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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ  
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI**

**INTERACTING WITH *A DOLL'S HOUSE* THROUGH  
READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM**

**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ**

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T.C  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of contents.....	i
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Özet.....	v
Abstract.....	vi

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study .....	1
1.2. Purpose of the Study.....	2
1.3. Significance of the Study .....	3
1.4. The Statement of the Problem .....	4
1.5. Methodology.....	5
1.6. Limitations.....	5

## CHAPTER 2

### READER- RESPONSE CRITICISM

2.1. The Emergence of Reader-Response Criticism .....	6
2.2. Pioneering Works and Predecessors of Reader-Response .....	9
2.3. Major Theories of Reader-Response .....	14
2.4. Transactional & Experiential Theory .....	14
2.5. Phenomenological Theory .....	18
2.6. Feminist Theory.....	20
2.7. Psychological Theory.....	21
2.8. Social Theory .....	22
2.9. Subjective Theory .....	24

**CHAPTER 3**

**A DOLL’S HOUSE AND ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS’ RESPONSES**

**3.1. Henrik Ibsen .....30**  
**3.2. A Doll’s House .....36**  
**3.3. Analysis of the Responses .....38**  
**3.4. Conclusion, Comments and Suggestions ..... 56**

**WORKS CITED .....60**  
**APPENDIX A.....63**  
**APPENDIX B .....65**  
**APPENDIX C .....67**

In memory of my father, İbrahim Ekmekçi

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**ÖZET**  
**OKUR ODAKLI ELEŞTİRİ YÖNTEMİNE GÖRE *BİR BEBEK EVİ***  
**(*A DOLL'S HOUSE*) İSİMLİ ESERİN İNCELENMESİ**

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Bu tezin amacı, edebiyat öğretiminde kullanılan geleneksel yöntemlerden farklı olan ve son yıllarda birçok eğitimcinin dikkatini çeken okur merkezli eleştiri yönteminin teorik gelişimini araştırmaktır. Diğer bir amacımız ise modern dramının önde gelen isimlerinden biri olan Henrik Ibsen'in *Bir Bebek Evi (A Doll's House)* isimli oyununu, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı Bölümü İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı üçüncü ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerinden gelen dönütleri esas alarak okur merkezli eleştiri kuramı kapsamında incelemektir.

Çalışmada teoriye dayalı ve betimleyici araştırma metotları kullanılmıştır. Daha önceden *Bir Bebek Evi (A Doll's House)* isimli oyunu okumuş olan SDÜ İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı üçüncü ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencilerine otuz sorudan oluşan bir anket uygulanmıştır. Okur merkezli eleştirinin en önemli özellikleri, okurun okuma süreci boyunca aktif rol oynaması ve her okuyucunun metinden anladığının farklı olabileceğidir. Bundan dolayı, yapılan ankette açık uçlu sorular tercih edilmiş ve değerlendirme herhangi bir istatistiksel program kullanılmadan her öğrenci için bireysel temelde yapılmıştır. Öğrencilerin verdiği cevaplar tek tek incelenmiş ve değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmamızda; geleneksel edebiyat öğretim yöntemleriyle dönüt odaklı yöntemin farkları, dönüt odaklı sınıflarda öğretmenin rolü, metne verilecek dönütleri etkileyen faktörler ve bir metne birden fazla geçerli yorum yapılma olasılığının nedenleri üzerinde durulmuştur.

Çalışmanın sonuç bölümünde, öğrencilere uygulanan ankette elde edilen sonuçlara göre öğrencilerin okur merkezli eleştiri yöntemlerinden daha çok hangilerini tercih ettikleri, aynı soruya kaç değişik cevap verildiği ve bunların nedenleri üzerinde durulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Okur Merkezli Eleştiri , Okur Odaklı Sınıf, Deneysel Yaklaşım, Görüngüsel Yaklaşım, Sosyal Yaklaşım*

## ABSTRACT

### INTERACTING WITH *A DOLL'S HOUSE* THROUGH READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

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This thesis aims at exploring the theoretical background of *Reader-Response Criticism* which has caught the attention of a lot of educators in recent years and which is different from the traditional literature teaching methods. The other objective of the thesis is to analyse and assess the responses of the junior and senior students studying at Süleyman Demirel University, Department of English Language and Literature, by using Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* through the assumptions of *Reader-Response Criticism*.

Theory-based and descriptive research methods have been used in the study. A questionnaire consisting of thirty questions has been applied to the junior and senior students, who have read the play *A Doll's House* in advance, studying at SDU Department of English Language and Literature. One of the most important characteristics of *Reader-Response Criticism* is that the reader is active during the reading process and each reader may understand and respond the text in a different way. Therefore, open-ended questions have been preferred in the questionnaire we applied and the questionnaire has been analysed individually without using any statistical programme. In our study, we have focused on the issues such as what the role of the teacher in response-based classes is, what objectives are desired, the factors affecting the responses to a text and the reasons for the possibility of giving a text more than one valid response.

In the conclusion part, we have tried to determine which *reader-response theories* used more commonly by the students according to the results obtained from the questionnaire, how many different responses to the same questions are given and the reasons for this have been focused on.

**Key Words:** *Reader-Response Criticism, Reader-Centred Class, Experiential Theory, Phenomenological Theory, Social Theory.*



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

In recent years, *reader-response criticism* has caught the attention of many teachers.<sup>1</sup> That is because of, most probably, the publications of lots of books on response-centred critical theory as well as journal articles and conference presentations. The focus of the writers of these books has been primarily theory which tries to clarify the reading process, determine the role of the reader, explore how meaning is made, define the nature of the interpretive act and assess the influence reading communities and literature conventions. It has been accepted that *reader-response theory* pedagogically the most meaningful for teachers because of the readers' individuality affecting and being affected by the text.<sup>2</sup>

One of the books based on reader-response theory is Nicholas J. Karolides's *Reader Response in the Classroom (1992)*. In this book, there is a part about teaching a poem by using two methods; the traditional teaching method and response-based teaching method. When we analyse the conclusions from this study, we can realize that a work of literature only comes to life when readers interact with the text and when they are active during the reading process.<sup>3</sup> The teacher using response-based teaching in the class points out:

Most people learn better when they are looking for answers to important questions than when someone is giving them those answers, and most people-and especially most teenagers- stop listening to someone else talking after about five minutes, at the most.<sup>4</sup>

It is evident that the other teacher using traditional method fishes for the answers that she has decided in advance are the correct ones. The students who want

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas J. Karolides (Editor), *Reader Response in the Classroom; Connecting Students and Literature*, Longman, New York, 1992, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

to get top grades try to guess what she wants them to say. They do not interact with the text and each other. They are not independent during the reading process. On the contrary, the other teacher who has a reader-oriented class asks the students open-ended questions, without expecting any pre-determined answer, to make them think deeply on what they read. Although the answers are different from what she thinks, she respects for all ideas in the class.

Considering these types of reader-oriented classes, we take *reader* as our starting point for our study.

## 1.2. Purpose of the Study

Our purpose for this study is to find out whether there are answers as many as there are students and to analyse the students' responses according to their phenomenological, social, psychological, feminist and transactional content.

Many teachers of literature believe that reading is a passive act. Robert C. Small writes in his article;

.... a reader opens a book as one might open a package, reaches down in to it, and pulls out what the author put there. Some readers who are careful and perceptive get more from their response to the text. Less attentive and less able readers get less and get it less accurately. But all are mining for the gold that the author has deposited.<sup>5</sup>

In this study, we aim to analyse whether readers really bring to a piece of literature what they experience in their life. That is why we have chosen Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. Since it is a social realist play and the characters stand for anyone in society, the students can easily find what they have experienced in their lives.

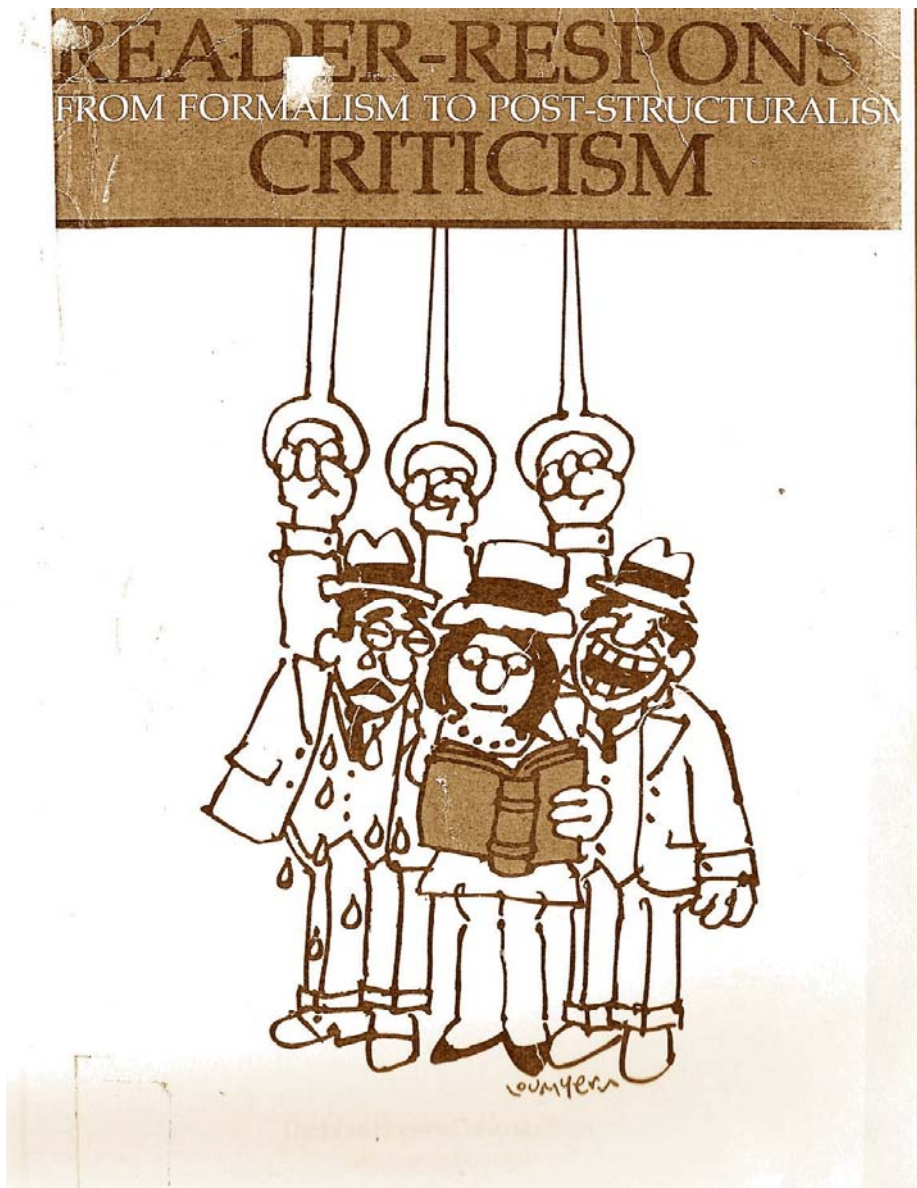
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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas J. Karolides (Editor), *Ibid*, p. 18.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

Student-centred classes have been desired in modern educational systems in recent years. In reading courses, the main objective is to make the students think critically and respond what they read. Our study attempts to make the reading lessons more enjoyable and efficient because there is no one true interpretation in this theory. Teachers are not the authority; however, they try to make possible a sharing of their students' personal responses. Students who are in response-oriented classes consider with respect the responses of other students' and the teacher's. And teachers do not consider whether students, critics and scholars agree with their own view. With this study, teachers will find different kinds of alternatives to make the reading lesson a real reading lesson.

#### 1.4. The Statement of the Problem



As we have seen the picture in the cover of the book *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, three people are reading the same book but their reaction to what they read are totally different from each others'. One of the men is reacting to the book by crying while the other man is laughing at what

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<sup>6</sup> Jane P. Tompkins (Editor), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992, cover picture.

he reads. Contrary to the two men, the woman remains neutral and shows no reaction. That is the problem which we compel us to search for during this study. The question is why a reader responds differently from another reader to the same piece of literature.

### **1.5. Methodology**

In our study, we will include a theory-based analysis of group of students' responses to Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. We will also use descriptive research methods in some parts of the study. While analysing the students' responses, we will not use a statistical programme as the questions in our survey are all open ended and subjective. Analysis of the students' responses will focus on the phenomenological, social, psychological, feminist and transactional content of their responses. While applying the questionnaire we have prepared, we let the students use their mother tongue in order to make them feel more secure as expressing their ideas. However, only twelve out of thirty two students have preferred using English while the rest of the students have answered the questions in Turkish.

### **1.6. Limitations**

The questionnaire applied is limited to advanced level students of English literature department. Reader-response questions can only be asked to upper-intermediate or advanced level students as English is not their native language. Therefore, elementary and pre-intermediate level students may not express their feelings exactly as they are the speaker of English as a foreign language. This study is limited to Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. We also limited the number of the students to whom we applied the questionnaire on purpose in order to analyze the responses in detail as we have not used any statistical programme.

## CHAPTER 2

### READER- RESPONSE CRITICISM

In this chapter, we will try to explain the emergence of *reader-response criticism*, its historical developments and basic assumptions that *reader-response approach* has. But there are lots of various theoretical assumptions; so it seems to be too difficult for us to analyze them in detail in this study. For this reason, only the important ones which constitute the approach are included in our study. Although reader-response critics all believe that the reader plays a part in interpreting a text's meaning, the critics have different methodologies with regard to textual analysis.<sup>7</sup> Many twentieth century schools of criticism such as deconstruction, feminism, Marxism and new historicism have something in common with *reader-response criticism*.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is too difficult to draw definite borders of *reader-response criticism*. Some books suggest that *reader-response theory* and practice fall into three distinct groups; structuralism in which the text is given more importance than the reader, phenomenology in which the text and the reader are given equal importance and subjective criticism in which the reader is given more importance than the texts. All of these approaches are evaluated and the critics who pioneered these approaches are mentioned in short in this study. After that, the main approaches shaping the *reader-response criticism* have been analyzed in this part of the thesis.

