

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reception of the children's theater

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Abstract

Reception theory or aesthetics is the name which takes part in the literary world, gives reader responsibility as well as an author about meaning or interpretation of author's works and analyze reader's function in this field. It's a matter of debate or study, who give a meaning to the work. When does the work have a meaning? Who constitutes the meaning? Reader or author? In the context of our subject, in what way does the reception process realize for theater audience and children's theater audience? Is there a difference between adult theater and children's theater? The subject of this study is to answer this question "In what way does the reception of the children's theater audience group realize among the children 4 aged and older in our country? " in the light of the cognitive development theory of Piaget and the reception aesthetics of W. Iser and we grounded the observations that were made during the children's plays and the interviews made after the play.

Keywords: Theatre for children, Reception, Iser, Piaget

Introduction

Reception aesthetics or theory (Rezeptionsästhetik) is a name given to various theories which study reader's function corresponding with the meaning and the interpretation of literary works. After the 1960s, the reception theory is a theory that the character connected with time or place was kept dark and this theory gives the reader responsibility for revealing various points. (Moran:1994:221) To

him, the meaning cannot be disclosed available in the work. The reader constitutes the meaning based on certain clues and this connected to his own accumulation of knowledge during the reading process. At that time, can we say it in this way: there are two texts constituted which create the meaning of the text in other words, give the text meaning. These are the text written by the author and the new text constituted by the reader starting from the text, in short, the new text generated by the interchange between the reader and the text. What really matters is the role of the reader. Which type of connection is made between the text and the reader that the meaning of the text arises and the work realizes? How does the reader participate in the creation work? What can be his contribution to the work? It's a matter of debate or study, who give a meaning to the work. Who constitute the meaning of the work? The reader or the author? The reader constitutes the meaning in the way that he fills in the blanks of the author or the meaning is constituted by the selected words of the author? In the process of searching answers of these questions, the situation becomes more complicated if the subject is a theater work, yet the author and the director being in the first place, decoration, costume, light and other technical factors come into play within the process from the author to the acting for theater script. Finally, it meets with the audience. The reception of the audience has the last word but the work enters into a new reception process at every turn starting from the author to the audience with each one's reception.

For Gadamer, the meaning of a literary work is never limited to the purposes of the author. The work can gain a meaning that the author or the reader cannot think about in his own period. This instability precisely belongs to the own character of the work. All of the interpretations are situational and they are formed and limited to the criterion of a certain culture exposed to historical change. It is impossible to know the literary work "warts and all". (Eagleton:1990:95)

For W.Iser, reading is always a dynamical process, has a complicated movement and radial structure in time. (...) Reader approaches the work within the context of preliminary meanings, expectations, and beliefs. Various specifications of the work are interpreted in this connection, too. (Eagleton:1990:101) For W.Iser, As the reading process was improving, these expectations are modified by things beginning to compose that we learned and a hermetic circle which manipulates from part to whole and manipulates again from whole to the part. The reader organizes selectively components of the text by externalizing, internalizing and apparently materializing certain components of this circle. His purpose is to unify consistently the components of the text therefore he can constitute a coherent meaning based upon the text.

For Iser, the meaning of a literary work is not apparent, it is constituted slowly by the reader during the reading process according to certain clues.

"The reader who approaches a text interprets with a certain accumulation of reading, a sociocultural point of view and a stack of beliefs and expectations and he carries with a preliminary comprehension arising from this accumulation. In fact, each reader's comprehension of a text is directly proportionate to his own global life, dimensions of conscious experiment especially his language ability thus each interpretive ability is a little interpretation of our own ego. Here, in this sense, the reading and the interpretation are not only an activity aimed at grammatical, linear and naked components but also an activity including these

things, a background and beyond, a surface and deep of the text, its various point of views, a travel through different meaning categories, an effort and an occupation." (Ekiz:2007:123)

Any text doesn't gain its own meaning. The meaning of a Kafka's tale becomes clear in the light of a perspective and a thought of complete Kafka's works with its own literary context. The literary context in point constructs in consideration of both synchronic and diachronic literary connections. The situation is same as Yunus poem and Shakespeare play. (Göktürk:1988:28)

