

Puppet theatre - means of education for children

Clara GHIUVELICHIAN¹

Abstract: *The puppet theatre has unlimited possibilities for communication with the young audience, as the performances are based on different means of expression, thematic variety and innovative artistic formulas. The children's show incorporates literature and builds on it, in this sense, dramatisations are a basic element of the repertoire. The Children's and Youth Theater "Căluțul de Mare" in Constanța includes, in its repertoire prestigious names of writers of Romanian and universal literature: Ion Creangă, Carlo Gozzi, Grimm Brothers, Lewis Carroll, Wilhelm Hauff. In the theatrical construction of the show, the doll represents the sign key. Children's theatre is a total theatre. Children have no boundaries between fiction and reality. Youth theatre means creativity and play, it is the foundation on which the adult's personality is built later.*

Keywords: *puppet theatre; puppet-key sign; education; the child spectator; children's show; the art of the actor; the art of animation;*

Introduction

In 2004, I became an actress of „Căluțul de Mare” Theater for Children and Youth, after having been an advised spectator for a long time, but especially fascinated by the magic of the art of animation. From the moment I became part of the „laboratory" where the miracle of a performance with each role is born, I understood that the theatre intended for children is a complex means of education. The possibilities of puppetry theatre and animation are unlimited; “this kind of art has the capacity to address a wide and varied theme, in various artistic forms and formulas.”² This wide scope and diversity is interdependent with the dramaturgy represented. Theatre is undoubtedly something other than literature, a truth that also applies to puppet and dramatic theatre, but the work of scenic art - the performance - incorporates the literary work on which it is built. The play, the dramatisation give wide wings to the imagination of the creators and, last but not least, give educational value to the stage act. The educational action of the theatre, and even more so when addressed to children, begins with the beauty of the language spoken on stage, with the expressive and poetic capacity of the word.

1. The Repertoire in the Puppet Theatre

The „Căluțul de Mare” Theater for Children and Youth has in its repertoire prestigious names of writers belonging to the national and universal heritage: Ion Creangă, Vasile Alecsandri, Carlo Gozzi, Grimm Brothers, Lewis Carroll, Wilhelm Hauff, Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen - after which dramatisations, adaptations and processing have been made.

¹ Faculty of Arts "Ovidius" University of Constanța, klaraghi@yahoo.com.

² Cristian Pepino. 1993. *The aesthetic modality of the puppet theater*[*Modalitatea estetică a teatrului de păpuși*]. București: UNATC, p. 35.

Acquainting the young public with masterpieces of national and universal creation through scenic transpositions constitutes an act of culture and education, even if the scenic work is apart from the inspiring literary work.

Through the stage fruition of a patrimonial literary work, the children's theatre performs an act of aesthetic education.

For aesthetic education, beauty is both a goal and a means.

If we refer to the aesthetic category of beauty, this is at the foundation of art education. It contributes to the understanding and reception of artistic beauty.

Related to „beautiful” as a means, the realisation of a moral and intellectual training is achieved through artistic beauty.

2. Puppet - Key Sign

My experience of nineteen years in children's theatre, performances seen in national and international genre festivals, revealed to me that stage work dedicated to children relies primarily on stylization and essentialization to reach metaphor and symbol. There are complex shows, in which various acts and the most varied animation methods are combined organically and harmoniously, all done with measure in the service of communicating the message. “The puppet - in this kind of performance - is a key sign that enters into a relationship with the animating actor, communicating the message to the room together.”³

Humans invented the puppet to know himself better. Spiritual, sometimes poetic, sometimes full of humour, it shows us our true face. And we accept it, as we accept the complicit wink that makes us take its suggestions. Always reborn, we find it everywhere on the coordinates of time and space, under an infinity of faces. In the form of traditional theatre, it carries the echoes of ancient civilizations. As avant-garde theatre, nowadays, it is always moving the boundaries between that of dramatic theatre and that of marionette/puppet. Tireless in investigating its own instruments, it is itself an instrument of investigation, for all who understand and make themselves understood as art, theatre is a vital means of communication of education.

