Taking Reader Response Theory to a New Level: Yasuhiro Endoh's Picturebook Read-alouds (*yomigatari*)

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"And you who wish to represent by words the form of man and all the aspects of his membrification, relinquish that idea. For the more minutely you describe the more you will confine the mind of the reader, and the more you will keep him from the knowledge of the thing described. And so it is necessary to draw and to describe." —Leonardo Da Vinci

(In David Bland, The Illustration of Books, London: Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 15)

Introduction

Modern Reader Response Theory finds its roots in the 1960s and '70s, mainly in Europe and North America in the works of Iser, Fish, Jauss and others. It has evolved into several approaches (transactional, subjective, psychological, social, and others) and has been successfully applied in a variety of fields. This paper will first take a general look into the history of this school of thought and its development, as well as its importance in recognizing the role of the reader as an active constructor of texts. It will also look into the Reader Response Theory's role in picturebooks as multimodal texts (in contrast to previous studies that had been focused exclusively on written texts). The paper will then delve into the literary form of picturebooks — important to young learners who use it as a stepping stone into literacy, but also to adults who can be reenergized from their busy and exhausted daily lives through the use of selected picturebooks. Yasuhiro Endoh and his presentation and read-aloud techniques will be the focus of the second half of the paper. It will enquire into how he applies the Reader Response Theory into his activities by ensuring that his audience has the opportunity to respond and react to what has been discussed in the activities by providing Q&A sessions and story-telling presentation opportunities to listeners, and by

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recording and collecting readers' responses for analysis purposes.

Reader Response Theory

In contrast to other schools of thought and theories where attention is mainly on the content, author, and the book's structure, reader response theory focuses primarily on the reader's (audience) experience (reaction) to a literary work. This theory gained prominence in the late 1960s, especially in Germany and the U.S., where it was particularly popular, in the works of Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes, Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, David Bleich, and others. Rather than passively consuming texts, this school of literary theory is influenced by poststructuralism and its emphasis on the role of the reader in actively formulating textual meaning. A pioneer in this area was Rosenblatt (Literature as Exploration, 1938) who argued against imposing any "preconceived notions about the proper way to react to any work". Another person who laid the foundations of this school of literary theory was Richards who in 1929 analyzed a group of students' misreadings in Cambridge. A third person worth mentioning in relation to reader response theory is Lewis and his work *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961).

Reader Response Theory argues that a text has no meaning before it is experienced (read) by a reader. This stands in opposition to text-based approaches such as formalism that are grounded upon the objective meaning already present in the work being inquired into and in which recreating literary work is ignored. New Criticism, for example, stresses
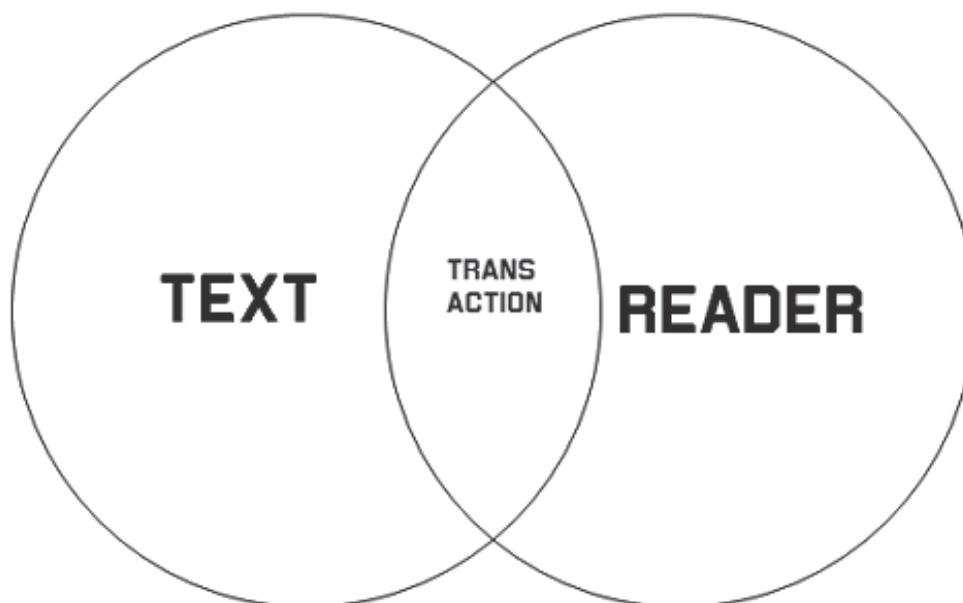