The author cannot say everything according to the reception aesthetics and the filling process in certain blanks which devolve upon the reader. We remark the blanks left by the author as empty space or ambiguities. These are various from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. The reader unwittingly fills the special and the simple ones and add essential details but in reality, the reader constitutes meaning by filling empty spaces. This situation materializes at an abstract level and it is necessary to touch on the connection between text and external world in order to clarify the role of the reader about this subject. (Moran:2004:242) Moran suggests characters that mentioned in the text aren't real life characters and he continues. They live in a fictional world but this fictional world has conventions, traditions, lifestyles and beliefs resembling the real life in the world. The connection of fictional text to the reality should be searched in historical, cultural and social components which are found out of the text. As we say, these come along in text in the form of conventions, traditions, behavior patterns, world perspectives. Shortly, the connection of fictional text to the reality is ideological because of this W.Iser concerns himself with the meaning of the word "reality" before anything else and he dwells on the reality concept. In history, each historical period explains the meaning of the reality differently because a certain period has a certain reality concept and this reality is a model that was systematically constructed by the dominant worldview in that period thus it is systematized an unstable and incoherent reality and it gains integrity. It is only connected to the context of its own period. (Moran:2004:222)

Knowledge doesn't exist in nature independent from the knower in compliance with the constructivist theory. This theory clarifies both education, comprehension and epistemology. Knowledge is not independent of the subject. The subject constitutes the knowledge during the interaction with other subjects in itself. The subject and its environment are impressed by the constituted knowledge. The constitution of knowledge is accomplished by the realization of mental processes. The way and the process of knowledge constitution (and knowledge) are an individual and inner concept. The most important principle of constructivism is the proposition that humans effectively constitute their own perspectives on their own. Education within the frame of constructivism is a construction of new information and perspectives over old information in consequence of real experiences. (Şirin:2008:198)

It is obvious that reception theory and constructivist theory correspond to each other. Both of them give the reader, audience and spectator responsibility in the presence of a work. Both of them constitute their perspective about the work in the context of our subject and they add new information over old information of children's audience for the reader or the theater audience.

Applying for the cognitive development theory of Piaget provides an important support in order to determine audience's limits of reception and this

application provides justification when we need to evaluate in what way the reception realize for children's audience. When we study scientific works about cognitive development, they try to explain how the child perceive and observe the world around him at different ages.

The cognitive development theory of Piaget (along with discussions in its some aspects) is an important theory that became instructive for many studies about children. Bruner and Vygotsky study in this field, too and they put forward theses different from the one of Piaget's in some points.

The human being observes, studies and explores in the process of learning and he uses gradually the obtained information in a particular logical framework. At the same time, this is the process of cognitive development. The cognitive development is named as a development of active mental activity that provides individual to understand and learn the world around him. The cognitive development is the process including the individual's way of thinking and understanding the world and the environment. This process becomes more effective and complicated. A child in the process of cognitive development is only in the process of improving his ability of thinking and understanding the social environment. (Kol:2011:1)

According to this theory, children exhibit certain behavior patterns in certain periods and their capacity of perception, problem-solving ability, the ability of contact and their logic system resemble each other. The period of these behavior patterns can be longer and shorter in as much as the environment that child is in but its gradation never changes. Each period is constructed over other periods' attainments and it has typical specifications peculiar to each period. These periods are pertinent to the development of children's perception of the world, his comprehension, and explanation in a regular order.

Periods that Piaget prepared and called cognitive development periods are classified in this way.

Sensorimotor development (0-2 age) sensorimotor development, the preoperational stage (2-7 age) (Piaget divided this stage in two substages: the symbolic function substage (from 2 to 4 age) and the intuitive thought substage (from 4 to 7 age), the concrete operational stage (from 5 to 11 age) and the formal operational stage (11 age and above).

In Turkey, as a children's theater audience, plays are prepared aimed at the children at age 4 and above. In other words, we underline the reactions of the children in the intuitive thought substage and in the concrete and formal operational stage and their feedback about the plays in this study.

When examining the characteristics of the child in the intuitive thought substage, the child at this age (from 4 to 7) his way of thinking is unidirectional so they see one direction of one situation and one event and he cannot keep in mind the whole object or events.