Object, mask or abstract form, the puppet is the character. It is the product of the scenographer, of the artist who animates it and of the creative director, of the synthetic image, a metaphor that conveys the sign of a human destiny.

3. The Child Spectator

Children's theatre is a total theatre. Through my observations during rehearsals and performances over the years, the study for the completion of my doctoral thesis (The animal character in the children's show) through the discussions held with the masters of the genre - the director and university professor Cristian PEPINO, the puppeteer actress Aneta FORNA CHRISTU founding member of the Constanța Puppet Theater and emblematic personality of the animation in Romania and beyond;

I tried to give an answer to an ever-current controversy related to the relationship of the child spectator with the theatre. How far can the child's perception capacity keep up with the scenic imagination?

Do you have to „sit on your knees” to match his intelligence? Do we have to cause a genuine and strong impact of the stage on the child, in the intellectual and affective way, or do we have to maintain, to provoke through questions the contact between the stage and the

³ Cristian Pepino. 1993. *The aesthetic modality of the puppet theater [Modalitatea estetică a teatrului de păpuși]*. București: UNATC, p. 112.

room?

The text must be poetic, rich in images; spiritual - or strictly functional? But the answer to all this always comes after each performance, then the real dialogue is engaged in the darkness of the performance hall, at great emotional tension where children and dolls live their stories, funny or pathetic, with an unrepeatable passion.

For the child there are no borders between fiction and reality, for him, what happens on stage is as true as reality itself. "In this dialogue the child opens all his credit to the doll, and she takes her partner seriously, and the most open, most serious audience is the child."⁴The doll and the child talk about everything: about life, about morals, about characters, thus the child discovers thousands of possible existences, a universe that stirs and develops his imagination, makes him sensitive to art.

4. The Privilege and Responsibility of Creators

Children's theatre means creativity and play, it is the foundation on which the personality of the later adult is built. Here, the little viewer learns a certain demeanour of life together with the characters, they positively influence feelings and characters that are being formed. The animation theatre show opens children's cultural universe, enriches their imagination, is a means of personality formation, learning a type of positive behaviour, is a means of communication.

The audience of children is, for us creators in animation theatres, a privilege and a heavy responsibility at the same time.

4.1. Privilege

Puppet and animation theatre also means education through play, imagination, using shapes and colours, together with family and school cultivates a taste for beauty; it teaches the child what is good and what is bad, provides models and contributes to his intellectual development.

The stories translated into the show give rise to feelings towards the heroes on the stage, noble and good. Friendship makes sense, truth and good are always victorious.

4.2. Responsibility

Since children cannot be spoken to in any vocabular, but necessarily in one that contains truth and beauty, in this regard the lesson that the child can give us in a well-known Andersen story is universal.

When so many around were competing to praise the emperor's charming clothes, a child with his undisguised mind did not shy away from exclaiming, „The emperor is naked!" The child is a developing personality with a starting point in a whole entity; a gene - if one may say so - "in the composition of which all its future valences and virtues exist and wait to be called upon."⁵

Consequently, of course on the scale of his appreciative means, we have the duty to put before him authenticity, values, certain truths of knowledge and feeling.

⁴ Anaid Tavitian. 2020. *Aneta Fornă Christu, The puppeteer with a child's soul [Aneta Fornă Christu, Păpușarul cu suflet de copil]*. Constanța: Editura Ex Ponto, p. 78.

⁵ Alexandra Davidescu. 1979. *A small big theatre [Un mic teatru mare]*. Craiova: Editura Scrisul Românesc, p. 95.

My experience as an actor in dramatic theatre as well as animated, has shown me that for children, reality is more ramified, richer in tones than that of adults.

It is a world where the fantastic reigns and where the borders between the truth and the imaginary, between the achievable and the unachievable, are much more open. The child spectator does not remain passive to what is happening on the stage, he actively participates in the performance.