#### 2.1. The Emergence of Reader-Response Criticism

*Reader-Response* is primarily German and American literary theory which drew attention in literary analysis in the early 1970s but its historical roots can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it is difficult to say an exact date of its appearance as readers have been responding to what they have read since the dawn of literature itself. Also, as the theorists who make up "*Readers-Response*" did not

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<sup>7</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism. An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, 2nd. Ed., Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1999, p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> Nationmaster-Encyclopedia: Reader Response <<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Reader-Response>> (17 March 2009)

consciously create a school of thought, it is not easy when and with whom the movement began. It did not emerge as a total system because *Reader-Response* is a reaction to the textual emphasis of New Criticism of the 1940s through 1960s in the west. New Criticism emphasizes that only that which is within a text is part of the meaning of a text. According to New Critics, the text reveals its own meaning and it can be analyzed and dissected so it becomes autonomous. The text itself contains what the readers need to discover its meaning. While examining a literary text, the critic searches for both denotative and connotative meanings, possible allusions within the text, individual words, phrases, sentences, figures of speech, symbols, point of view and tone. The critic tries to uncover the meaning of any literary texts without considering author's life, times and any other extraneous information.<sup>10</sup> Some extrinsic factors such as historical, social, context, authorial intention, authorial biography, readers' psychology and the response upon reading matter little. However, the classical writers *Plato* and *Aristotle* were aware of the effects of works of literature. Plato, in fact, worried that poets would stir up the emotions of the audience.<sup>11</sup> He also believed that art, as a copy of copy, was at a furthest remove from "truth" and therefore misled people. In his *Republic*, he excludes poets from his ideal society. Aristotle was also conscious of the significance of specific rhetorical effects of works of art. In his discussion of tragic form, he tells us that tragic plays elicit from spectators the feeling of pity and fear.<sup>12</sup> In the *Poetics*, Aristotle voices concern about the effects of a play will have on the audience's emotions. Will it arouse the spectators' pity or fear? Will these emotions purge the viewer? Will they cleanse a spectator of all emotions by the play's end? Both Plato and Aristotle's concern about audience response confirm the idea that the audience or the reader is passive. Readers or audiences allow the literary work to dominate their thoughts and actions. They bring little to the play or text.<sup>13</sup>

*Reader-response criticism* tries to describe what happens in the reader's mind while interpreting a work of fiction. Reading is a creative process like writing. No text provides self-contained meaning. Literary texts do not have meaning

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<sup>10</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Approaches to Reading and Interpretation  
<<http://www1.assumption.edu/users/ady/hhgateway/gateway/Approaches.html>> ( 17 March 2009)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, (17 March 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Ibid*, p. 64.

independently from readers' interpretations. A text is not complete until it is read and interpreted. Dana Gioia and R.S. Gwynn explain this in their study *The Longman Anthology of Short Fiction* as follows:

The easiest way to explain reader-response criticism is to relate it to the common experience of re-reading a favourite book after many years. A book one read as a child might seem shockingly different when re-read as an adolescent or as an adult. The character once remembered favourably might seem less admirable while another character becomes more sympathetic. The book has not changed. However, our life experiences between the first reading and any subsequent re-reading can affect the way we respond to a story. (2001: 17)

In the same book they explain how different individuals see the same text differently by focusing on the effects of religious, cultural, and social values. They state that individuals do not read the same text in exactly the same way and they do not agree on its meaning, either. According to Dana Gioia and R.S. Gwynn, *reader response criticism* also overlaps with gender criticism in exploring how men and women read the same text with different assumptions.<sup>14</sup>

*Reader Response Criticism* pays attention to the areas of psychology, history, and sociology. In so doing, the critics of *reader response* make reading an interdisciplinary activity. *Reader Response Criticism* develops open-ended problem solving strategies and it operates on the following premises:

- Texts affect readers in unique and subjective ways.
- Readers participate in determining the meaning of literary works.
- Anything that contributes to the development of a reader influences his/her interpretation of a reading selection.
- An individual's social class, racial background, ethnicity, gender, nationality, age, physical condition, employment, vocational interests, and so on, make a profound impact on how that person sees and understands the world.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dana Gioia , R.S. Gwynn, *The Longman Anthology of Short Fiction*, Compact Ed., Toronto, New York, 2001, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>Reader Response Theory

<<http://www.llp.armstrong.edu/reese/courses/1102/2008Win1102/readerresponse.pdf> > (17 March 2009)



## 2.2. Pioneering Works and Predecessors of Reader-Response

Important predecessors of *Reader-Response* include I.A. Richards, Louise Rosenblatt, Hans Robert Jauss, Gerard Prince, Wolfgang Iser, Norman Holland, David Bleich and Stanley Fish.

I.A. Richards, who was one of the founders of New Criticism, analyzed a group of Cambridge undergraduates' misreading of poems. He was interested in the reading process itself and tried to use *Reader-Response* approach to textual analysis. When he asked his students to record their free responses and evaluations of the short texts, he got surprised because of the wide variety of seemingly incompatible and contradictory responses. He published his findings, including his own interpretation, in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1925). He recognized the contextual nature of reading poems and he stated that a reader brings to the text a vast variety of ideas gathered through life's experiences and previous literary experiences. Also, s/he applies these experiences to the text. He concluded that the reader is no longer passive receiver of knowledge but an active participant in the creation of a text's meaning.<sup>16</sup>

Louise M. Rosenblatt developed Richard's assumptions related to contextual nature of the reading process in the 1930s. According to Rosenblatt in her work *Literature as Exploration* (1937), the reader and the text must work together to produce meaning.<sup>17</sup> The reading process involves a reader and a text. Both the reader and the text interact or share a transactional experience. The text shapes the reader's experiences, selecting, limiting and ordering the ideas. The reader and the text produce new creation through the transactional experience. Rosenblatt states that readers read in two ways which are efferently or aesthetically.<sup>18</sup> When we read to be informed, it is efferent reading. During this process, we gain information and we are not interested in actual words. Aesthetic reading is to experience the text. We care for each word, its sounds and patterns. During this kind of reading, we interact with

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<sup>16</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Ibid*, p. 65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*. p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

the text. For Rosenblatt and many other critics of *Reader-Response*, the focus is on not only the text itself but on the reader and the reading process. Readers are now active participants together with the text in creating meaning. Rosenblatt summed up her ideas in her essay *Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading* (1969) as “A poem is what the reader lives through under the guidance of the text and experiences as relevant to the text”<sup>19</sup> She wrote:

The idea that a poem presupposes a reader actively involved with a text is particularly shocking to those seeking to emphasize the objectivity of their interpretation. (1969:3149)

Rosenblatt also states that there is no universal, absolute interpretation of a text, rather, there can be several probable interpretations, depending in part upon what the reader brings to the text. She agreed with New Critics’ emphasis on *close reading*. Reading is a transaction in which readers, while bringing their world of experience to activate the text, respect the text on its own terms.

The other exponent of *reader-response criticism* is Hans Robert Jauss. He emphasized that a text’s social history must be taken into consideration while judging the literary text. The criteria used while interpreting the literary texts must be consistent with the period in which they were written. He proposed the term “*reception theory*”<sup>20</sup> which means that the reception of different groups of readers from different ages and periods would differ. He also used the term “*horizon of expectation*” which means including all of a historical period’s critical vocabulary and assessment of a text. He pointed out that how any text is evaluated from one historical period to another. According to Jauss, it is equally wrong to say that a work is universal and its meaning is fixed forever and open to all readers of any period. Therefore, there is no single predetermined adequate reception of a given text on which the literary theory needs to focus. Instead, all actual receptions in the past and present are valid. Historical knowledge is of importance to the reader.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Critical Approaches

<[http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/poetry/critical\\_define/crit\\_reader.html](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/poetry/critical_define/crit_reader.html)> (29.10.2009)

<sup>20</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> English Literature Essays < <http://www.english-literature.org/essays/reader-response.php> > (29.10.2009)

Gerard Prince, who is another advocate of *Reader-Response Criticism*, drew a parallelism between the narrator and the narratee. He used a system of classification. He posited a series of distinctions among the kinds of readers to whom a text can be addressed: *the real reader*; the person who holds the book in hand, *the virtual reader*; the kind of reader the author thinks he is writing for, *the ideal reader*; one who understands the text perfectly and approves its every nuances.<sup>22</sup> He stated that texts are classified not only according to the traditional distinctions among various kinds of narrators but also according to the types of narratees to whom the story is addressed. In the 1970s, he tried to develop a specific kind of structuralism known as narratology; the process of analyzing a story using all elements involved in its telling, such as narrator, voice, style, verb tense, personal pronouns, audience and so forth.<sup>23</sup>

German phenomenologist Wolfgang Iser believes that any object does not gain meaning unless an active consciousness recognizes or registers this object.<sup>24</sup> It is impossible to separate the object from human mind. He states that the critics' job is to examine and explain the text's effect on the reader. He analyzes this effect on both the implied reader and actual reader. Implied reader is the reader implied by the text. According to Iser, implied reader is the one who

.....embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect-predispositions laid down, not by empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader has .....his or her roots firmly planted in the structure of the text".<sup>25</sup>

The actual reader is the person who physically picks up the text and reads it. It is the reader who comes to the text shaped by cultural and personal norms and prejudices. Iser also discusses ways in which text are *concretized* in the mind. He discusses ways in which text call upon and changes the reader's own horizons of expectations. He believes that there are some gaps in the text; places in which the text expects us to fill in information or otherwise use our imagination. According to Iser, a

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald Prince, *Introduction To The Study Of The Narratee. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Ed. Jane P. Tompkins, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992, p.7-24

<sup>23</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Ibid*, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1974, p. 285.

literary work has two poles: the aesthetic and the artistic.<sup>26</sup> The artistic pole is the author's text and the aesthetic is the realization accomplished by the reader. Therefore, the literary work can not be considered as the actualization of the text, but is situated somewhere between two. Because every reader, including children, comes to a text with his own set of social values and norms and has to confront the values of the society as embodied in the author's text, it becomes a source of emotional and experiential growth and this determines our expectations about what we are going to read.<sup>27</sup> To summarize, Iser says that what is most important in meaning-making for everybody is the active, dynamic process of working toward meaning, the filling in of gaps, the changing of one's own viewpoint, the ultimate growth on both the semantic and experiential levels.

The other exponent of Reader-Response is Norman Holland who shares the same ideas with Louise Rosenblatt. In his work *The Dynamic of Literary Response* (1968) he asserts that reading process is a transaction between the text and the reader.<sup>28</sup> The text contains its own themes, unity and structure so it is very important. However, a reader transforms the text into a private world. He used Freudian psychoanalysis as the foundation for his theory and believed that we receive from our mothers a primary identity at birth and we personalize this identity through our life experiences.<sup>29</sup> Each reader interjects ready-made psychological process with individual variations. On examining the responses of real readers, Holland found variations great to fit a core of shared fantasy or defence. One reader found a character in a Hemingway story like a sinister torturer, while another found the same character warm and hospitable.<sup>30</sup> The first reader perceived texts in terms of threats to his masculinity, the second looked for sources of support. According to Holland, interpretations are subjective. He thinks that there is no such a thing as a correct interpretation. There are as many interpretations as there are readers.

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<sup>26</sup> English Literature Essays < <http://www.english-literature.org/essays/reader-response.php> > (29.10.2009)

<sup>27</sup> Susan Steinfirst, *Up For Discussion: Reader-Response Criticism*, School Library Journal, October 1986, p. 114.

<sup>28</sup> Reader Response Criticism- Wikipedia < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reader\\_response\\_criticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reader_response_criticism) > (17.03.2009)

<sup>29</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Ibid*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Reader-Response Criticism < <http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/5603/Reader-Response-Criticism.html> > (18 March 2009)

David Bleich, who is an American Critic, is the founder of *subjective criticism* which means that the reader's thoughts, beliefs, and experiences play a greater part than the actual text in shaping a work's meaning. According to Bleich, there is no objective existence of a text. One can not find meaning in the text but it is developed only if the reader interacts with the other readers to get the text's *collective meaning*. The meaning can be obtained if the reader negotiates and discusses on the text within the group. Subjective critics including Bleich assert that when a reader is reading a text, the reader responses something interesting or amazing in the text. These kind of private responses are discussed by the members of the reader's social group and the group decides on the valid, acceptable interpretation of the text.

The last advocate of *Reader-Response Criticism* is Stanley Fish who provided the first reader-oriented study of a major literary work, *Paradise Lost (1667)*. His thesis emphasizes that Milton used a number of literary techniques intentionally to lead the reader into false sense of security whereupon he would affect a turn from the reader's expectations in order to surprise the reader with his own prideful self-sufficiency. Fish's concern is with "What is really happening in the act of reading?" and this is reflected in his compilations of essays entitled "*Is there a Text in This Class?*"<sup>31</sup> Fish claims that it is the *interpretative community* that creates its own reality. It is the community that invests a text with meaning.<sup>32</sup> Fish's theory is sometimes called *reception aesthetics* which means that a text is not simply passively accepted by the audience but the reader or viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on their individual cultural background and life experiences. In essence, the meaning of a text is not inherent with the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the reader. A basic acceptance of the meaning of a specific text tends to occur when a group of readers have a shared cultural background and interpret the text in similar ways.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> A brief history of literary theory, < <http://www.xenos.org/essays/litthry1.htm>> (17.03.2009)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, (17.03.2009)

<sup>33</sup> Stanley Fish, *Literature In the Reader: Affective Stylistics. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Ed. Jane P. Tompkins, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992, p. 70-100.