Fig. 1. Transaction between text and reader. (Author Marquesate, 2012)

that only what is within a literary text is part of the meaning of a text. This theory recognizes the reader as an active agent imparting "real existence" to the work, completing its meaning through interpretation. The reader response theory critic's task is to investigate the extent and variety of reader reactions and examine the different ways in which readers (interpretive communities) make meaning of the text based both on culturally conditioned ways of reading and on personal experience (Botev 2016). This literary school asserts that literature should be regarded as a performing art where readers generate their own, distinctive, text-related performance. Orthodox New Critics would not permit discussion on the authority or intention of the author, nor to the psychology of the reader.

Theorists such as Rosenblatt focused their attention on the nature of readers' engagement or experience with a text. Rosenblatt formulated her theory in the 1920s – 30s, which many today consider to have been ahead of its time. It described reading as a dynamic transaction between reader and text; a two-way process. She put forward that in order for the reading process to happen several components must be involved. Hence, reading is "transaction" as she called it. "[A] text, once it leaves the author's hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work — sometimes, even, a literary work of art" (p. ix). To paraphrase, only when a reader, within a given time and space of context, has a relationship with a text, the text begins to have meaning.

There are also more recent theorists who further shed light on reader response theories, such as Beach (1993, p. 52) who identified the following five categories to classify responses for analysis purposes (Table 1).

Table 1. Bleach's Categories of Readers' Responses (1993)

engaging	becoming emotionally involved, emphasizing identifying with the text
constructing	entering into and creating alternative worlds, conceptualizing characters
imaging	creating visual images
connecting	relating one's autobiographical experience to the current text
evaluating/reflecting	judging the quality of one's experience with a text

Other researchers have also created their own response classifications based on their collected data, allowing categories to materialize from the data itself. This is based on Squire's (1964) take on the Reader Response Theory (parallel to grounded theory), which
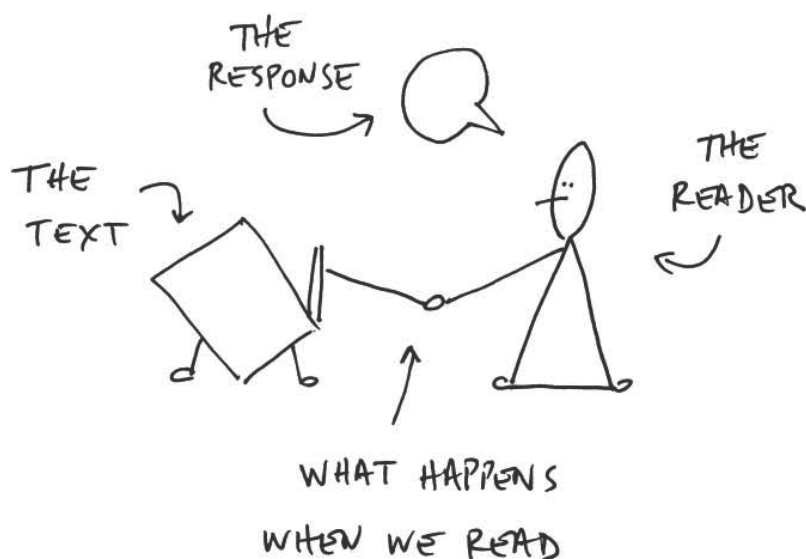
Fig. 2. The four subjects of literary study: the text, the reader, the response, and the reading process. (Laurence Musgrove, 2010)

also focused primarily on the reader. He examined oral responses of young adults to several short stories in order to see how reader responses developed during the reading process. He recognized the following seven response categories: *literary judgement, interpretational response, narrational reaction, associational responses, prescriptive judgements, self-involvement,* and *miscellaneous.* Because this paper looks into read-alouds of picturebooks (combination of pictures and text), it must be noted that the types of categories presented above emerged in studies about literary works that were not necessarily multimodal.

