjective, in the sense that only those who are party to that agreement (and who therefore constitute it) will be able to recognize it.

A reader does not have to read a work in a certain way, but, as a function of his interpretive strategy, he chooses to do so. To illustrate this, Fish refers to St. Augustine's argument from his On Christian Doctrine that "[...] everything in the Scriptures, and indeed in the world when it is properly read, points to (bears the meaning of) God's love for us and our answering responsibility to love our fellow creatures for His sake" (Fish, 1976: 471). If something does not seem to point in this direction, Augustine says that it is simply a figurative way of creating the same "text" and that it is the Christian's duty to find a way to interpret (to choose to interpret) it as such.

This may shed some light on why an individual reader may read a text one way or another, but it does not address why separate readers often have the same (or at least similar) understanding of the same text. Fish states that "they do not have to" but when they do it is because of his "[...] notion of interpretive communities [...]" which are "[...] made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (Fish, 1976: 472). This idea of interpretive communities is central to Fish's position, as in the introduction of his book, Is There a Text in This Class? he states; "[...] the act of recognizing literature is not constrained by something in the text, nor does it issue from an independent and arbitrary will; rather, it proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count as literature, a decision that will be in force only so long as a community of readers or believers continues to abide by it" (Fish, 1980: 11). This implies once again that readers bring the meaning of a text to it and that it can change from place to place and from time to time.

In short, Fish shows that the method begins with an epistemological view of reading and adopts a procedure that will bring the reader's interpretive strategies to critical light.

**Normal circumstances**

In his "Normal Circumstances" (1978), Fish continues his discussion about meaning and becomes more mature about his strategies in reading a text. He describes how baseball player Pat Kelly's conversion is an example of interpretation. Kelly credited all of his home runs to his faith in God, and Fish believes that:

His conversion follows the pattern prescribed by Augustine in On Christian Doctrine. The eye that was in bondage to the phenomenal world (had as its constitutive principle the autonomy of that world) has been cleansed and purified and is now capable of seeing what is really there, what is obvious, what anyone who has the eyes can see: 'to the healthy and pure internal eye He is everywhere.' He is everywhere not as the result of an interpretive act self-consciously performed on data otherwise available, but as the result of an interpretive act performed at so deep a level that it is indistinguishable from consciousness itself (Fish, 1978: 627).

Fish assumes that this idea is really an interpretive strategy for looking at the world, and a very successful one at that. In the same way, he says, readers choose, on a level that is "indistinguishable from consciousness itself," to interpret texts either as the same or different and this choice produces the sameness or differentness of the texts' formal features.

Then, he asks the question "What is in the text?"(Fish, 1978: 627) and argues that there is always a text but what is in it can change. He illustrates his argument by Milton's Samson Agonistes and argues that "The example of Samson Agonistes suggests that what is perceived to be "in the text" is a function of interpretive activities" (Fish, 1978: 629) and he goes on that his argument is "for a text that is always set; and yet because it is set not for all places or all times but for wherever and however long a particular way of reading is in force, it is a text that can change" (Fish, 1978: 630).

In "Normal Circumstances", Fish concerns the idea that a text, though fixed at a certain time and place, can change over time and bring up the concept of "context" as he says in the following passage:

"[...] we usually reserve 'literal' for the single meaning a text will always (or should always) have, while I am using 'literal' to refer to the different single meanings a text will have in a succession of different situations. There always
is a literal meaning because in any situation there is always a meaning that seems obvious in the sense that it is there independently of anything we might do. But that only means that we have already done it, and in another situation, when we have already done something else, there will be another obvious, that is, literal, meaning [...] We are never in a situation. Because we are never in a situation, we are never in the act of interpreting, there is no possibility of reaching a level of meaning beyond or below interpretation (Fish, 1978: 631).

In other words, everything is always in a context, and it is because of the context that sentences have meaning. In fact, without context there is no meaning.

Fish goes on his argument by contesting the distinction between direct and indirect speech acts. Direct speech acts are ones in which the meaning of the utterance is clearly inserted in its "text." Indirect speech acts are ones in which the meaning lies outside the "text" but is understood by the hearer because of a shared contextual understanding with the speaker. Fish believes "The distinction then is between utterances that mean exactly what they say and utterances that mean something different or additional" (Fish, 1978: 638). The hearer knows what the speaker is talking about, whether he uses direct or indirect language, because the utterance and its reception occur in a situation that lies in the realm of both parties' understanding. It is this idea of normal circumstances with which Fish takes issue. He says, "[...] I am making the same argument for 'normal context' that I have made for 'literal meaning' [...] There will always be a normal context, but it will not always be the same one" (Fish, 1978: 640). As an example, he indicates John Searle's use of the following situation:

Searle begins by imagining a conversation between two students. Student X says, "Let's go to the movies tonight," and student Y replies, "I have to study for an exam." The first sentence, Searle declares, "constitutes a proposal in virtue of its meaning," but the second sentence, which is understood as a rejection of the proposal, is not so understood in virtue of its meaning because "in virtue of its meaning it is simply a statement about Y" (61, 62). It is here, in the assertion that either of these sentences is ever taken in the way it is "in virtue of its meaning," that this account must finally be attacked. For if this were the case, then we would have to say that there is something about the meaning of a sentence that makes it more available for some illocutionary uses than for others, and this is precisely what Searle proceeds to say about "I have to study for an exam": "Statements of this form do not, in general, constitute rejections of proposals, even in cases in which they are made in response to a proposal. Thus, if Y had said I have to eat popcorn tonight or I have to tie my shoes in a normal context, neither of these utterances would have been a rejection of the proposal" (Fish, 1978: 639). At this point, Fish asks "Normal for whom?" in regards to Searle's proposed normal context. He then goes on to list a number of situations in which eating popcorn and tying shoes could be taken as a rejection of a proposal as long as both X and Y were privy to the circumstances. To the argument that these circumstances are special as opposed to normal, "The objection to these examples (which could easily be multiplied) is obvious: they have reference to special contexts, while Searle is talking about what sentences mean in a normal context" (Fish, 1978: 640). Fish answers that "'normal' is content specific and to speak of a normal context is to be either redundant (because whatever in a given context goes without saying is the normal) or to be incoherent (because it would refer to a context whose claim was not to be one)" (Fish, 1978:640). He does not intend to imply that an utterance can mean anything, but, rather, that its meaning is subject to certain constraints: "[...] would be possible only if a sentence could mean anything at all in the abstract." He goes on to point out; however, "A sentence [...] is never in the abstract; it is always in a situation, and the situation will already have determined the purpose for which it can be used" (Fish, 1978: 643).

**FISH AND OTHER CRITICS**

**Fish vs. New Critics**

Fish's emphasis on the importance of the reader in the creation of meaning in texts raises objections among the formalists, among them William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley. Wimsatt and Beardsley's *The Verbal Icon* (1954) contains the following passage:

The affective fallacy is confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does) [...] It begins by trying to derive the standards of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome [...] is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1954: 21).

Fish in "Affective Stylistics" answers this by saying, "My reply to this is simple. The objectivity of the text is an illusion and, moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing [...] A line of print is so obviously there [...] that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it" (Fish, 1970: 140). To Fish, the poem cannot disappear because it was never actually there in the first place except as a reflection of the interpretive strategy used to approach it.

Fish's theory rejects the claims of the New Critics and the formalists that the work itself contains meaning that
can be derived by a study of its formal features. Fish argues that those formal features are themselves interpretations and so any interpretation based on them is illegitimate. He does not deny the importance of formal features, but in his essay "What is Stylistics and Why are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?" he asserts that rather than possessing any particular meaning in and of themselves, these features "[..] acquire it [..] by virtue of their position in a structure of experience" (Fish, 1973: 139). In other words, the reader brings his special interpretive strategy (a product of his experiences) to the text and creates meaning out of the pattern of formal features that are found within it.

Fish seems to be anti-structuralist, anti-formalist, and anti-stylist, yet he does not deny the validity of many of their premises, only the conclusions they derive from them. Fish's position seems to be composed of the ideas that reading is an activity, rather than being imbedded in formal features, and the meaning of any text is brought to it by the reader's interpretive strategy. Interpretive communities make it possible for some agreement on the meanings of texts and all acts of interpretation occur in some context. These seem obvious assertions, yet they seem to frighten many critics that Fish's method leads to a lack of certainty. Fish himself does not try to argue against this claim directly. In fact, at the end of "Interpreting the Variorum", he himself admits this uncertainty when discussing how one can know to which interpretive community one belongs. He says, "The answer is he cannot, since any evidence brought forward to support the claim would itself be an interpretation." All one can have as far as proof of membership is a "[..] nod of recognition from someone in the same community [..]". He ends this essay with the only words that someone who speaks from his viewpoint can truly maintain with any certainty: "I say it [we know] to you now, knowing full well that you will agree with me (that is, understand), only if you already agree with me" (Fish, 1976: 485).

Fish vs. Holland

In the mid-1970s, Norman Holland invoked the premises of ego-psychology to describe how readers read according to a tacit narrative (called an identity theme). Holland's work helps to explain the exuberant multiplicity among individual readings. On the other side, Fish's account of "interpretive communities" helps to explain how groups of readers develop similar interpretations in spite of the differences that Holland uncovers. While Stanley Fish believes in interpretive communication in reading, Norman Holland believes in psychological response in reading.