### 2.3. Major Theories of Reader-Response

In this part, we have tried to outline the responses of readers to a text. Norman Holland in his essay *The Mind and the Book: A Long Look at Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (1998)<sup>34</sup> focuses on how psychology has been applied to three different minds associated with literature: the author's mind, the character's mind and the reader's mind. He states that as the character's mind does not exist, the reader can not study something which does not exist. In the same way, the author's mind is usually unavailable, and since biographical material can be limited, his/her mind is also difficult to study. He concludes that studying the reader's mind is the most productive means of understanding the literary transaction.<sup>35</sup> For these reasons, we give primary importance to the reader and study the main theories of reader-response criticism within the framework of Richard Beach in his study. For him, *reader-response theorists* have several different perspectives which include, phenomenologist Iser and Poulet as textual theorists; Louise Rosenblatt and David Bleich as experiential theorists; and feminist Elizabeth Flynn as cultural theorist. We also follow this methodology while studying the theories of *reader-response*.

### 2.4. Transactional & Experiential Theory:

Louise Rosenblatt wrote her book *Literature as Exploration* in 1938 and she first put forward the concept of the reading experience as a "transaction".<sup>36</sup> The dominant theme of her book is that a literary work exists in the transaction between the reader and the text and she considers reading as an interaction between the reader and the text. She states that there are no generic readers or generic interpretations but there are countless relationships between readers and texts.<sup>37</sup> In her book she points out this fact as follows:

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<sup>34</sup> Norman N.Holland, *The Mind and the Book: A Long Look at Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* <<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/nholland/mindbook.htm>> (29.10.2009)

<sup>35</sup> David Bleich, *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*, Urbana, NCTE, 1975, p. 121.

<sup>36</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 5th ed., The Modern Language Association of America, New York, 1995, p. viii.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

A novel or poem or play remains merely inkpots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience. When the reader refers to a poem, say, "Byzantium," he is designating such an experience in relation to a text. (Rosenblatt 1995:24)

Rosenblatt leads a number of critics who are referred to as "experiential theorists". These theorists are mainly interested in describing the reader's processes of engagement and involvement which create the readers' own reading or experience.<sup>38</sup> According to her, there is a distinction between "efferent" and "aesthetic" modes of experiencing the text. She recognizes that the reader shifts between these modes. She also focuses on the reading process stating that the reader comes to the book from life and turns for a moment from his direct concern with the various problems and satisfactions of his own life.<sup>39</sup>

A reader's past experience and current preoccupations affect his or her reading of a text and form his or her response. Furthermore, Rosenblatt states that other factors also help to shape the literary experience. She claims that adolescents bring to the literary transaction several other underlying factors which will affect their responses. She notes the adolescents' self-consciousness concerning their normalcy, the adolescents' beginning questioning of the family's authority, the adolescents' personality development, and the adolescents' juxtaposition of conventional ideas of life roles and circumstances of contemporary life. Rosenblatt believes that the students will bring to the reading experience the social, moral, and religious codes which have been assimilated from their community as well as from their family.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, she suggests that teachers should be familiar with current adolescent psychological theories that contribute to framing the human personality and also they should become familiar with the basic social concepts of psychological theory. She mentions a lot of external factors influencing the development of personality such as feeding as a source of security, emotional relationships between parents and siblings,

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Beach, *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader Response Theories*, Urbana, NCTE, 1993, p.49

<sup>39</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 5th ed., The Modern Language Association of America, New York, 1995, p.35

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94

and economic conditions surrounding the readers and students. Rosenblatt explains all these in her book as follows:

The same text will have a very different meaning and value to us at different times or under different circumstances. Some state of mind, worry, a temperamental bias, or a contemporary social crisis may make us either especially receptive or especially impervious to what the work offers. Without an understanding of the reader, one cannot predict what particular text may be significant to him or what may be the special quality of his experience. Hence it is important to consider some of the selective factors that may mold the reader's response to literature. (Rosenblatt 1995: 35)

According to Rosenblatt, what the student brings to literature is very significant for "the equation represented by book plus reader." Some questions must be taken into consideration during the reading process such as: Why was his reaction different from those of the other students? Why did he choose one particular slant rather than another? Why did certain phases of the book or poem strike him more forcibly than others? Why did he misinterpret or ignore certain elements? What was there in his state of the mind that led to a distorted or partial view of the work? What in his temperament and past experience helped him understand it more adequately? What questions and obscurities remain?<sup>41</sup> Furthermore she states that the student's particular community background, whether he comes from the North or the South, from city or country, from a middle-class or underprivileged home, will affect the nature of the understanding and the prejudices that he brings to book. She explains what happens in the reading of a literary work as follows:

What, then happens in the reading of a literary work? The reader, drawing on past linguistic and life experience, links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his interfusion with the peculiar contribution of the text. (Rosenblatt 1995: 30)

Rosenblatt states that the reader seeks in literature a great variety of satisfactions. She gives an example of a freshman class at a New England women's

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<sup>41</sup>Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Ibid*, p. 75.



college. The teacher asks “Why do you read novels?” Some spontaneous answers are as follows:

I like to read a novel for relaxation after I have been studying hard all day.

I like to read anything that is well written, in which the author gives you interesting descriptions and exciting adventures.

I like to find out about the things that happen to people and how they solve their problems.

I had an interesting experience with a novel a few weeks ago. I discovered that one of the characters was in the same fix that I was in. I got a great deal from seeing how the character in the book managed.

I like to read about as many different kinds of situations as possible-just in case I myself might be in such a situation some day.(Rosenblatt 1995:35)

Rosenblatt theorizes that the literary work of art is a form of personal experience which has several dynamic potentialities. To sum up, for Rosenblatt, literature:

- encourages imagination needed in a democracy.
- acts as an agency in our culture that transmits images of behaviour .
- reveals to the adolescent the diversity of possible ways of life.
- helps readers make sound choices through imaginative trial and error or experimentation.
- enables readers to view his or her own personality and problems objectively.
- frees the adolescent from fears, guilt, and insecurities engendered by too narrow view of normality.
- suggests socially beneficial channels for drives that might otherwise find expression in antisocial behaviour. (Rosenblatt 1995: 212-213)

For Rosenblatt, the literature teacher must create a situation in which the student becomes aware of possible alternative interpretations and responses by creating the environment for evoking an experienced meaning and reacting freely to it.

In summary, Louise Rosenblatt develops the archetype for experiential reader-response theory. She claims that when we read the same text at different times, we can differentiate. Undisciplined or distorted emotional responses and the lack of relevant experience or knowledge will lead to inadequate interpretations of the text. The aim is to help the student toward a more and more controlled more and more valid or defensible response to a text by improving the quality of the students’ actual

literary experiences. The reader must ultimately submit to the text's guidance which is demanding activity. In *Literature as Exploration*, she claims that literary critics and theorists of the past have failed because they placed too much attention on the classification of symbols and patterns within a text and little attention to the process of synthesizing. Transaction between the reader and the text forms the basis for many *reader-response theorists*.<sup>42</sup>

According to Rosenblatt, the reader must be free while responding to books even though his/her response does not resemble the 'standard critical comments'.<sup>43</sup> He/she should be able to express himself/herself freely and they should know in advance that his/her response is also worth expressing. She states that a literature class where the student feels that everything that he thinks or says is equally valuable might possibly have a therapeutic effect. Teachers must be aware of the fact that the students who have a rural or urban background or regional loyalty will tend to build up stock responses. The fixed ideas and emotional associations that cluster about family and sex relations may lead to irrelevant responses. Reader must be helped to develop 'flexibility of mind'<sup>44</sup>, a freedom from rigid emotional habits, if they are to enter into the aesthetic experiences the artist has made possible.

## **2.5. Phenomenological Theory**

Phenomenological approach to literature looks at the personality behind the work especially with the general reader. It seeks to bridge the gap between biography and criticism by approaching the author through the text. It starts with the work and attempts to trace the pattern of the author's mind. Phenomenology as an approach to literature is usually associated with the theory and practice of the Genova School of Critics, most notably George Poulet and Wolfgang Iser. The dominant idea is that the critic should empty his or her mind of all presuppositions and then, responding directly to the text, discover the unique mode of the consciousness of the author. As a phenomenological theorist, Wolfgang Iser focuses on the dynamic nature of the literary work which is revealed primarily through the reading process in two ways.

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<sup>42</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Ibid*, p. 294-295.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

First, the process of reading is one in which much of the dynamism is derived from the gaps in the text. Literary texts are full of gaps, turns, twists and frustrations which a reader faces an attempt to fill in those gaps and to make the connections between the interruptions in the flow of the text. The boredom arises if the reader's imagination never enters the field. For this reason a literary text must be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination by giving the opportunity to the reader for filling in the gaps.<sup>45</sup> However, it is significant not to forget the fact that each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way. While reading, he makes his own decision on how the gaps to be filled. With traditional text this process was more or less unconscious, but modern texts often exploit it on purpose. With all literary texts, it can be said that the reading process is selective, and the potential text is richer than any of its individual realizations.

The second way in which the dynamic characteristics of the reading process are revealed is through what Iser describes as self-correction. While a reader is reading, he or she "formulates significations which he must then continually modify"<sup>46</sup> According to Iser, the reader's perspective changes and so do the signs in the text. It is a fact that a second reading of a piece of literature frequently produces a different impression from the first. That's because he is looking at the text from different perspective when he is reading it at the second time. This shifting results in reconciliation of the conflicting elements as well as a balance between detachment from and involvement in the text. Iser asserts that the reader arrives at real understanding when a balance between empathy and judgement is simultaneously balanced with detachment and involvement.

The other phenomenological theorist George Poulet focuses this imbalance as well in the confrontation between the reader (self) and the text (other) in his description of the reading process. His argument centres around the general passivity of the reader who is dependent on the text. Poulet explains how texts only take on their full existence in the reader and that the reader takes on the subject which does the thinking saying that "since every thought must have a subject to think it, this

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<sup>45</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach, From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Ed. Jane P. Tompkins, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992, p. 50-51.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

thought, which is alien to me and yet in me, must also have a subject which is alien to me”<sup>47</sup>

## 2.6. Feminist Theory

Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It examines women's social roles and lived experience, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, psychoanalysis, economics, literary criticism, and philosophy.<sup>48</sup> In a modern sense, feminist criticism seeks to challenge the conventions of patriarchal society that is based on the premise of masculine authority. Keith Booker explains this in her book as;

Feminist literary criticism focuses on the relationship between literature and patriarchal biases in society and on the potential role that literature can play in overcoming such biases.<sup>49</sup>

It has been argued that reader- response theory goes hand-in-hand with feminist theory. Both Rosenblatt and Iser focus their studies on hypothetical readers. But cultural theorists, Elizabeth Flynn and Judith Fetterley have studied actual readers. Richard Beach considers feminist theory as a developmental step in the history of reader- response theory in his work *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader Response Theories*. He claims that it is a natural outgrowth of the psychological and psychoanalytical perspectives of the 1980's and early 1990's.<sup>50</sup>

One of the leading feminists, Judith Fetterley, asserts in her work *Reading about Reading* that much of the literary canon taught in secondary and post-secondary schools is grounded in the male canon. She believes that women are *immasculated* as a result of reading the male canonical texts.<sup>51</sup> Women are taught to think and respond as men, to identify with male points of view and even to accept as normal and valid a male system of values.<sup>52</sup> According to her, women are “estranged from their own

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<sup>47</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *Ibid*, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> Feminist Theory, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_theory)> (18.03.2009)

<sup>49</sup> M.Keith Booker, *A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism*, Longman Publishers, USA, 1996, p. 89.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Beach, *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Judith Fetterley, *Reading about Reading*, Indiana UP, Bloomington, 1978, p. 147-164.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader, A Feminist Approach To American Fiction*, Indiana UP, Bloomington, 1978, p. xi-xxvi.

experience ... they are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one.”<sup>53</sup>

As feminist theory is embedded in cultural and social perspectives, the role of gender in the experience of reading cannot be ignored. In fact, gender plays a significant role in readers responding to literature. Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocínio Schweickart point out in their text *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* that men and women interact differently with any given text. For Flynn, three things can occur during the reading experience: the reader can dominate the text by resisting an alien thought or subject, thereby remaining essentially unchanged by the experience; or the text can dominate the reader who can allow the alien thought to become such a powerful presence that the self is replaced by the text and thereby effaced; or the third possibility exists when the reader and the text interact with a degree of mutuality.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.7. Psychological Theory

Since intellectual development varies from student to student, teachers should have an understanding of the developmental psychology of the student reader because it has become a factor leading to the emergence of psychological theories of response. Piaget’s stages of cognitive development as well as Kohlberg’s levels of moral reasoning have certainly been at the core of psychological response theorists.<sup>55</sup> However, Norman Holland in his 1968 treatise *The Dynamics of Literary Response* offered a slightly different approach in his psychoanalytical theory of response. Three basic concepts form the basis of his work: the shifting of the conscious to the unconscious, the role of fantasy, and the reader’s identification with characters.<sup>56</sup>

On a conscious level a reader is actively engaged in perceiving a text in an attempt to make meaning through a process of successive abstractions. However, on an unconscious level, readers bring other things such as associations or experiences to a text. This shifting from the unconscious to the conscious is a dynamic as well as

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<sup>53</sup>Judith Fetterley, *Ibid*, p.xx.

<sup>54</sup>Elizabeth Flynn, Patrocínio Schweickart, *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore, 1986, p. ix-xxix.

<sup>55</sup>Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Ibid*, p.10-12.