The child in the concrete operational stage (from 7 to 11) can solve concrete problems logically. He can achieve the classification and constitute series. They are connected to concrete, apparent conditions. As for the ones in the formal operational stage, they can solve abstract problems. They can see, evaluate multiple directions of a situation and they can set a course accordingly. They can advance and reverse stages more than one. They are interested in social issues.

The cognitive development stages that we mentioned briefly will be a determinant of children's theater audience and especially characteristics of the play which will be performed.

A drama performing actualizes in multiple stages and the work is produced at every turn. The author at the writing stage and the director at the performing stage put the theater text on the stage by reproducing it according to the meaning of their perception. It is reshaped by interpretation of the players. Finally, the process is completed in line with the reception of audience. Particularly the manner of the audience put the author, the director, and the audience together for a common goal. Consequently, theater comes into view as an art which never breaks loose from social relations. It gets into social life and mutual interaction.

The whole components of theater performance, in other words, the language of dialogue, scenery, gestures, costume, makeup and intonations of players and also a great number of other signs make a contribution to unveiling the meaning of performance. (Esslin:1996:15)

It is said to be children's theater; when considered used signs and the way of using them, the cognitive development stages of a child audience that we abovementioned briefly, there can be an interchange between the audience and the scenery for a reception and the purpose of this interchange is to deal with a performance being watched with interest by target audience on the other hand, it approaches the signs which don't fit for the child's cognitive development stage. These induce the child not to stay focused, thus the ruptures occur in the triangle of reader, author and text and the process of producing meaning is interrupted or a different meaning occurs unlike the one that the director aimed at.

Theater plays are different from other literary types on the subject of the reception. This difference is a reception of audience reading the text which appeared as a result of acting it, namely while he is reading the work as a text, the reception composed in the triangle of author, text, and reader. The reception and the interpretation of director with the production's acting will get involved in this process. Here it is a matter of multi-directional process.

Hereby, beyond all question, it is mentioned various sets of people from a common reader or audience to professional readers like dramaturgist, director or critic and child audience. On the one hand, "receiver" gives the meaning to the theater script that starts from the signs in the play script, on the other hand, he tries to fill in the blanks of the script with the help of his own accumulation.

The children's theater is compatible with the same situation. If we mean children's theater audience, the child's interpretation of the text is different from the common audience's in the process of the child's reception. The situation of the child audience's preoperational, concrete and formal operational stages changes in accordance with his way of perception. On the other side, the director and the scriptwriter must take the audience's processes of reception into consideration. The child cannot always evaluate the multi-layer structure of the text. If we approach the subject with simple logic, the way that the child infers ambiguous meanings from apparent ones varies depending on his age.

Yet another subject, the director must at least take the audience into consideration pedagogically if the audience is a child. The director's knowledge about how the children's reception realizes plays a role in order to reunite the

things the director wanted to tell correctly with the audience. However, the reception of the director and his way of acting the play are connected directly with his underlying messages, his way of getting the message etc, all of the details, the director's worldview, his educational perspective and the way he observes the children.

You can warn your child with a calm voice against his false step or you can shout him, too. You can even punish him by intensifying the punishment and pulling his ears. All of these details determine your pedagogical manner and your way of getting in contact with the children. It is possible for us to find the traces of the director's manner and worldview about this subject in the plays that he organized. He can give the message of the play by adding to the whole as well with the support of a motto, in other words, he can give it directly, too or there is threat risk in the content of the given messages. As a consequence, the director approaches the child with an effective understanding of the society that he lives in otherwise -not approved-. The approved play determines the society's perspective of the children who live in this society. This is didactical, authoritative or democratical, open to critical thinking, liberatory.

Study

This study was constituted by the observations of the children audience in the theater hall during the play and the interviews with the children at the end of the play. Questions were prepared in accordance with the children's age group with the object of the way they perceive. We watched the play and we studied every script of plays then we evaluated approaches of director and author. Nevertheless, we watched every play then we observed child audiences, having only focused on the play and having taken notes. We approved the observations and we asked questions again to the children at the end of the play.