Norman Holland has viewed the reader's response not as one guided by the text but rather as one motivated by deep-seated, personal, psychological needs. Holland in "Reading and Identity" has suggested that, when we read, we find our own "identity theme" in the text, "[..] we actively transact literature so as to re-create our identities" (Holland, 1979: 207). Tyson in Critical Theory Today believes that "Holland focuses on what readers' interpretations reveal about themselves, not about the text" (Tyson, 1999: 168). Obviously, Holland concerns the act of reading as a subjective experience of readers. Holland employ psychoanalysis in his reading and in his "Reading and Identity" (1979) believes that "The revolution began as an inquiry into the way readers read. It has become a re-think from the roots of what psychoanalysis can say about the ways people sense and know things" (Holland, 1979: 205). Tyson goes on, "Holland believes that we react to literary texts with the same psychological responses we bring to events in our daily life" (Tyson, 1999: 168). For Holland, reader-response is a personal response to the reader's psyche and reader reads a text to fulfill his psychological needs and desires. In fact, Holland calls for the reader to fulfill his psychological needs and desires in the act of reading. As Tyson says, "Our interpretations, then, are products of the fears, defenses, needs, and desires we project onto the text [...]. A literary interpretation may or may not reveal the meaning of the text, but to a discerning eye, it always reveals the psychology of the reader" (Tyson, 1999: 169).

In short, while for Fish, interpretation of a text is dependent upon each reader's own subjective experience in one or more communities, each of which is defined as a 'community' by a distinct epistemology, for Holland it is dependent upon each reader's psychological needs and desires.

FISH AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Words are embedded in social contexts and language users, purposes, and goals belong to the social contexts as members of particular domains. Words carry with them the features of particular social environment. Fish's theory about "interpretive community" gives the opportunity to the reader to make any kind of judgment about the contemporary world. Fish theories bring about a radical change in our perception of social realities, which is based on "interpretive community". Today, these communities determine the truth, knowledge, and power of our life.

Stanley Fish along with the other thinkers such as Derrida and Lyotard gave rise to postmodernism, where there is no absolute truth. In postmodern, based on Fish's "interpretive community" individuals of community determine the standards of truth. Fish in "Affective Stylistics" believes that truth is different from community to community.

The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their
accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text", but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being (Fish, 1970: 142).

By "interpretive community", fish confirms that literature cannot proceed independently of the study of society because literature finds its meaning in the society. In "Affective Stylistics", Fish emphasizes the temporal nature of the reading process and argues that the meaning of a literary text cannot be seen as separate from the reader's experience. The reader creates the meaning based on his life experience and based on this experience he finds the truth of his life. Interpretive strategies make the reader able to ask any kinds of question about his society. Tyson believes that "These interpretive strategies always result from various sorts of institutionalized assumptions (assumptions established, for example, in high schools, churches, and colleges by prevailing cultural attitudes and philosophies) [...]" (Tyson, 1999: 171). High school, church, and colleges are life experiences that help us create the meaning in our "interpretive community".

"Interpretive community" can have different levels; it can be sophisticated and produced by the Marxist critical theorist or can be unsophisticated and produced by a group of literary students who read literature to find the hidden or symbolic meaning of literary works. Any kind of judgment that we want to make about the government, power, truth, meaning, just depends on the community where we belong to it. In short, any kinds of judgment we make about our society "results from the interpretive strategies we bring with us when we read the text" (Tyson, 1999: 172).

Many of contemporary critics view themselves as reader-response critics and as practitioners of some other critical approaches as well. Certain feminist and gender critics with an interest in reader response have asked whether there is such a thing as reading like a woman. Reading-oriented new historicists who read literature to find the hidden or symbolic meaning of literary works. Any kind of judgment that we want to make about the government, power, truth, meaning, just depends on the community where we belong to it. In short, any kinds of judgment we make about our society "results from the interpretive strategies we bring with us when we read the text" (Tyson, 1999: 172).

In one essay after the other, Fish shows his focus on extending the reading strategies and proves his creativity and innovation in reading both the literary texts and life from a subjective but universal perspective.

CONCLUSION

Stanley Fish argues against the narrow reading strategies of New Critics who find meaning only in the text itself. As similar problem is any attempt to locate meaning in authorial intention, which is necessarily beyond the reach of critics. Fish's reader-response criticism is the assumption that texts are open. Meaning develops outside the text in a dynamic relationship with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments, and assumptions. In "Variorum", Fish argues that these are learned from the norms of "interpretive communities" which are themselves "no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned [...] The ability to interpret is not required; it is constitutive of human being" (Fish, 1976: 471).

REFERENCES