<sup>56</sup>Norman Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response*, Oxford UP, New York, 1968, p. 30-62.

meaning-making process which forms the basis of Holland's theory.<sup>57</sup> According to Holland, a literary work "presents itself as a text, written or spoken or seen" which transforms a reader's primitive, childlike fantasies into adult, civilized meanings.<sup>58</sup> Holland believes that transforming fantasies through various defensive devices gives force to a reader's conscious meaning which, in turn, manages a reader's fears and drives. Thus, in a psychoanalytical reading it is the "form of the fantasy that generates our response".<sup>59</sup> Another facet of the fantasy suggests that the reader willingly suspends his or her disbelief and adopts a mental stance. By doing this when reading literature, readers involve their deepest level of basic trust which feels as though this suspension of disbelief is going on within them and not outside them. The third and final point of Holland's psychoanalytical theory of response is the importance he places on the reader's identification with a character. For him, readers don't "identify with a character so much as with a total interaction of characters in which some satisfy needs for pleasure and others satisfy our need to avoid anxiety"<sup>60</sup>. Ultimately, what Holland does is reduce the literary experience to a balance of fantasy and management of fantasy. For him, psychoanalytical, as one aspect of psychological, theory encourages responses as a way of managing the fantasy a text sets forth.

## 2.8. Social Theory

Stanley Fish's famous book *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* explains the nature of his interpretive communities. As a reader reads the subtitle, the meaning of the word *authority* can be interpreted at least two ways. On one hand, it can simply mean power. On the other hand, depending on the social role of the reader or interpreter, *authority* might be interpreted as meaning *efficacy*. Either interpretation reveals a distinctly different point of reference based on the social role of the interpreter. As a response theorist, Stanley Fish is interested in how readers' social roles function in their construction of meaning. Fish's ideology emerged from the solution to two dilemmas. One concerns how literary texts come to

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<sup>57</sup> Norman Holland, *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 313.

be identified. What he came to understand is that literature is a "function of a communal decision as to what will count as literature"<sup>61</sup>. His other dilemma questioned: "Which was the repository of meaning, the text or the reader?" Rather than the text or the reader making meaning, Fish believed that the answer lay in the interpretive community as that which is ultimately responsible for producing meaning. He defines interpretive communities as those people "who share interpretive strategies"<sup>62</sup>. Fish also assumes that readers not only share strategies valued by a certain group, but also the interpretive communities exist "prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around"<sup>63</sup>.

Critics of Fish are concerned with the vague nature of the interpretive community because of the variations of meaning resulting from an interpretation. He counters this argument by insisting that the nature of the interpretive community as the authority is neither objective nor subjective, but rather neutral. He says;

.....the meanings and texts produced by an interpretive community are not subjective because they do not proceed from an isolated individual but from a public and conventional point of view<sup>64</sup>.

On the other hand, an interpretive community is not objective because "as a bundle of Interests, of particular purposes and goals, its perspective is interested"<sup>65</sup>. Another problem often considered in Fish's theory is the notion that in a classroom, students often respond as members of several communities from several different perspectives, therefore it is not uncommon to have conflicting allegiances between communities from which the reader is responding<sup>66</sup>. In other words, for Fish the nature of interpretive communities is dynamic in nature; students respond to texts as members of several different communities at the same time.

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<sup>61</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, Harward UP, Cambridge, 1980, p.10.

<sup>62</sup> Norman Holland, *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Beach, *Ibid*, p. 107.

## 2.9. Subjective Theory

The cornerstone of Bleich's subjective criticism is his subjective paradigm which evolved not only from Louise Rosenblatt's work in reader response, but also as a reaction to New Criticism. Bleich begins by observing the connection between language and literature. Stressing that the handling of language and literature does not depend on knowledge of meanings, but rather on a belief in those meanings given by certain authoritative authors, Bleich points out that it is impossible to "separate the meaning of words and literature from the way language and literature are handled by speakers and readers"<sup>67</sup>. In a broad sense literature reflects people, and readers use literature as a mirror and microscope to examine human problems; literary pedagogy has long been rooted in this maxim. But this is where Bleich begins to diverge from standard literary assumptions. According to him, teachers fail to consider that once a text is read, it also becomes a reflection of the reader. Readers are less than truthful if they deny their experience as an emotional one, and consequently, a subjective experience.<sup>68</sup> Bleich condemns today's educational system by insisting that readers do not explore the personal and emotional connection they have to language and literature in part because of "the lack of any widely accepted context for validating subjective experience"<sup>69</sup>.

Dissatisfaction with years of New Criticism and its objectification of literature perplexed theorists like Bleich whose emphasis has been on the role of the reader in experiencing literature. Linguistic knowledge cannot be objectified as if it was a scientific experiment; an objective standard of knowledge cannot therefore be applied to language-dependent disciplines. It is at this point that Bleich begins to argue that recognition of his subjective paradigm is a means of "reducing the distance between actual reading experiences ... and linguistic knowledge"<sup>70</sup>. The positing of his subjective paradigm as a means of making a reader's subjective experiences of language and literature more satisfying is the core of his theory and therefore the substance of his entire book *Subjective Criticism (1981)*.

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<sup>67</sup> David Bleich, *Subjective Criticism*, John Hopkins UP, Baltimore, 1981, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.



The subjective paradigm initially grew from the work of T.S. Kuhn who defines paradigms as a "model that describes the cognitive state of mind of those systematically observing something in human experience"<sup>71</sup>. Bleich writes that a paradigm is what "members of a scientific community share, and, conversely, a scientific community consists of men who share a paradigm."<sup>72</sup> Bleich interprets this to mean that a paradigm is "a set of beliefs about the nature of reality subscribed to by a group of thinkers ... wishing to observe and understand human experience"<sup>73</sup>. Believing that all perception takes place through a paradigm., Kuhn posits that reality is "invented and not observed or discovered by human beings" and therefore, since "paradigms govern science," hence, "objectivity is itself only a paradigm"<sup>74</sup>. Because scientists view an objective paradigm as a means of getting closer to truth, an exploration of the nature of the objective paradigm is necessary. Descartes proposed that the basis of the objective truth paradigm lies in the notion that there are two levels of existence: the level of things, matter; and the level of experience, minds. Along with Kuhn, other scientists such as Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg have concluded that knowledge is the "function of the means of observation and perception"<sup>75</sup>. Key to these formulations is the importance of the role of the observer. Here, Bleich theorizes that an observer is a subject whose means of perception "define[s] the essence of the object"<sup>76</sup>. Thus, central to Bleich's concept of a subjective paradigm is the knowledge that "new truth is created by a new use of language and a new structure of thought" and that a subjective paradigm views knowledge as "made by people and not found"<sup>77</sup>.

The scientific community is not alone in adhering to the objective paradigm of seeking and knowing truth. Literary Critics have also adhered to the objectivity of knowledge. Northrop Frye, through his emphasis on archetypes, believes that literary criticism "should imitate physics: criticism, the subject, studies literature, the object, just as physics studies nature"<sup>78</sup>. Bleich disagrees with Frye who is "committed to the

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<sup>71</sup> David Bleich, *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

objectivity of knowledge" because he feels that "knowledge ... is the subjective construction of our minds, which are, after all, more accessible to us than anything else"<sup>79</sup>. Bleich concludes his argument for a subjective paradigm by calling attention to the "complex subjective actions of language"<sup>80</sup>. He implores readers to heighten their awareness of how language is used as a means of defining realities and to use the subjective paradigm to better understand human thought and language by limiting the tendency to objectify an experience<sup>81</sup>.

Bleich proposes the subjective paradigm as an evolution resulting from a belief that scientific, and therefore objective, explanations were inadequate and not applicable in all circumstances. He is increasingly aware of two phenomena: the role of language in producing knowledge and the subjective nature of knowledge. Bleich believes that since we think in language, it is not possible to think about language as an object.

During the process of acquiring knowledge, all humans have a basic need to explain something in objective and scientific terms. Whenever they require an explanation, the result is a series of symbolizations and resymbolizations. These resymbolizations are a result of being dissatisfied with a symbolic objectification. Thus, resymbolization reworks established symbols in "a direction more adaptive to present needs"<sup>82</sup>. Bleich continues to explain that when a concept is resymbolized by a group or community who sought an explanation, the explanation is commonly referred to as an interpretation. Moreover, interpretation is not a scientific, analytical process but a "synthesis of new meaning based on the assumption that the old shared meanings of words and works are not in question, but that the present perception of these meanings have created the experiential circumstance for resymbolization"<sup>83</sup>. Interpretation is first motivated by perceptual initiatives toward a symbolic object which Bleich identifies as subjective *responses*<sup>84</sup>. And so, Bleich defines response as the perceptual act of translating a sensory experience into consciousness.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> David Bleich, p. 35.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 96.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

If a response statement records the perceptions of a reader's experience, the response must contain two major components: *affects* and *associations*<sup>86</sup>. *Affect* is a real kind of emotion such as anger, love, jealousy, etc. These feelings or emotions are usually accompanied by physiological phenomena such as perspiration or quickened heart rate. *Affect* is what most people talk about when they are asked how they feel about something. *Affect* is easy to notice and to communicate. The other contributing factor to an emotional response to literature is getting to the roots of first reactions through associative analogies or associations. Remembering an anecdote that has a common link with the present enables the reader to make an association; hence, the result is an emotional response to the literature ultimately, for Bleich a response statement is a negotiation resulting from shifting "the mind's objectifying capacity from the symbolic object to one's self, the subject"<sup>87</sup>. However, once negotiation is completed, the final knowledge is only a judgment. One advantage to conceiving knowledge as a negotiated knowledge and not as an ordained law is the full personal involvement of the subject or reader. In this way, regardless of how it is formulated, no knowledge is absolute. All laws, whether laws of nature, God or man, "provide a stable framework for social functioning"<sup>88</sup>. Moreover, as Bleich's research covers many years of researching readers' responses, he reconstructs literary inquiry into four contexts for reaching these subjectively based judgments:

1. Judgments of taste and of changes in taste
2. Judgments of meaning/significance
3. Judgments of the author as a historical figure and as a symbolized one in the reading experience
4. Judgments of common interests and the classification of texts<sup>89</sup>

The first two contexts deal with what the subject or reader thinks and feels. The third context deals with what the reader does with what the author says, and the fourth one concerns how the reader negotiates what he or she "thinks, feels and does with

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<sup>86</sup> David Bleich, p. 147.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

communities larger than just you and me, and how [the reader] will perceive such communities of the past"<sup>90</sup>. Finally, the response statement is a means of using an individual's reading experience to negotiate knowledge.

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<sup>90</sup> David Bleich, p. 166.

## CHAPTER 3

### A DOLL'S HOUSE AND ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES

In this chapter, we will focus on Henrik Ibsen's biography and his work *A Doll's House* by emphasizing the importance of his works in the field of modern drama. We will particularly dwell on *A Doll's House* as the students will interact with it through *Reader-Response Theory*.

In the analysis part, the responses we have obtained from the students who have read the play in advance will be analysed. Analysis of the students' responses will focus on the phenomenological, psychological, social, feminist and experiential content of their responses.

Before applying the questionnaire, we let the students respond in Turkish so that they can express themselves more securely. Almost half of the students have responded in English. Some of their responses have been grammatically corrected and put into our study as examples. The Turkish responses have been translated into English by us while analysing the questionnaire.

Reader-response theories can be categorized by the kinds of readers studied as hypothetical and actual. Hypothetical readers are posited by phenomenological theorists like Wolfgang Iser who describes the text as a "set of incomplete instructions to be completed by the reader"<sup>91</sup> For Iser, the reader fills in the gaps based on personal experiences with the text. In contrast to Iser, actual readers are studied by feminist, psychological, social and experiential theorists such as Judith Fetterley, Elizabeth Flynn, Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, Louise Rosenblatt and David Bleich.

In our questionnaire we will analyse both hypothetical student readers and actual student readers' responses.

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<sup>91</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *Ibid*, p. 20.

### 3.1. Henrik Ibsen

To live is - to war with trolls  
In the holds of the heart and mind;  
To write is - to hold  
Judgment Day over the self.  
Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Johan Ibsen is a Norwegian playwright who was born in Skien, a tiny coastal town in the south of Norway on March 20, 1828. His father, Knud Ibsen, was a successful merchant but in 1836 he went bankrupt, which changed the family's social position. His mother, Marichen Altenburg Ibsen, a painter and devotee of the theatre, encouraged her son in his early artistic endeavours. His father had to sell most of the property that his wife had brought into the marriage and move his family to the only place they still owned, a neglected farmhouse near Skien called Venstøp. Ibsen's schooling probably suffered since the Ibsens could not afford the school attended by the children of the town's successful families, and his formal schooling ended altogether shortly after his fifteenth birthday in 1843 when he had to go to work to support himself.<sup>92</sup> He was apprenticed to a pharmacist in Grimstad. The first three or so years were characterized by extreme poverty, long exhausting hours on the job, lack of sleep, and great loneliness in Grimstad. On October 9, 1846, a house servant, Else Jensdatter, gave birth to his illegitimate son, whom she named Hans Jacob Henriksen. Ibsen had to support the son until he was fourteen, but apparently never made an attempt to see him.<sup>93</sup>

In Grimstad, Ibsen was constantly reading and studying for passing the entrance exam for the University of Christiania with the hope of eventually becoming a physician. While he was at Venstøp, he had entertained his siblings, including a sister named Hedvig, as well as the neighbour's children and others with magic tricks, puppet shows, caricatures, and satirical poems. He continued producing caricatures and satires in Grimstad but also advanced to more mature paintings.<sup>94</sup> In 1848, he was reading Sallust's account of the conspiracy of Catiline and Cicero's orations against Catiline and this reading prompted him to write the first

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<sup>92</sup>Thomas Van Laan, *Ibsen: A Brief Life*, Rutgers University, Emeritus, 2009, <<http://www.ibsensociety.liu.edu/life2.htm>> (29.11.2009)

<sup>93</sup>“Henrik Ibsen” <<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/ibsen.htm>> (30.11.2009)

<sup>94</sup>Thomas Van Laan, *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

version of his first play, *Catiline*. One of the closest friends of Ibsen took the manuscript of *Catiline* to Christiania and tried to get it accepted by the theatre or a publisher, and finally paid to have it published out of his own. In May, he completed his second play, *The Burial Mound*, a pleasant but shallow one-act verse melodrama on the confrontation between the Vikings and Christianity.<sup>95</sup>

He had been in a variety of activities but none of them provided him much income. He was supported by his friends financially. He made lots of friends after he moved to Christiania. He began to take part in radical activities such as demonstrations and co-editing. He wrote articles of various kinds, satires, and reviews. He also wrote poems and began but did not finish a new play. Many of the poems were written for special occasions and through them Ibsen began to develop a reputation as a writer of promise. In October 1851 the internationally famous Norwegian violinist Ole Bull came to Christiania seeking financial support for a theatre he had founded in Bergen, the first theatre in Norway to use Norwegian rather than Danish and Norwegian actors rather than Danish ones. He met Ibsen and was impressed by him, both for his writing and for his enthusiasm for the new theatre, and hired him to join the theatre company as its "dramatic author."<sup>96</sup>

Ibsen remained in his new job for nearly six years. He earned a steady salary but it scarcely freed him from poverty, and in general his stay in Bergen gave him more disappointments than satisfactions. As dramatic author, he was required to provide one new play a year. Most of his time was taken up with other work for the theatre, including designing sets and transferring the theatre's productions to the stage after they had been rehearsed elsewhere by the artistic director.

