

DISAPPEARANCE OF OBJECTIVITY IN GEORGE POULET'S “PHENOMENOLOGY OF READING”

Dr. Nanaware D. C., Associate Professor of English, DAV Velankar College of Commerce, Solapur

During 20th century, the wave of rejection of formalistic approaches to literary criticism appeared in the critical scenario and it advanced the theory stating requirement of reader to open his or her mind to the consciousness of the author. George Poulet, in his essay “Phenomenology of Reading” shows understanding of the act of reading to be a confluence of minds, or better, an identification of a passive consciousness with that of an active storyteller. Poulet was an essayist and critic who commented on experience of reading through mind blowing interpretations. He represented the Geneva School of Literary Criticism; the group of Literary Critics in the 1950s and 1960s. The group emerged out of the Russian Formalism and Phenomenology trends and it practiced the phenomenological method for the analysis and interpretation of literary expressions as presentations of deep structures of a writer's consciousness; his or her relationship to the real world. 'Phenomenology' is the study of phenomena in which 'phenomena' refers to things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings of things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the object of the experience. For phenomenology the ultimate source of all meaning and value is the lived experience of human beings. Phenomenological theories of literature regard works of art as mediators between the consciousnesses of the author and the reader or as attempts to disclose aspects of the being of humans and their worlds. (<http://litguide.press.jhu.edu/>)

George Poulet attracted attention of the scholars towards his theory with his establishment of union between passive consciousness and active storyteller. Practically, the union between the two stands for the union of opposites; however, it is elaborated that it establishes out of words on a page into mental objects and reader's mind. Poulet states that the act of reading catalyses a disappearance of objectivity. It fades away from the world of which the reader is objectively a part of; continued under the guidance by fiction. He writes, “For the book is no longer a material reality. It has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin to exist”. Consequently, there is existence of new form in the mind of a reader; which, he terms as “number of significations”. These significations formed in the mind emerge as the objects emerged out of the mind set up in which it has been set. Poulet mentions writing as a flexible form of art; which he states as a peculiar quality of a book. A book and its significations vary person to person; however, other forms of art characterize themselves with objective rigidity. The giving up of literary objects leads to the location of objects in to the person's individual mind according to his perception. Poulet writes, “*in order to exist as mental objects, they must relinquish their existence as real objects*”. (Poulet 1321) The critics have attempted to draw meaning of objective existence from Poulet's point of view; to which Poulet writes, “It is still there, . . . and at the same time it is no longer, it is nowhere.” (Poulet 1321). However, the scholars' fraternity disagrees with the statement saying that it is unacceptable to accept the complete giving up of existence.

Poulet further talks of transmutation through the language of reality into a fictional equivalent; where he signals towards change in the reference of word and its application in fiction. He hints towards talks of reading as a kind of intuition of the author's consciousness. Graham Bippart in an article “The Spirit of Prospero: Fiction and Identity in Georges Poulet's Phenomenology of Reading” states: *'He talks of the metamorphosis of the words of a book into the objects of a mind as that quality of reading by virtue of which “the opposition between the subject and its objects has been considerably attenuated”.*'

(: <http://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/chr/vol1/iss1/4>)

For Poulet, the surrounding exposed in fiction is not radically opposed to the him who thinks it. The states reason for this is that the literary objects are exposed to the reading mind does not proceed with the rigid objectivity. The essay attracts compelling attention to delineate between subjectivity and objectivity of language. The academic language, for instance, is 'objective' where as literary language is 'subjective' where opinions tend to biased based on subjective judgments. Thus, fictional language represents mode of subjectivity. It is devoid of determined significations. Poulet attempts to suggest differentiation between fictional and real language.

Poulet believes that the reader apprehends the consciousness of the author. The consciousness is afforded by the author through the utmost level of subjectification of the selected objects from his thought. The reader is identified with the author leading to level of similarity between reader and writer. Poulet mentions: '*When I am absorbed in a reading, a second self takes over, a self which think and feels for one.*' (Poulet 1324) It prompts to ponder upon the thought of separation between subject and objet in day today life of reality. The defense of the statement rests on the claim that subjectivity and objectivity are always interchanging among people. Poulet believes that the thoughts of author are actually being thought by the reader that unification between two subjectivities is granted. As a result, he hints towards unification of opposites. However, Poulet is charged for one sided unification. Graham Bippart comments, '*The author himself, the human consciousness who may or may not still inhabit the world in which we read, is absent. Poulet's understanding of reading as a comforting coincidence of the subject and the objects of his thought, unrealizable except in the act of reading, may imply a darker, more solitary existence for the author himself.*' (: <http://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/chr/vol1/iss1/4>)

Poulet shows concern about the threatening severance of the writer in the act of writing as the subject. He discourages the implication of own consciousness of author in essence but accepts essence in the act of reading. He locates a moment where the subject disengages and distances in the reading process and makes him stand alone.

Extending an idea, he further points out inability of any structure to define its concreteness exposing in its fundamental indeterminacy. The interesting part is that Poulet believes in the more humble role of a reader rather than that of the author. In the process of takeover of mind by the author's thought is entitled as 'consciousness of the critic'. While stating instance of an 'I' reader and an 'I', the persona in the work of author, Poulet establishes his own stance of Phenomenology. He invites criticism as necessity and necessary fallible task. He mentions human consciousness and role of critics for relating non articulated entities. He believes in the author's thought which failed to grasp with the level of obscurity. It is the process of grasped point; it is reduced to being a mere self awareness scarcely perceived by the being which entertains it. (Poulet 1330). Poulet emphatically appeals demarcation between real and fictional languages; thus, stating purpose and establishing communication between subjects.

Works Cited:

- Leitch, Vincent B. et al. "Georges Poulet." The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism. New York: Norton, 2001. 1317-20.
- Meltzer, Françoise. Introduction. Exploding Poetry. By Georges Poulet. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977. vii-xi.
- Poulet, Georges. "Phenomenology of Reading." New Literary History 1, 1 (October 1969): 53-68.
- <http://litguide.press.jhu.edu/>
- <http://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/chr/vol1/iss1/4>