

RISE OF NEW JOURNALISM, JOHN HOLLOWELL'S *FACT & FICTION* & READER-RESPONSE THEORY

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the connection of two important theories that put the reader's place ahead of a text and an author. Journalism is also considered as a branch of literature. The key feature of journalism is a presentation of fact. The rise of New Journalism gave new direction to the field of journalism. The rise of reader response theories gave importance to the role of reader. The role of the reader is very important in the process of interpretation. Somehow New journalism and reader response theories seem to be significant in the context of the selection of reading material by the reader.

Keywords: New Journalism, reader-response theory, fact

The Rise of New Journalism:

The history of American Journalism marks different periods as 'New Journalism'. Robert E. Park in his book *The Natural History of Journalism* considers the dawn of penny press (1830) as "New Journalism". The "Yellow Press" or "Yellow Journalism" began with the publication of Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*. This emergence is marked "New Journal-ism" by journalists and historians. The second half of the 19th century marked the rise of industrialization and urbanization that has changed the countenance of America. According to Ault and Emery, the newspapers mark this era as "New Journalism." Honenberg also uses the term "New Journalism" for interpretive reporting which gained popularity after World War II. In 1967, Christine Heintz published an article under the title "The New Journalism."

The rise of New Journalism is the movement by few American journalists. They thought conventional method of reporting is not suitable for the time they are living in. The conventional journalist had set rules such as to keep the self out of the story, exercise straightforward writing style without any twirl or twist. They used to gather lot of information through field work, interview, observation or research. The tradition journalist associated with their subject only. The other reason can be rivalry with fiction writing as Wolfe describes the novel writing of that time "Fiction writers were busy running backward, skipping and screaming, into a begonia patch" he uses the term "Neo-Fabulism" for such practices. He adds that such a condition of fiction

writing has made the way for nonfiction writing in America that can be called New Journalism. Tom Wolfe advocated that the only problem was that no journalist was devising aesthetic aspect in journalism to make interesting for the readers. His contemporaries were presenting dry facts without any excitement that could create encouragement among the readers. He boasted that the new form of journalism would erase the existence of novel. Liz Fakazis describes this movement as, “The genre combined journalistic research with the techniques of fiction writing in the reporting of stories about real-life events.”

In his book, *The New Journalism*, Tom Wolfe describes the scene of Olympian Club during 1950: “The scene was strictly for novelists, people who were writing novels, the people who were paying court to The Novel. There was no room for a journalist unless he was there in the role of would-be novelist or simple courtier of the great. There was no such thing as a literary journalist working for popular magazines or newspapers. If a journalist is aspired to literary status, then he had better have the sense and the courage to quit the press and try to get into the big league.” The key features of Wolfe’s New Journalism were its dramatic and deep prose writing style and charged style of writing. He eliminated the traditional characteristics such as lack of involvement, nonpartisanship word count and ‘inverted pyramid style of reporting’ has made a distinguishing feature of New Journalism. He focussed on the form of writing.

Again, Tom Wolfe welcomes new era of journalism: “And yet in the early 1960 a curious new notion, just hot enough to inflame the ego, had begun to intrude into the tiny confines of the feature status here. It was in the nature of discovery. This discovery, modest at first, humble in fact, deferential, you might say, was that it just might be possible to write journalism that would...read like a novel. Like a novel if you get the picture.” Tom Wolfe in *New Journalism* appreciates the ‘Gonzo Journalism’ of Hunter S. Thompson in a chapter called ‘The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved’. Thomson reports vividly by selecting details with personal notes so that the reader would feel as if he is reading a story. One piece is presented here: “Pink faces with a stylish sag, old Ivy styles, seersucker coats and button-down collars...burnt out early or may be just not much to burn in the first place.” The purpose of this article was to create outrage among the readers and stop the event of Derby Day.

John Hollowell’s *Fact & Fiction*:

John Hollowell in his *Fact & Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel*, broadens his paradigm and offers five additional components of New Journalism.

1. The novelists such as Truman Capote and Norman Mailer were originally fiction writers. They narrated in a documentary form and played the role of witness.
2. Some new journalists played the role of central character in their stories. For example in his *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*, Hunter S. Thompson describes his experience of riding with the biker’s group Hell’s Angels.
3. New Journalism is a combination of novel, autobiography and reportage
4. The fourth aspect that Hollowell mentions is ‘a mood of impending apocalypse...’ Wolfe believed that the changes in the American social structure were the biggest advantage for New Journalism. The novelists failed to catch the zeitgeist of rising and changing mood of America.
5. John Hollowell puts nonfiction novels as ‘Tentative solution’ that records or presents the drastic changes in America.

Truman Capote’s novel *Cold Blood* interestingly contains the elements of New Journalism as advocated by Tom Wolfe. Capote used the elements social realism such as reconstruction of

scenes, satirical dialogues and wonderful treatment of point of view. To bind all the elements together Capote did inclusive investigation the incident of killing, its result, and other documents. The author interprets actual events and puts them in a narrative style. This course of action establishes “Fiction” which is quite opposite to the Wolfe’s theory of New Journalism.