For January 2, Ibsen wrote *St. John's Night*, which is an example of fairy-tale comedy, *The Burial Mound* and *Lady Inger of Østråt* respectively. All of the plays failed, but his next plays *The Feast at Solhaug* (1856) and *Olaf Liljekrans* (1857) which belonged to another dramatic type, the ballad drama, then popular in Scandinavia became successful.<sup>97</sup>

In Bergen, Ibsen met Suzannah Daae Thoresen and married to her on June 18, 1858. She was his lifelong companion, his faithful supporter, and a principal source

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas Van Laan, *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

of the energy that supported his work. *The Vikings at Helgeland* was Ibsen's first artistic success. In June 1862 the theatre went bankrupt, leaving Ibsen for the next two years without a regular income to support himself, his wife, and their son Sigurd, who was born December 23, 1859. The period from 1860 to 1864 was probably the worst of Ibsen's life. He drank heavily, he considered suicide, and he had difficulty in writing. His next play was *Love's Comedy*, a witty satire on marriage set in contemporary times and written in rhymed verse of a Byronic brilliance. When it was published the reviewers attacked it as inartistic and immoral, and in consequence the Christiania Theatre declined to present it. Ibsen's next play, *The Pretenders*, a tragedy based on Norwegian history and featuring three great acting roles, is, in form and scope, his most Shakespearean play. It is also his first unequivocal masterpiece and easily his best play not widely known outside of Norway. It was published in 1863 and performed at the Christiania Theatre in January 1864.<sup>98</sup>

In 1864, Ibsen left Christiania and Norway for Rome by using a governmental travel grant. He lived in Italy, Rome, and in Germany. In July 1891, he came back to Norway and spent the remaining fifteen years of his life there. His next work is *Brand*, which is his great five-act epic tragedy in rhymed verse about an idealist whose extremism causes him to destroy everything he holds most dear. When it was published, it made him famous throughout Scandinavia, and it changed his life in more ways than one. *Brand* was published by the prestigious Copenhagen publishing house of Gyldendal which remained Ibsen's publisher for the rest of his life. The success of *Brand* also brought Ibsen an annual author's pension from the Norwegian government.

*Peer Gynt* (1867) is his next product which is much looser in structure than *Brand*. It is generally considered to be one of Ibsen's greatest achievements. Both *Peer Gyn* and *Brand* were written as closet dramas, but while *Brand* has seldom been put on the stage *Peer Gynt* is one of Ibsen's most frequently performed plays. Ibsen's later realistic dramas of contemporary life won him the epithet "the father of modern drama"; because of *Peer Gynt* he should also be called "the father of avant-garde and post-modern drama."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> "Henrik Ibsen", Ibid, (30.11.2009)

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Van Laan, Ibid, (29.11.2009)



Ibsen wrote *The League of Youth* two years after *Peer Gynt*. In this work, he tried to create a prose comedy dramatizing the intrigues of a not very scrupulous young lawyer who seeks to get himself elected to Parliament.<sup>100</sup>

*Emperor and Galilean* was the last of Ibsen's plays to feature an epic scale, historical material, and the mode of traditional drama. By the time his next play appeared, four years later in 1877, Ibsen had re-tooled as a dramatist, going back to the form of *The League of Youth* and developing it into something newer and more of the moment, thereby creating the basic form for his twelve dramas of contemporary life.

*Pillars of Society* (1877), the first drama of contemporary life, but the form is not fully worked out until the next play, *A Doll House* (1879). In *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll House* and *An Enemy of the People* (1882), the protagonists learn that they must break with past practices in order to live a more worthy life, and the audience is learning the same lesson through their actions and their overt articulations of what they have learned. Tragedy enters into *Pillars of Society* in the form of tragedy averted. The earliest extant preparatory material for *A Doll House* is entitled "Notes for the Contemporary Tragedy," and the play has the form of tragedy to the extent that Nora's world and her hopes suddenly collapse as a result of the course of events. But even though Nora is exiting at the end into a very uncertain future, the overwhelming effect of the play is that her striking out on her own is both necessary and salutary. The third play of this first quartet, *Ghosts* (1881), has considerable discussion of social issues and it is argued that it is the first modern tragedy.<sup>101</sup>

Ibsen wrote *The Wild Duck* (1884) in which the conventions of the social problem comedy have completely disappeared. In the later part of *Ghosts* and in all the plays from *The Wild Duck* on, the subject matter is human psychology and particular experiences created by it, all of them involving the longing of the protagonists for a world more in harmony with their desires than the one in which they find themselves.

When *A Doll House* came out, it created a sensation. It was discussed everywhere in Scandinavia, both in public meetings and at private dinners. It outraged the conservatives and brought cheer to those seeking a more enlightened

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<sup>100</sup> Thomas Van Laan, Ibid, (29.11.2009)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, (05.12.2009)

outlook. Before long it became a rallying cry for the new feminist movement, not only in Scandinavia but throughout the west and eventually part of the east. When *Ghosts* came out, it outraged just about everyone because of its introduction of taboo topics like incest and venereal disease, its caricaturing of the church, and its undermining the authority of the father in the home.<sup>102</sup> The outrage was so intense that the play could not be staged in Europe's leading theatres for several years. Some subsequent plays also provoked milder outrage, but, generally speaking, the most usual negative reaction to the later dramas of contemporary life was that they kept getting more and more obscure

In 1876 *The Pretenders* and *The Vikings at Helgeland* were staged in Germany, the first in Meiningen and Berlin, the second in Munich, Dresden, and Leipzig. But Ibsen's real breakthrough into theaters outside of Scandinavia was achieved by the first quartet of the dramas of contemporary life. In 1878 *Pillars of Society* played in five different theaters in Berlin at the same time and then went on during the next twelve months to twenty-six further productions elsewhere in Germany. *A Doll House* was even more successful in Germany, being produced just about everywhere there shortly after its world premiere in Copenhagen in 1879. *A Doll House* was also Ibsen's breakthrough play into the English-speaking world, through the now famous London production on June 7, 1889, with Janet Achurch as Nora, and into Italy as well, through Eleonora Duse's performance of it in 1891.<sup>103</sup>

In *Rosmersholm* (1886), Ibsen returned to tragedy. *Rosmersholm* is Ibsen's most beautifully designed play.<sup>104</sup> And it introduces the first instance in the dramas of contemporary life of a character who has such a powerful symbolic dimension that it virtually blots out his psychological identity.

*The Lady from the Sea* was written in 1888 and this play has two subplots that reflect on the main plot in the Shakespearean manner. *Hedda Gabler* is the tragedy of a woman who despises the world that her class and gender have forced her into and who reacts to it in such extreme ways that she is the most difficult of Ibsen's protagonists since Brand to accept on her own terms, and some readers and spectators are unable to do so. *Hedda Gabler* is the zenith of Ibsen's realism, the

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<sup>102</sup> Thomas Van Laan, Ibid, (29.11.2009)

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, (29.11.2009)

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, (29.11.2009)

work in which he most avoids explanatory devices and gives us the action only in its concrete details.<sup>105</sup> In *Hedda* and in *Nora of A Doll House*, Ibsen has given the theater two of its greatest roles, with *Hedda* being the more difficult one because of what the actress has to bring to it in order to make sure audiences at least understand her on her own terms.

Ibsen's last four protagonists are a master builder, a writer, a venture capitalist with grand, even poetic ambitions, and a sculptor, and all of them feel deep regret for the turns their lives have taken. In consequence, these plays have often been interpreted as Ibsen's autobiographical reflections. But the themes of artistic vocation and regret for the past are not new, for all of Ibsen's protagonists, from *Catiline* on, are artists of life, seeking to remold the life they are living into the one they long for.<sup>106</sup>

*Little Eyolf* is one of the most important plays because of its extensial use of Scandinavian folklore, its frank treatment of female sexual desire, its psychologically odd brother-sister relationship, and its insights concerning mourning. It is post-tragic in a way, since its main focus is loss and the process of trying to get beyond grief.

Ibsen returned to tragedy in his last two plays. One of them is *John Gabriel Borkman* which is noteworthy for taking place in the same amount of time as it takes to stage it, for its frequent black comedy, and for moving out of the realistic theatre setting in the final act into a symbolic, cinematographic landscape. Borkman's declaration of love for the buried riches he wanted to liberate from the earth reminds us that Ibsen was formed as a writer at the height of the Romantic period. When, a few moments later, the two sisters reach out their hands to each other over his dead body, their speeches, though written in prose, constitute a minimalist poetry of a quite modern sort.

*When We Dead Awaken* was written in a similar kind of minimalist prose poetry, which at times anticipates Samuel Beckett.<sup>107</sup> This play also repeats the use of landscape that becomes more symbolic than real, and, in fact, many aspects of the play such as the characterizations, the movements upward and downward, the contrasting of the two couples, one moving upward to death, the other downward to

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas Van Laan, *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

life give the play an unusually noticeable symbolic cast. This effect is heightened by the numerous allusions. A few months after the publication of *When We Dead Awaken*, he suffered the first of a series of strokes that made him an invalid and he lingered on until May 23, 1906. According to his doctor's journal, his last utterance was "Tvertimod"! which means "On the contrary!"<sup>108</sup>

Ibsen's work had made him the most accomplished and most important dramatist since Shakespeare, and because it is so difficult now to genuinely experience Greek drama Ibsen is for most of us the second greatest dramatist of all time.

Considering all his works, Ibsen is regarded as intensely urban, a scrutinizer of society, the moral self, besieged domestic life and a dramatic poet. According to Ibsen, the central faculty of literature was that of sight, in other words, a writer's task is to see. He thinks that to see is to relate, to make distinctions and connections.<sup>109</sup> In fact, he has contributed greatly to British drama. Richard Gillman writes in his book "*The Making of Modern Drama*" that Ibsen changed the course of drama because the drama was ready to be changed.<sup>110</sup> Ibsen was ready to respond the requirements of modern life. His plays reflect the reality as he was a great reader and follower of the contemporary society. That is why he is called the father of modern drama.

### **3.2. A Doll's House**

*A Doll's House* is a social realist play which was published on December 1879 and it has been noted as a major event in the development of dramatic literature. The play was first presented in Stockholm by the Royal theatre on 8 January 1880 and the productions followed in Oslo, Bergen and Germany.<sup>111</sup> Both the published play and the productions caused excitement and controversy because the play was sharply critical of 19<sup>th</sup> century marriage norms. It follows the formula of well-made play up until the final act, when it breaks convention by ending with a discussion, not an unravelling.<sup>112</sup> Nora's departure made an impact throughout

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<sup>108</sup> Thomas Van Laan, *Ibid*, (29.11.2009)

<sup>109</sup> Richard Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama*, Yale University Press, London, 2000, p. 46.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*. p. 60.

<sup>111</sup> Yvonne Shafer, *Approaches to Teaching Ibsen's A Doll House*, MLA, New York, 1992, p. xi.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*. p, xii.

society: it was, in the famous phrase, “the door slam heard around the world”<sup>113</sup> The play also manifests Ibsen’s concern for women’s rights and for human rights in general.

We have chosen this play for getting students’ responses since the play presents its theme of individual worth through the skilful manipulation of the characters’ words and actions. The topical and timely ideas on love, marriage and individual worth are remarkable when we consider that it was first performed in 1880.<sup>114</sup> The concepts Ibsen presents in this play stimulate interesting and useful discussions for adolescents who are themselves trying to answer questions similar to those encountered by the play’s characters: What is love? What demands can be placed on a loved one? Is there a difference in society’s standards for males and females? How does one find his true inner worth? What is maturity? The play also presents students with no serious problem of literal comprehension. In other words, there are no unfamiliar terms and no confusing political intrigues. What the play is about is certainly one question that the students will explore. More recent criticism suggests that it is about many things and that it is not a clear-cut thesis play at all.<sup>115</sup>

The translation of the title is controversial. The play achieved fame and notoriety under what became its traditional title, *A Doll’s House*.<sup>116</sup> Today a number of scholars, directors and actors prefer the title *A Doll House*, which was first used by Rolf Fjelde.<sup>117</sup> There is an alternative ending to the play as well. It was felt by Ibsen’s German agent that the original ending would not play well in German theatres; therefore, for the play’s German debut, Ibsen was forced to write an alternative ending for it to be considered acceptable. In this ending, Nora is led to her children after having argued with Torvald. Seeing them, she collapses, and the curtain is brought down. Ibsen later called the ending a disgrace to the original play and referred to it as a ‘barbaric outrage’<sup>118</sup>

It can be said that *A Doll’s House* is a play that will only be appreciated when examined in depth. But many factors affect the analysis and presentation of this

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<sup>113</sup>Yvonne Shafer, *Ibid*, p. xi.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiii.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiii.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiv.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiv.