5. Conclusions

Our art, of actors in children's theatres, gives us the admirable possibility to apply and verify this, every time - and this always happens - in the hall of the Theater for Children and Youth „Calușul de Mare”, the applause of the little spectators makes me sure that those applauses are sincere and real; it means that we have managed to reveal the truths of life, of nature, of humanity, it means that we have found the way to the mind and heart.

The actors of the theatre dedicated to children have at their disposal and in their power a unique instrument of its kind: the doll/the puppet/the marionette. This is yet another privilege; the puppet is not a simple object, the artist gives it form, expression, life, soul. Their mission is always looking for inspiration and dedication.

The art of the actor in the theatre of puppetry and animation is a collection of delight, grace, music, dance, embroidery and filigree, miniature, vivid and telling colours, images or dream states, transfigurations of one kind or another. They are all elements that once entered through the channels of spontaneous feeling can become acts and moral forces. The need for a fairy tale is part of the child's imminent rights to knowledge. Fairy tales offer the young viewer models, guiding values for the later adult.

I believe that children's shows, in order to fulfil their educational mission, must be real cultural events. To occasion fundamental encounters with major writings from national and universal literature, with a literary Romanian language, with quality music, with images that recreate a balanced and dynamic world where the soul feels at home.

The show in the children's theatre is a corollary, it is the fruit of the meeting of several creative energies. All this having the role of educating, enriching the child's mind and soul. As we showed in a previous chapter, everything starts with the choice of the text. This is done with great care for the power to convey through words ideas, feelings and last but not least the power to educate. The director is the one who establishes, through his conception, the transformation of the universe contained in the dramatic text, into a theatrical story. It reaches the child viewer through vivid images, with the support of the thought expressed in words, of the movement that emphasises the words, of the plasticity of the scenography.

One of the most important energies I was talking about is the ACTOR. The children's theatre actor is at the centre of the whole theatrical universe, like a true magician. With the help of imagination, the children's theatre actor capitalises on the entire corollary of the performance art: the play, the director's vision, the scenographic framework, the sound universe. Metamorphosed into so many characters, he enters into a direct relationship with the audience, offering the child human and spiritual models. The actor is an essential value of the performance in the animation theatre.

When we talk about the actor's role in animated theatre, a very important aspect arises: that of the primacy of affect or lucidity. What do we choose: the theatre of living (Stanislavski) or the theatre of representation (Brecht)? From my experience I can say that in animation theatre it is necessary to meet all these in a creative way.

As for the director's role in children's theatre, he is like a conductor who harmonises - a miniature universe, with all the rigour. Over the seasons, I performed more than twenty roles

in the „Căluțul de Mare” Theater for Children and Youth, and I realised that the director is the one who puts together the so-called SHOW, gives unity and style to the theatrical performance. It facilitates the actor to find the most suitable means of expression. Speaking about the means of expression of the actor in the children's theatre, the importance of several means must be emphasised:

VOICE - the inflection, the quality of the timbre give the measure of the originality of the interpretation. The actor's voice is „sculpted” continuously in the most distinct registers (going from high to low tones).

MAKEUP also has a fundamental value.

GESTURE, MOVEMENT, BODY EXPRESSIVENESS - complete and enrich the actor's means of expression.

All this makes up the STORY that delights, delights and educates the little viewer.

6. References

• Books:

- Davidescu, Alexandra. 1979. *A small big theater [Un mic teatru mare]*. Craiova: Editura Scrisul Românesc.
- Tavitian, Anaid. 2020. *Aneta Forna Christu, the puppeteer with a soul of child [Aneta Forna Christu, păpușarul cu suflet de copil]*. Constanța: Editura Ex Ponto.
- Pepino, Cristian. 1993. *The Aesthetic modality of puppet theater [Modalitatea estetică teatrului de păpuși]*. București: UNATC București.