The Rise of Reader Response:

The process of reading received better consideration during 1930 as an opposite theory against the New Criticism dominated thought that advocated the importance of text over the reader. The Reader-response did not come into focus until 1970. The School of New Criticism believed that the text is a self contained and so it bears meaning within. There was no importance of the reader’s role in the process of interpretation or creation of meaning. They argued that the meaning can not change with reader’s response and if we believe in such action that the text will create confusion of “What the text is and What the text does”. The new critics borne the following assumptions :

1. A poem should be treated as poem, as an object and nothing else. Intrinsic approach, T.S. Eliot says “ Poetry as poetry”.
2. The reader must get the meaning from the literary work itself. The text is self contained.
3. They suggested to avoid literary work’s moral or psychological effects. They established the importance of literary communication i.e communication through language .
4. They did not consider the account of social conditions at the time of the creation work. They rejected the idea to refer historical or biographical context.
5. They advocated the ‘ Organic Unity’ of structure and meaning
6. They accepted words, symbols and image as the elements of literary work. (avoided the importance of character, thought and plot.)

According to reader-response theorists text can not have static meaning and the role of reader can not be ignored during the process of reading. The process of reading demands active participation of reader and hence objective literary text can not force him to accept the given meaning. He creates his own meaning from the text.

Many critics believe that the roots of reader-response theory are based on the philosophical term ‘ phenomenology’, that denotes different meanings such as ‘to bring into light’, ‘study of phenomena or appearance’(Kant) or ‘study of consciousness’(Hegel). The theory of Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden which is known as ‘ Theory of aesthetics’. It is associated with reader-response criticism. Thus, Reader-response theory is a convergence of different approaches or critical methods that came mainly from American or German criticism. The prominent reader-response theories are ‘Affective stylistic’ (Stanley Fish), ‘Phenomenological Theory’ (Wolfgang Iser), ‘Subjective criticism’ (David Bleich), ‘The theory of Transactive criticism’ (Norman Holland) and ‘Structuralist criticism’ (Jonathan Culler).

Study of Reader-Response Theory in the Context of New Journalism

As we have discussed in the reader-response theory, the role of the reader is very important in the process of interpretation. Whether it is literature or newspaper, the reader is an active player in the process of meaning making. The reader would not accept the news as they are; he would rather try to figure out his own judgments from the given text. The key areas such as audience approach, culture, the narrative form of news, the differences in the viewers of television; film and the readers of news articles and the role of New Journalism can help us to understand the function of reader in the context of New Journalism. There have been different studies in mass

communication on the film, music or television audience but News articles were not given much attention and the role of reader has not received much appreciation. For example John Fiske, media scholar and professor at The University of Wisconsin-Madison, has devised 'Audience Centered' approaches, separately from the literary theories. He names it 'Reader's Liberation Movement'. According to Fiske, reader has the capacity to turn the program into text and that connect with social experience. Somehow, Fiske along with other media scholars hardly talks about the literary theories and print media. Anyway, in journalism, the reporter is the writer and his contribution is different from the writer of the literary work. The reader of news article or reportage would offer more metaphoric language with the help of interpretation.

Michael Schudson and Gaye Tuchman believe that the narrative form of the news articles attracts reader to attend and interpret it. The American Journalist Edward J. Epstein rejects the idea of 'dramatic' elements of news reporting along with the conventional idea of 'truth' and 'accuracy' in new reporting. The others believe that the narrative structure masquerades the ideal material of new stories. The assumption can be made that the news reporters create stories and these stories are made available to the 'undifferentiated' reader as a static product. Horace Newcomb, the editor, author, columnist and professor, advocates the value of "Dialogic aspects", especially in mass communication. Being an editor for the television series his own analysis focuses on the 'Textual and structural' aspects as an important rather than audience.

After examining these examples, it will be too early to conclude that no media scholars or media critics have paid proper attention to the role of reader as an active player in the process of meaning making while reading journalistic articles or books. However, their negligence for the same is not less what formalist critics have done to the reader. Fish in his book "Is There a Text in a Class" rightly observes: "(Readers) are ignored because the text is taken to be self-sufficient--everything is in it--and they are devalued because when they are thought of at all, they are thought of as the disposable machinery of extraction." Tom Wolfe, the torchbearer of New Journalism Movement rightly said that writers try to "create within the mind of the reader an entire world that resonates with the reader's own real emotions"

There are media scholars who believe that print media gives more stimulation and satisfaction than film and television. Wayne Booth, the American critic, considers the role of television-audience just 'tourists', who cannot control anything. Booth, in his book *The Company We Keep: Self-Making in Imaginative Art, Old and New*, writes "Reading a story, in contrast, I must be engaged with it at every moment, or it simply stops...This country needs me"

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