<sup>118</sup> ‘A Doll’s House-Wikipedia’ <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Doll's\\_House](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Doll's_House)> (30.12.2009)

richly constructed play. The play may be viewed through many different lenses, including feminism, structuralism and Marxism. Each student may view the play from a particular perspective, influenced by cultural, political, social, and philosophical interests. Another objective of this thesis is to unravel the students' views on the play and to find out multiple interpretations of them.

### **3.3. Analysis of the Responses**

#### **Question 1 What Were Your Initial Feelings After Reading the Play?**

All of the students participating in the questionnaire have responded to this question. The responses of 18 students out of 32 have feminist content. These students support and appreciate Nora's behaviour and her courage. The following comments from respondents are some examples which illustrate this point:

“Anger, pity unhappiness as the protagonist, in the play, represents women and their treatment unjustly”

“I appreciate Nora's rebellion against the society”

“If I were Nora, I would do the same thing”

“Even a smallest thing that a woman does may be reflected as the worst thing in the world by men”

The responses of the rest of the 14 students have social and experiential content. Most of the students support Nora but they are against her leaving the children. This indicates that what they bring to literature is very significant as their reactions are different from the others. Some examples are:

“I felt disappointed because she left her children behind her”

“I thank to God because I do not live in such a society and do not have such a mentality”

**Question 2 Did This Play Make You Laugh? Cry? Cringe? Smile? Cheer?  
Explain**

31 students out of 32 have responded to this question. 4 students get surprised, 5 students cheer on behalf of Nora, 15 students are sorry for Nora and 7 students are confused about their feelings. This result indicates that readers are affected by the text differently and they may respond the same text in different ways. The responses of the students have generally psychological content.

**Question 3 What Connections Are There Between the Play and Your Life?  
Explain.**

All of the students have responded to this question. 9 students have answered that there is no connection between the play and their lives. 10 students think that there is no connection at all but they have found some connections between the play and women in societies in general. An example for this:

“Thanks God! I do not have any parallels with my life but even today in some parts of Turkey, unfortunately, some people favour man rather than woman”

13 students have responded that there is a connection but they have treated these connections in different ways. 5 students responded that they are treated like Nora at home. 3 students responded that the only connection is Nora’s freedom at the end. They think that they are similar to Nora. The responses of the other students are different from each other. The most striking one is that a student whose mother and father passed away responded to the question as follows:

“No motherhood anymore in children’s lives. A life without mum”

In general, the responses to this question have social, psychological and experiential content.

**Question 4 What is the Most Important Event in the Play? Explain.**

All of the students have responded to this question. 26 students think that the most important event in the play is Nora's leaving home. This indicates that the social content of the responses and society as a whole in which the students live does not approve of women's leaving home in any way. 3 students regard Torwald's reaction to Nora's act when he learns the truth as the most important event. According to 3 respondents, Nora's forgery is the most important one.

**Question 5 Who Should or Shouldn't Read This Play? Why?**

31 students have responded to this question. 14 students think that everybody should read the play. 5 students think that women who have a life similar to Nora's should read this play as it makes them realize the truth. 6 students think that women who have such a husband like Torwald should never read the play as it causes the destruction of their family. 5 students think that people who have feminist tendencies should not read the play as they can not stand it. Only one student thinks that her mother should not read the play as she believes that her mother is just like Nora and she adds that she does not want her mother to leave home.

The responses of the students have social, experiential and psychological content. The reason of the varieties of the responses may be traced back in their social and experiential backgrounds.

**Question 6 What Are the Best Parts of the Play? Why? What Are the Worst Parts? Why?**

31 students have responded to this question. Of 20 think that the best part is the resolution scene in which Nora decides and leaves home. 2 of them think that the best part is the one in which the relations between Nora and her children are revealed. One student points out that the best part is the scene about the discussion on their marriage. One student thinks the best scene is Nora and Torwald's first real argument. To one of the students, the best part is Nora's self-sacrifice for her



husband. The other student regards the first act of the play as the best since it is a model for a happy family. Two students think that the best part of the play is Krogstad's posting the letter to Torwald and Torwald's finding out Nora's forgery. Only one student has rejected to respond to this question while one favours writing just about negative parts of the piece.

9 students have avoided answering the questions concerning the negative aspects of the play. 4 students think that the worst part is Krogstad blackmail. The first part is the worst for 6 students because of Nora's unnatural and unreasonable behaviour. 5 students regard the second act as the worst since it has unnecessary dialogues. 7 students think that Nora's leaving her children is the worst.

In this question the student readers have given various responses which show subjectivity in understanding of the written text. The responses indicate generally social and experiential content.

#### **Question 7 Do You Like the Ending of the Play? Why or Why Not?**

All of the students have responded to this question. Of 20 think that they liked the ending as it deals with the freedom of women. 6 out of 32 think that they did not like the ending because Nora should not have left her children under any conditions. 6 respondents think that they liked the ending but she should not have left her children behind. The following comments of the respondents illustrate this clearly:

“Yes, I love it so much. It is really hard to leave everything behind but it is a very good indication of proud and self-confidence.”

“I liked her brave behaviour but leaving her beloved children is not acceptable as a woman.”

The responses given to this question signify the feminist and social content of their worldview. Most of the students support Nora's freedom but some of them do not approve of her leaving the children.

### **Question 8 What Came As a Surprise In the Play? Why?**

30 students have responded to this question. Of 12 think that the surprise in the play is Nora's leaving home. 7 out of 30 regard the sudden appearance of love between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde as a surprise in the play. To three, the surprise is that Nora borrowed money from Krogstad for her husband. 4 students think the surprise is Dr. Rank's confession to Nora about his feelings. 3 students think that the surprise in the play is that Krogstad tore the bills. 3 students have rejected to respond to this question. As it has been clear in the responses, the students' thoughts on what the surprise is in the play are different from each other, which indicate the subjectivity while approaching the text. The given responses show the social, experiential and psychological content of their worldview. Here are some examples:

“Nora's awareness and leaving home came as a surprise to me. In the nineteenth century, to see such an act was almost impossible compared to that century's social structure.”

“Nora's leaving the house was surprising to me. I expected Nora's forgiving her husband.”

### **Question 9 Do Any of the Characters Remind You of Friends, Family Members, or Classmates? Explain.**

27 out of 32 have responded to this question. 14 think that the characters in the play remind them of nobody. 11 think that the characters in the play remind them of their friends or relatives in their social lives. 2 of them point out that Nora resembles them in terms of her courage and self-confidence. 5 have avoided responding to this question. The responses we got from the students have social and experiential content. Some examples are:

“Yes, Nora reminds me my aunt. In the past my aunt did the same thing but the reasons were different.”

“Yes, including me most of women are Nora and their partners are Helmer”

### **Question 10 Which Character Would You Like To Be in This Play? Why?**

30 students have responded to this question. 13 out of 30 think that they would like to be Nora in this play. 6 students would like to be Kristine. 8 students think that they do not want to be any of the characters in the play. One student would like to be one of the children as they do not have any active role and they are the most innocent in the play. The other student would like to be babysitter since her only job is to deal with the children. Another student would like to be Helmer as he is insensitive. 2 of the students have not responded to this question. The responses once again indicate the social and experiential content. Half of the students prefer to be Nora as she runs for her freedom but some of them would like to be other characters in the play, which indicates their point of view in life. Some examples are:

“I would like to be Nora because at the end of the play she has realized her true strength and strikes out as an independent woman”

“I would like to be Kristine in this play because her opinions are right for me. She acts logically.”

### **Question 11 Do You Think the Title Fits the Play? Why or why not?**

30 students have responded to this question. All of the students think that the title fits the play perfectly. They point out that it represents the women as a doll with a smiling face always ready to be played. Some of them think that Nora was controlled first by her father and then her husband and it makes her a doll. The following comments from respondents are some examples which illustrate this point:

“The title is wonderful. Nora is a doll, fake, not human in the eye of her husband.”

“Yes, but only people who have some information about the writer can understand it exactly.”

**Question 12 Has the Play Helped You In Any Way? Explain.**

All of the students have responded to this question. 9 students think that the play helps them realize the power of women and they point out that the play strengthens their feminist point of view. One of the male students states that he is not going to behave his wife as a doll in the future. One respondent thinks that people should not be prejudiced. 13 focus on humanism, equality, self-confidence and social problems in life. They also state that the play makes them see the world from different points of view. 5 respondents think that the play did not help them in any way. One student points out that life may be good or bad only if people shape it. 2 students focus on honesty as the best policy. The responses of the students indicate experiential, social and psychological content of their worldview. Some examples are:

“Honesty is the best policy. If Nora told the truth, the end would be the same but she would not feel fear against his threats.”

“Yes, once more I thank to God since I do not live in such a society”

**Question 13 How Have You Changed After Reading This Play? Explain**

28 students have responded to this question. 4 students have not responded to the question. 9 respondents think that they did not change after reading the play. 7 students focus on feminist point of view and how it helps them realize the place of women in life. 3 think that the play destructed the traditional taboo of being a mother by leaving her children. 2 students point out that they should not accept everything without questioning like Nora. Another 2 think that people should not be prejudiced. One of the respondents states that he became more realistic about life. 4 students focus on the idea that people should be more tolerant in life. The responses show social, feminist and experiential content of their ideas. Some examples are:

“You can not please men!”

“I used to believe that a mother can do anything for her children but now I think a mother can do anything for her own life, even leave her beloved children”

#### **Question 14 What Does the Writer's Purpose Seem to Be?**

31 students have responded to this question. Of 24 think that the writer's purpose is to emphasize feminist point of view. 3 students point out that the writer wants the readers to see how couples behave each other. 4 students have responded differently from the others. One of them thinks that the writer wants to make the end of the play more attractive by using Nora. The other one states that the writer's objective is to give the message that people should be sensible to each other. Another student thinks the writer focuses on the idea that people determine their destiny by themselves. The other student points out that the writer wants to indicate the hypocrisy of people who pretend to be happy and honest. The responses of the students indicate feminist, social and psychological content of their view. Some examples:

“Women have also self-confidence as much as men.”

“The aim of the writer is to indicate the place of women in society at that time and to emphasize the rebellion of a woman representing all women.”

“The writer's aim is to show the reader what a woman can do for her own life.”

#### **Question 15 My Favourite Character In the Play is \_\_\_\_\_ Because \_\_\_\_\_**

31 students have responded to this question. 24 respondents state that their favourite character is Nora in the play. But the reasons why they regard Nora as important and favourite are different. Of 6 think Nora is the main character and that is why they have chosen Nora as favourite character. For 10 of these students the reason is that they appreciate Nora as she sees the truth and leaves home. To 4 respondents, Nora is the supporter of women rights. And for 2 of these students, Nora is the most realistic character in the play.

3 regard Kristine as their favourite character. Because they think that she is logical and honest. She also helps Nora with her running through freedom.

To one of the students, Dr Rank is her favourite character because he is a clever man. Another student thinks that Torwald is her favourite because he behaves like a real man. The other student regards Krogstad as favourite since he is the most honest character in the play even though he seems to be fraud at the beginning. And the other student thinks the babysitter as favourite because she is away from her children to support them financially and sacrifices herself for her children. The responses of the students are various and signify social, feminist, experiential and phenomenological content of their worldview as they fill the gaps in the play. The students generally think Nora, protagonist in the play, as favourite but there are students who think antagonist Torwald, Dr.Rank and even the babysitter as favourite. All these variations indicate the differences in the points of view of the students. The following comments from respondents are some examples which illustrate this point:

“My favourite character in the play is Nora because she is protagonist and we can see how she changed in the period of time.”

“My favourite character in the play is Torwald because he behaves like a real man.”

“My favourite character in the play is the babysitter because she ventures to work away from her child in order to support her.

**Question 16 If I Was the Author, I Would Change \_\_\_\_\_.**

29 students have responded to this question. 9 students think that they would not change anything if they were the author. 8 point out that they would change the end of the play but they have responded in different ways. Of 6 think that they would end the play with happy ending. 3 respondents state that they would change the attitude of Torwald in the play. 2 students think that they would change the faith and role of the children in the play. Another 2 think that they would change something about Dr. Rank. One states that she would not let Dr. Rank die. The other thinks that she would change the role of Dr. Rank who is posited as a sick man in the play but in fact he covets Nora by lascivious behaviours and that makes him far from moral force. 5 different students evaluate the question from different points of view. One of

the students states that she would develop the rising action in the play. The other student points out that she would change Nora's character development. Another one states that she would change Nora's father. The other one states that he would change Mrs. Linde by not letting her give the letter to Krogdstad. The last student thinks that she would change the names in the play to be more suggestive and allegorical. The responses of the students indicate phenomenological, social and experiential content. Some examples are:

“If I was the author, I'd change the names to be more suggestive and allegorical.”

“If I was the author, I'd change the attitude of men to women.”

**Question 17 Something That Does Not Make Sense About This Story is \_\_\_\_\_.**

5 students have not responded to this question while 27 have responded. 6 students think that the relationship between Dr. Rank and Kristine does not make sense. 3 respondents state that Dr. Rank's death does not make sense. 5 think that the relationship between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad is illogical. 4 students state that Nora's slamming the door without looking back to her children does not make sense to them. 2 point out that the rich limit the poor does not make sense in the play. 3 students think that Torwald's forgiving Nora suddenly is not logical for them. 2 respondents state that the Christmas scene and gifts in the first act of the play are not necessary. One of the students thinks that Nora is called with a number of diminutives by Torwald, which does not make sense. The other student states Helmer's unawareness does not make sense in the play. The responses of the students show experiential, social and phenomenological content. Some examples are:

“Nora is called a number of diminutive childlike names by Torwald throughout the play.”