Different receptions in the triangle of author, director, and children

"Purple Night, Blue Day" takes sides with the child. It has a structure with a critical perspective towards adults and it has characteristics which show himself and show the world he lives into the child. Our hero is a naughty child maybe we can regard him as hyperactive. He is a little more moving according to other children in his class. Our authors wrote up the play for the purpose of having shown this child who was in their world and he even resembled themselves and they brought this child on stage. The director said the child with an authoritative and didactical approach "if you continue to misbehave, you are exposed to these." We see here obviously that the outlook of director and authors on the child resulted from their different receptions which are related to childhood and child education.

The authors wanted the child to see himself in a more liberal field. In the script, there is a cute naughty child who spread his toys and doesn't want to eat.

The children could watch themselves with pleasure in entertaining scenes if director and authors had approached the text with the same ideas.

However, the director assumes an attitude which subdues the child rather than accepts him with his childish characteristics. The director turns the entertaining dream scene which includes debates between typical childish naughtiness into a nightmare scene that toys behaved the child badly. These toys came to life and his friends left him alone with an angry manner.

Naturally, the audiences expressed the given message "he had bad dreams at night for having misbehaved, we have bad dreams, too if we misbehave and sadden surroundings like this.

Interpretation of the signs on the stage

"Tree selfish persons at the bus stop" this is a play that expresses missed opportunities of three selfish persons as a result of their dissension, quarrel and expresses how they made the world unlivable. In the play in which three clowns took part, the director, as well as the scriptwriter, wanted to concretely demonstrate waiting action, experiences and disappearances of the waiting with a bus stop metaphor.

Gradual increasing stress in the process of the waiting action comes to a head with a war scene. While the play needed to show horror of war between, smashed tanks, casualties, and the last hijacked bus by the end of the war scenes which were fortified by light and effects, in an instant, the play turned into a show that people having taken sides in the hall cheered the people on stage, it was curiously supposed who would damage who more, there was a battle cry and the audience was full of beans. The children left the hall with an excitement which was created by this magical war environment. First-grade primary school students expressed that most of them enjoyed the war scene at most and they wanted to watch here again. In fact, the director/the writer had wanted to how bad the war was. The powerful war scene surrounded by the violence had destroyed everybody.

Reception connected with the child's cognitive development stage

For the interpretation of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" play peculiar to the children, the children in the hall showed different reactions according to their ages. Preschool children watched nymph's transformation into a donkey as an instant event and they were surprised. They asked where the donkey came from then they weren't interested in it. Instant changes only interested them. For them, there wasn't a funny event, a man had transformed into a donkey, that's all!

The older children above 7 years old evaluated one step behind having thought the humorous dimension of "transformation into a donkey" and they guessed one step ahead. There was a funny event. In other words, the event would not be funny, it would be magical if the man had transformed into another thing instead of a donkey. The children who I put a question to about this said

that they found funny "immediate transformation of their friend into a donkey and his oblivion". They watched the transformation in front of them in a perceptible way and they had fun by having thought the possible events that could actualize one step ahead. The children above 11 age who passed into the concrete operational stage had fun, too. The reason they laughed was that they thought possible confusions and misunderstandings having realized by the transformation of the nymph into a donkey. Younger ones were interested in the instantaneous change. Older ones had fun by having thought possible chain of events.

Things behind the visible one

The most popular and amusing scenes of the play were the quarrel between two builders who couldn't decide what they would build in the forest by having said "cutting" or "no burning" and these were their falling, their butting each other, their clumsy conflicts. The children were supporting the persons on the stage. They cried and they took sides. In fact, the aim of the builders was to destroy the forest. Here, two persons masqueraded as Laurel-Hardy were making their act very nice with funny movements. At the end of the play, they said that they liked these two builders and they had lots of fun in the children's interview. When we said "but these are two men who tried to destroy the forest", they said, "never mind, but they were too funny."

Conclusion

As is seen, the reception is a field which gives the reader/the audience responsibility for filling in the empty spaces. The audience/the reader explains the meaning and he filled in the empty spaces in accordance with his own equipment, capacity, and culture. In additional to this situation, as for the child audience explains the meaning according to his cognitive development stage, in other words, he explains it forhis perception capacity. In the case of going out of his capacity, he breaks the connection of the stage and he is not interested in it. For this reason, the playwright of the children's play and the director must determine the target audience by considering the child's cognitive development stages and he must certainly prepare their plays for this audience's characteristics.

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