“Helmer's reaction which changes immediately when he got the note from Krogstad does not make sense.”

**Question 18 If I Were \_\_\_\_\_(Character In Story), I Would \_\_\_\_\_.**

All of the students have responded to this question. 8 students think that if they were Torwald, they would apologize to Nora and forgive her. They would be more sensible and listen to Nora first without questioning her and they would treat Nora as a wife not like a doll. 2 respondents state that if they were Krogstad, they would not accept and trust Mrs. Linde again. One student thinks that if she were Kristine, she would not marry to Krogstad and would work only for herself. 20 respondents think that if they were Nora, they would do some different things. 6 state that they would rebel everything, tell the truth and leave home at the beginning. Another 6 point out that they would leave home but take the children with them. 3 think that they would definitely slam the door just like Nora. 5 students state that they would warn Torwald instead of leaving home and they would not appear as a selfish, silly woman as Nora was in the first act. The responses given to this question signify social, feminist, experiential and phenomenological content of their worldview. They fill the gaps in the play in different ways which indicate the different social backgrounds. Some examples indicating this point are as follows:

“If I were Nora, I would definitely slam the door after that reaction of my husband.”

“If I were Nora, I would not appear as a silly and selfish woman.”

“If I were Nora, I would not leave my home and family.”

**Question 19 I Believe the Author Wanted the Reader To \_\_\_\_\_.**

30 students have responded to this question. Of 15 think that the author wants the reader to realize women’s place in life and worth of women. They also have stated that the author focuses on the courage which Nora and all women have. These students point out that the author’s aim is to create awareness about women’s rights. They approach the text from feminist point of view. 7 respondents believe that the author wants the reader to see the realities and understand Nora as a woman. 2 think that the author wants the reader to be aware of their life and live a good life. 2 students believe that the author’s aim is to emphasize the idea that people should not



be prejudiced. 2 respondents think that the author is the supporter of the weak. He wants the reader to see some realities and to be on the alert about immorality. One of the students state that the author wants the reader to see how complicated the marriages are. The other student believes the author wants to indicate how unfaithful the people are. The responses of the students show feminist and social content. Some examples are:

“I believe the author wants the reader to understand that we must respect women as they are our biggest part.”

“I believe the author wants the reader to wake up and try to tell them not to obey blindly the rules which they do not think to be true.”

**Question 20 This Play Has Made Me Reconsider or Think Twice About \_\_\_\_\_ Because \_\_\_\_\_.**

31 students have responded to this question. According to 11 students, this play has made them reconsider or think twice about marriage because of Nora’s position in life and society. 2 respondents state the play has made them reconsider the women and their roles in society. However, according to 3 students, they reconsider and think twice about men because they must be more careful while interacting with women in society. To three, this play has made them reconsider or think twice about life because people should know well what they expect from life; freedom, happiness or both of them. 3 students state that this play has made them reconsider or think twice about inequality of women because of their badly treatment. 2 think that this play has made them reconsider or think twice about people because nobody seems reliable anymore. 3 respondents point out that this play has made them reconsider or think twice about making a decision as it affects our lives. One student’s answer is family because having a real family is not easy. The other student’s response is self-sacrifice because people should foresee whether they deserve it or not. And the other student thinks that this play has made them reconsider or think twice about freedom because people should be sure about that they are really free or they pretend to be. The responses given to this question show

phenomenological, feminist, social and experiential content of their worldview. Some examples underlying this point are as follows:

“This play has made me reconsider or think twice about life because I thought whether being free is enough for being happy or not”

“This play has made me reconsider or think twice about women because I must be careful or else I will in danger.”

“This play has made me reconsider or think twice about the role of women because women must have rights to develop their own individuality, but in reality, their role is often self-sacrificial.”

**Question 21 If I Could Step Into the Play, the First Thing I Would Do is \_\_\_\_\_.**

25 students have responded to this question. 9 students think that if they could step into the play, the first thing they would do is about Nora. For example, some would talk to Nora and convince her not to leave home. Some would make Nora tell the truth at the beginning and find a job and take her children. Some of them would change the character features of Nora. 10 respondents state that that if they could step into the play, the first thing they would do is about Torwald. For example, six of these students would change Torwald and his behaviours. The others would change Torwald by persuading him about Nora’s innocence. One of the students would put Dr. Rank out the play. Three students would finish the play with happy ending. 2 respondents would do nothing but just watch the event. The responses of the students indicate feminist and social content of students’ worldview. Some examples are:

“If I could step into the play, the first thing I would do is to rebuke Torwald.”

“If I could step into the play, the first thing I would do is that Nora could have a job and take her children with her later.”

**Question 22 I Felt Like Crying When \_\_\_\_\_.**

29 students have responded to this question. Of 18 think that they feel like crying when Nora leaves her home, husband and children in the last act of the play. 3 students have not responded to the question. One student thinks that she feels like crying during the scene in which Nora was trying to pay the loan helplessly. 2 think that they never feel like crying during the play. 2 respondents state that they feel like crying whenever Torwald treats Nora badly. 4 students think that they feel like crying when Nora is aware of the facts that she is not taken seriously and she is now a stranger for her family. One student points out that when Torwald begs Nora not to leave home, she feels like crying. The other respondent states that she feels crying when she reads about Kristine and her desperate situation. The responses given to the question signify social, psychological and feminist content of students' ideas. It is very interesting that some students do not feel crying while the others are affected deeply by some scenes. Some examples are:

“I felt like crying when I read about Kristine Linde’s situation.”

“There was no scene for being sad and crying.”

“I felt like crying when Nora left home and her children without looking back.”

**Question 23 I Laughed Aloud When \_\_\_\_\_.**

26 students have responded to this question. 4 respondents think that they have never laughed during the play. 8 state that they laugh aloud when Nora tries to affect Dr. Rank sexually and when Dr. Rank interrupts family affairs constantly. 5 students think that they laugh aloud when they read about Nora’s strange behaviours like eating macaroons, dancing Tarantella and her efforts to persuade Helmer not to read the letter. 3 respondents point out that they laugh aloud when they read about Torwald’s strange behaviours and speech such as his treatment to Nora as if she was a child and his usage of some nicknames for Nora. 2 state they laugh when the play is over since they get surprised. 2 students think they laugh aloud when they find out some scenes similar to Turkish movies such as the previous love between Mrs. Linde

and Krogstad and their coming together years later. One of the students points out that she laughs when Linde gets the job. The other one states that she laughs aloud when Krogstad says to Nora that her father has signed the document three days after his death. The responses of the students show experiential, phenomenological and social content. Some examples are:

“There are many comic sections in the play- one might argue that Nora’s “songbird” and “squirrel” acts, as well as her early flirtatious conversations with her husband, are especially humorous.”

“I laughed aloud when I read about Dr. Rank’s words and behaviours after the party.”

#### **Question 24 I Was Furious When \_\_\_\_\_.**

28 students have responded to this question. 11 respondents think that they have been furious when they read about the attitude Torwald has by the time he learns the truth. 3 students have been furious when Torwald humiliates Nora constantly throughout the play. 4 state that they have been furious when Krogstad threatens Nora. 4 students point out that they get angry when Nora leaves home. 6 different students have given six different responses to this question. One of them thinks that she has been furious when Nora tells a lie to Torwald about being alone at home. The other one states that he gets angry when he reads that Nora exploits Dr. Rank’s feelings. One student thinks that she gets furious when she reads Dr. Rank’s speech about his feelings towards Nora though she wanted his help to rescue her from the situation. The other student states that she gets angry when she learns that Torwald deceives Nora and himself by pretending to give value to their marriage. One respondent thinks that she has been furious when Torwald discovers his love to Nora. The last student’s response is that she has been furious about the babysitter’s leaving her child to work for Nora and Torwald. The responses of the students indicate social, feminist, experiential and psychological content of their worldview. Some examples are:

“I was furious when Torwald scolded and insulted Nora.”

“I was furious when Krogstad threatened Nora.”

“I was furious when their nurse, Anne, left her daughter for working”

**Question 25 I Was Surprised When \_\_\_\_\_.**

30 students have responded to this question. 11 students state that they get surprised when Nora leaves home. 4 think that they get surprised when they learn Dr. Rank is in love with Nora. 2 respondents get surprised when they learn that women can not loan from the bank. 5 students get surprised when they learn that Krogstad and Linde were in love with each other in the past. One student gets surprised when the play ends suddenly. 2 get surprised when Krogstad sends the note. 2 students get surprised when they learn that Nora has borrowed from Krogstad. One gets surprised when Krogstad threatens Nora. 2 respondents get surprised when Torwald finds the letter because they have thought that after talking to Mrs. Line, Krogstad would get the letter back. The responses show experiential and social content of students’ point of view. Some examples are:

“I was surprised when Krogstad appeared to be a bitter and vengeful extortionist until he was reunited with his true love, Mrs Linde.”

“I was surprised when Nora left after the word ‘Motherless’.”

**Question 26 Which Character Would You Choose As a Friend, Brother/Sister, Boyfriend/Girlfriend, and Mother/Father?**

30 students have responded to this question. Of 7 think that they would not choose any of the characters as friend, brother, sister, boyfriend, girlfriend, mother and father. 11 respondents state that they would choose Mrs Linde as a friend. 11 think that they would choose Nora as a friend; but, to one of them, as a mother. One student would choose Torwald as a boyfriend. The responses signify social and experiential content of students’ worldview. Some examples are:

“I would like to have Nora as my mum or friend because only such a strong woman may help me be strong.”

“I would choose Nora because she is intelligent and possesses capacities beyond mere wifehood. Her description of years of secret labour undertaken to pay off her debt shows her fierce determination and ambition.”

“I would choose Mrs Linde as a friend because she is really helpful.”

**Question 27 This Play Reminds Me of \_\_\_\_\_ Because \_\_\_\_\_.**

22 students have responded to this question. 10 students have rejected to respond. 5 respondents think that this play reminds them of feminism, women rights and some feminist writers because Nora appears to be a supporter of feminism and runs to her freedom at the end. 4 students state that this play reminds them of the women in the Victorian age because Nora’s life is similar to those in that period. 2 think that the play reminds them of themselves as they would like to be as strong as Nora in the future. 3 students state that this play reminds them of unhappy and so-called marriages in society because it is still very common to pretend to be happy but in fact they are not. 2 respondents think that the play reminds them of traditional Turkish movies and soap operas since they have generally similar plots. One student points out that the play reminds her of Virginia Woolf as she is one of the feminist writers. 4 state that the play remind them of inequality in society, unfaithfulness, liberty and doll-like behaviours of some people. One of the students thinks that the play is a good example of the fact that children are sometimes ignored. No matter how self-actualized is a woman, she should not leave her children. The responses of the students show phenomenological, psychological, social, feminist and experiential content of their point of views. Some examples illustrating this point are:

“This play reminds me of liberty because Nora is a slave through her life, in the end of the play, she gains her freedom.”

“This play reminds me of Virginia Woolf because she was a feminist writer.”

“This play reminds me of me in the future because I want to be as strong as Nora to start a new page in life.”

### **Question 28 Is Nora Being Silly or Are Her Actions Normal For a Person In Love?**

30 students have responded to this question. 4 respondents think that Nora is silly because she has done lots of things for Helmer and she should not have let him use her to the end even if she adores him. 2 students state that Nora is both silly and her actions are normal for a person in love. 24 respondents think that she is not silly and her actions are normal for a person in love. It is clear in the play that love makes her blind and can not act logically. The responses of the students indicate experiential, social and psychological content of their worldview. Some examples are:

“Nora is never ever silly. Every person in love in true sense does the same thing.”

“She is not just a ‘silly girl’ as Torwald calls her. That she incurs taking out a loan to preserve Torwald’s health is an indication of her being intelligent and possessing capacity beyond her wifehood.”

### **Question 29 Does Torwald Seem to Love Nora?**

All of the students have responded to this question. Of 8 think that Torwald loves Nora because men generally behave women in the same way as Torwald does in the play. 9 students state that Torwald seems to love Nora but he does not know how to show his love to a woman because of the society he has grown up. 5 think that Torwald loves Nora as a doll but not as an individual. He does not love her character and spirit. 10 respondents state that Torwald does not love Nora because he only believes in the norms in society but does not give importance to real love. He is just together with Nora because of his social status in society. The responses of the students signify social, feminist and experiential content of their point of views. Some examples are:

“No, he does not love; because he prioritizes his reputation over his wife’s desires.”

“He seems so but he does not show much interest to her personality. He only cares about his duties as a wife and mother.”

“No, he loves himself. He wants to be possessor of Nora. He thinks that Nora is his tool.”

### **Question 30 Which One of These Five Characters Seems Most Realistic?**

**Torwald Helmer**

**Dr. Rank**

**Nils Krogstad**

**Nora**

**Mrs Kristine Linde**

31 students have responded to this question. 17 respondents regard Nora as the most realistic in the play. 6 think that Mrs. Kristine Linde is the most realistic. 4 students regard Torwald Helmer as the most realistic. One thinks that Dr. Rank is the most realistic. The other student states that Nils Krogstad is the most realistic. According to two students, Torwald Helmer, Nora, Nils Krogstad are all the most realistic in the play. The responses given to this question indicate feminist, social and experiential content of their worldview.

### **3.4. Conclusion, Comments and Suggestions**

Nicholas J. Karolides rightly states that “The upsurge of reader-response has caught the attention of many teachers at all levels of instruction.”<sup>119</sup> We have chosen reader-response criticism and especially reader for our starting point. We have decided to work on *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen, who is regarded as the father of modern drama.

In the introduction part, the purpose of the study has been stated clearly. We have tried to explore the theoretical background of *Reader-Response Criticism* and to analyse students’ responses and find out the reasons of their responses. We have mentioned the significance, methodology and limitations of the study in this chapter.

In the second chapter, we have reviewed some literature on *Reader-Response Criticism* by focusing on the main theories. We have chosen only the most important

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<sup>119</sup> Nicholas J. Karolides (Editor), *Reader Response in the Classroom*, Longman, New York, 1992, p.xi



ones as it is too difficult to cover all theories in such a study concerning *Reader-Response Criticism*.

The third chapter begins with Henrik Ibsen's biography and focuses on the importance of his play *A Doll's House*. We have tried to show and prove why we chose *A Doll's House* for application in a classroom setting. In this chapter we have attempted to analyse the play through the assumptions of *reader-response criticism* by applying a questionnaire to the student readers. The questionnaire has comprised of thirty open-ended questions and thirty two students have responded to the questions. Some students have preferred not to respond to some questions. We have obtained quantitative data about how many students think in the same way and how many of them think in a different way. We have tried to determine the number of unique responses to the questions. We have had to analyse the responses one by one in detail as the questions are all open-ended. According to the results, we have obtained from the data, some questions such as 6, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 27 have been responded in very different ways. There have been respectively many more common points for the other questions. For the question numbered 11, all of the students have agreed on that and given the same responses.

We have found out some facts from our questionnaire and study overall. One conclusion from our study is that there are possibilities of having as many responses as there are students. In our study there is no such a situation but there are varieties of answers and the range of these answers are wide. There are also some answers which are unique. Our suggestion for literature teachers is that there is no one true interpretation of a text. Therefore, they should let the students respond freely without limiting and imposing their own views. The responses may be valid, some invalid or erroneous but singularity in responses does not exist. Any similarity in responses may occur when the student's responses are shared and negotiated within a community of other student's output.

The other conclusion of our study is that if a reader has insufficient linguistic or experiential background to respond to the questions, s/he can not relate to the text. In our questionnaire we have observed that some students have rejected to answer some certain questions because of this reason. We believe that engagement with the text both emotionally and intellectually is necessary for the evolution of a literary

work. Some students prefer to read just the synopsis but it should not be forgotten that reading a synopsis of a book or a play does not substitute for reading it. You may learn something about the book, but you will not have experienced it.

Another conclusion drawn from our study is the fact that although the play is the same for all students, that is, the words, the marks and the structure, the students approach these words and structures with a particular point of view formed by their social background, gender, age, upbringing, past experiences, current circumstances, regional origins, past and present readings. The students to whom we have applied the questionnaire are at the same age and they have similar background, but their responses vary because of some reasons such as the mood, the current situation, and the pressures society puts on them. It is clear that the reading event for each reader is unique.

Students do not have to agree with their teachers, critics and scholars. Teaching students about conflict, symbols and other textual devices is a means of inputting information. But *Reader-Response* concerns the examination of a student's output. Therefore, no one can limit this output by imposing his/her own views.

What the students understand from the book or the play may be different from the author's intention. For example, in our questionnaire the responses given to the question numbered 23; I laughed aloud ....., may be far from Henrik Ibsen's intention. Some students laugh at Torwald's speech and behaviours while some laugh Nora's eating macaroons. But Ibsen's intention, most probably, was different from those respondents while penning down the play. Our study proves the fact that a book or a play, once written and published, is no longer in the author's control. It waits for a reader to respond and to enliven and interact with it.

In our study, we have found out some associative responses to the questions. The reasons for this could be related to their similar personal experiences, similar social background, the power of TV and movies and the same gender. For example, those responses which have feminist content have been given by female students or the responses which have social, experiential and psychological content have been given by the students whose mother or father is dead or who have some family problems.

To conclude, teachers should pay respect to all possible responses to a piece of literature, so students can benefit from teachers who apply the assumptions of *Reader-Response Theory* and how readers read. We believe that *Reader-Response Criticism* has an important place in the future classrooms. As this study is the first of its kind in Turkey, so considerable care and trouble have been taken in the selection and interpretation of the material contained in this thesis with the view to help promote the understanding of, and interest for the students of English and those future researchers.

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## APPENDIX A

### Synopsis

The play opens on Christmas Eve with Nora decorating and preparing the house for the Christmas festivities. Nora and Torvald have a discussion about his promotion to bank manager and his increased salary. Mrs. Linde, a school friend from Nora's youth and a recent widow, stops in for a visit. She asks Nora to ask Torvald if there might be a position at the bank for her. Commenting on Nora's naivety, Mrs. Linde states that Nora knows nothing of real world suffering; however Nora defends herself by telling Mrs. Linde her secret. Seven years earlier, Nora took out a loan to cover expenses for herself, Torvald, and their infant son, Ivar, to travel to southern Italy in order to treat Torvald's life threatening illness. Torvald would have surely died because he would have never borrowed the money and made the journey. Because it was illegal for women to borrow money without their husbands' consent and Nora felt she must act quickly to save her husband's life, she forged her father's signature on a loan to obtain the money. To pay off the loan, Nora began secretly saving money from her allowance from Torvald and performing odd jobs, such as copying. Torvald agrees to grant Mrs. Linde a position at the bank. However, she would replace Krogstad, a man of questionable moral character and coincidentally, from whom Nora borrowed the money. When Krogstad hears he is to be replaced, he discloses to Nora that he knows that she forged her father's signature because the date on the note is a few days after her father's death. Threatening to expose Nora's lie, Krogstad urges her to convince Torvald to keep him on at the bank. Disturbed by Krogstad's threat, Nora attempts to convince Torvald to keep Krogstad, but Torvald refuses, citing Krogstad's immoral character as reason to discharge him. Mrs. Linde comes visiting again, and Nora asks her to help repair a Neapolitan fisher girl costume that Nora will wear to a costume ball that evening. Mrs. Linde realizes that something is bothering Nora, but the women hear Torvald coming, so they decide to discuss the matter later. Torvald tells Nora to practice her Tarantella dance that she is to perform that evening at the party. Dr. Rank, an ailing and wealthy friend of the Helmer's, drops by to visit and speak with Nora. For a moment, Nora considers asking Dr. Rank for the money to pay off her loan, but when he confesses his love

for her, she cannot bring herself to trouble him. After his termination from the bank, Krogstad delivers a letter detailing Nora's crime to the Helmer's mailbox. In desperation, Nora tries to divert Torvald's attention from the mailbox by pretending not to remember how to dance the Tarantella and begging Torvald to help her learn it again. She also asks him not to concern himself with the mail until the party is over. Torvald agrees. Mrs. Linde and Nora have another opportunity to talk. Nora shows Mrs. Linde the letter in the mailbox, and tells Mrs. Linde that the letter cannot be retrieved because Torvald has the only key. Mrs. Linde assures Nora that Krogstad might be persuaded not to go through with his plan. Apparently, Krogstad and Mrs. Linde were once in love, and she intends to speak to him about the situation. While the Helmers are at the party, Mrs. Linde speaks to Krogstad. She explains to him that because they need each other and still share strong feelings for one another, they should marry. Overjoyed, Krogstad wishes to recall his letter but Mrs. Linde dissuades him from doing so, believing that Nora's secret needs to be revealed for the two to have a real marriage based on understanding. Nora and Torvald arrive home, and Torvald takes the letter and Dr. Rank's calling card out of the mailbox. The calling card has a black 'X' on it, a sign that Dr. Rank has shut himself in his house to die. When Torvald reads Krogstad's letter, he vehemently scorns Nora for ruining his reputation. He tells her she can stay in the house for the sake of appearances, but their marriage will never be the same. Just then, Krogstad delivers another letter promising not to tell anyone about the matter. At once, Torvald is relieved and overjoyed, and now expresses concern for Nora. He tells her he forgives her, but it is too late. Nora refuses to reconcile with Torvald because she realizes that Torvald does not know her, and therefore cannot love her for who she is but instead loves the idea of her as his doll. Consequently, she must live her own life to be a truly happy human being. Torvald begs Nora to stay, but she slams the door, leaving her husband, her children, and her past behind her.



## APPENDIX B

### Characters

**Nora:** Nora is the protagonist of the play and Torwald Helmer's wife. At the beginning of the play, Nora seems to be completely happy and naïve child who lacks knowledge of the world outside her home. She responds affectionately to Torwald's teasing and speaks with excitement about extra money which Torwald's new job will provide. She does not seem to mind her doll-like existence. As the play progress, she reveals that she is intelligent and possesses capacities beyond her wifhood. Her taking out a loan to save her husband's health indicates her ambition, determination and courage. Krogstad's blackmail and Torwald's behaviour open her eyes to her unfulfilled and underappreciated potential. She realizes that she has pretended to be someone she is not in order to fulfil the role that her husband, her father and society at large have expected of her. Nora's awakening is strengthened by Torwald's severe and selfish reaction after learning of Nora's deception and forgery. She understands that she is in total conflict between her life and her real personality. In fact, from the beginning to the end she shows her rebellious action by eating macaroons and swearing just for pleasure. At te end she walks out towards her freedom to find herself.

**Torwald:** In some editions, he is presented as *Helmer*, their surname. Torwald is Nora's husband who likes authority and patronizing. He does not view Nora as equal but rather a plaything or a doll to be teased and admired. He is concerned with his place and status in society. He is always afraid of society's scorn and doing something wrong. He believes that a man's role in society is to protect and guide his wife. Even though he seizes the power in his relationship with Nora, it seems that he is actually the weaker and more childlike character. It is clear that Torwald must be sheltered like a child from the realities of the world. He is in a respectable position at the bank now and he expects respect from everyone. He fires Krogstad because he he feels threatened and offended by Krogstad's failure to pay him the proper respect. She insists that Nora remain in the house because his chief concern is saving the appearance of their household.

**Krogstad:** He is a lawyer and holds a subordinate position at Torwald's bank. He is the antagonist of the play. He uses unethical tactics to achieve his goals. His character is contradictory because he wants to protect his children from scorn but he does the same thing to Nora. Nevertheless, he is not without sympathy for Nora as he tries to discourage Nora from committing suicide. Just like Nora, Krogstad is also wronged by society but he and Nora have something common: they both break the law and commit the same crime. He seems to be a victim of circumstances because he does all these things for the sake of his children.

**Mrs. Linde:** In some editions, she is presented as *Kristine*. She is Nora's childhood friend. She is a practical and realist woman. She takes responsibility for her sick parent, whereas Nora abandons her father when he is ill.

**Dr. Rank:** He is Torwald's best friend. He is unconcerned with what others think of him. Unlike Nora and Torwald, Dr Rank admits to the diseased nature of his life.

**Bob, Emmy and Ivar:** They are Nora and Torwald's three small children. Nora seems to be a loving mother. As Nora fears of corrupting them morally, she refuses to spend time with her children.

**Anne-Marie:** She is Helmer's nanny. Ibsen does not develop this character but she seems to be affectionate and kind woman. She shares with Nora and Mrs. Linde the act of sacrificing her own happiness out of economic necessity by giving up her own daughter.

**Nora's Father:** He is dead before the action of the play begins. But the characters refer to him throughout the play. Nora accuses him of contributing to her subservient position in life.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> 'Sparknotes: A Doll's House' <<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/dollhouse/characters.html>> (02.01.2010)

## APPENDIX C

This questionnaire has been prepared for collecting data on readers' responses. The answers you will write are very important for our study. Therefore, please read the questions carefully and answer the following questions about Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House. Feel free and be honest while giving your answers. In the first part you are expected to answer some personal questions and in the second part you will find the questions about the play. Thank you very much for your help.

### **PART A**

How old are you? .....

Where were you born? ..... Where do you live?

.....

Gender : ( ) Male ( ) Female

What is your father's job? .....

What is your mother's job? .....

How many brothers or sisters have you got? .....

What sorts of books do you like reading? .....

### **PART B**

- What were your initial feelings after reading the play?

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- Did this play make you laugh? Cry? Cringe? Smile? Cheer? Explain.

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- What connections are there between the play and your life? Explain.

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- What is the most important event in the play? Explain.

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- Who should or shouldn't read this play? Why?

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- What are the best parts of the play? Why? What are the worst parts? Why?

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- Do you like the ending of the play? Why or why not?

---

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- What came as a surprise in the play? Why?

---

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- Do any of the characters remind you of friends, family members, or classmates? Explain.

---

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- Which character would you like to be in this play? Why?

---

---

- Do you think the title fits the play? Why or why not?

---

---

- Has the play helped you in any way? Explain.

---

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- How have you changed after reading this play? Explain

---

---

- What does the writer's purpose seem to be?

---

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- My favourite character in the play is \_\_\_\_\_ because

---

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- If I was the author, I'd change

---

---

- Something that doesn't make sense about this story is

---

---

- If I were \_\_\_\_\_(character in story), I'd

---

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- I believe the author wanted the reader to .....

---

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- This play has made me reconsider or think twice about .....because....

---

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- If I could step into the play, the first thing I would do is...

---

---

- I felt like crying when...

---

---

- I laughed aloud when...

---

---

- I was furious when...

---

---

- I was surprised when.....

---

---

- Which character would you choose as a friend, brother/sister, boyfriend/girlfriend, and mother/father?

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- This play reminds me of .....because....

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- Is Nora being silly or are her actions normal for a person in love?

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- Does Torwald seem to love Nora?

---

- Which one of these five characters seems most realistic?

Torwald Helmer

Dr. Rank

Nils Krogstad

Mrs Kristine Linde

Nora

121

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<sup>121</sup> <http://www.lanesville.k12.in.us/lcsyellowpages/BKRptRRResponseForms/RRQuestions.pdf>

## ÖZGEÇMİŞ

### **Kişisel Bilgiler:**

Adı ve Soyadı : Emrah Ekmekçi

Doğum Yeri : Samsun

Doğum Yılı : 1979

Medeni Hali : Evli

### **Eğitim Durumu:**

Lise: Samsun Lâdik Akpınar Anadolu Öğretmen Lisesi 1994–1997

Lisans: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Buca Eğitim Fakültesi İngiliz Dili Eğitimi  
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