To sum up, reader response theories focus on the reader and their experience of a literary work by examining the extent and diversity of reader reactions and analyzing ways in which different readers make meanings from their personal reactions, which may be inherent or culturally and historically conditioned ways of reading. They entail a negotiation between the text's inherited meaning and the reader's individual interpretation through the lens of their personal emotions and understanding of the world. In the transaction between the reader and the text, the reader constructs meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Reader Response to Multimodal Texts (Picturebooks)

Recent studies are also considering response of readers to multimodal texts, in contrast to previous studies that have focused on written texts only. When reading multimodal texts, the reader generally relies on a blend of modes (images and text) to be able to make meaning. Sipe (2008) analyzed previous research data of elementary school students'

responses to picturebook readings to find out that students constructed meaning through words and illustrations and that a significant amount (23%) of the responses were analyses of books' images. Categories that emerged in his study included: analysis of illustrations (*analysis*); stories related to other stories and media (*intertextual*); connections to students' own lives (*personal*); merging of real world and story world (*transparent*); and usage of book as a springboard for creative play (*performative*). This shows that the emergence of literature in multimodal format — not only picturebooks but also comic books and graphic novels — creates a need to look at the reader response theory from a different angle, thus devising the necessary additional categories.

Other studies (Kiefer 1993, 1995) have also focused on elementary school students' responses to picturebooks and have detected developmental differences in how students responded. Students seemed familiar with visual elements such as line, color, and shape, while at the same time lacked the correct vocabulary to express their responses (young learners are better equipped to respond in an illustrative form). It seemed they noticed details first and used critical thinking later. The types of responses that emerged in Kiefer's research are as follows: *informative* — content of illustrations, storyline, text to life observations, comparisons to other literature; *heuristic* — problem solving, inferences, hypothetical language; *imaginative* — entering into life of the book and using figurative language; and *personal* — expressing feelings on opinions, relating to characters, and evaluating illustrations.

Summary

The studies above list different labels to response categories. Also, responses differed developmentally in young readers' answers. At the same time, there are some common points in the responses with the exception of, perhaps, reactions to illustrations. There is a need for closer analysis and classification of responses in multimodal books, since responses to images often go unnoticed because teachers tend to focus on the verbal aspects of texts. As mentioned earlier, analysis categories usually arise from the data itself.

> Response to the visual elements requires... not only a different language but also a different approach to the printed word given the complex relationship between these two aspects. Perhaps we now need a different term that incorporates viewing, reading, and responding to other multimodal aspects of the new texts for children (Arizpe & Styles 2008, p. 370).

When reading text-only or multimodal texts such as picturebooks, many factors influence the reader's interpretation of a text in the reading process with the reader individualizing their responses. Some of the factors that can influence readers' responses include age and gender, ethnic and socioeconomic background, and cultural environment (Galda & Beach 2001). "As members of a particular culture and of a particular subculture or social group, we have absorbed concepts governing the nature of the literary arts, the satisfaction to be sought, the conventions to be observed, the qualities to be admired" (Rosenblatt 1994, p. 152). A brief but somewhat detailed look at picturebooks follows.

Picturebooks

The origins of the picturebook are debatable but this literary form is in fact comparatively new. It was not until late in the twentieth century that picturebooks became an object of academic study (Lewis 2001, Salisbury & Styles 2012). As Randolph Caldecott set to advance not more than 130 years ago, the role of the image in the narrative is not secondary but rather coveys the meaning of the story. To tell a story, most picturebooks today use sequential imagery alongside a limited amount of text (Botev 2015).

The present day picturebook is evolving constantly, as picturebook creators constantly redefine its use and contents. Additionally, a clear line must be drawn between books that feature illustrations and picturebooks.

> In contrast to the illustrated book, where pictures enhance, decorate and amplify, in the picturebook the visual text will often carry much of the narrative responsibility. In most cases, the meaning emerges through the interplay of word and image, neither of which is would make sense when experienced independently of the other (Salisbury & Styles 2012, p. 7).

The power of picturebooks lies in their instantaneous surprise, the uniqueness of the story, the poetic expression of words, the aesthetic power of the pictures, and the amusement and relaxation from the humor found in this genre (Endoh 2015). Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) stated that picturebooks are considered "educational vehicles [that] includ[e] aspects such as socialization" (p. 2), that "picturebooks are examined in connection with developmental psychology" and that they belong to a genre "containing pedagogical applications" (p. 3). Picturebooks are regarded as a type of literature and cultural genre that prepares young learners for other communication media.

Picturebooks are usually placed in the Children's Literature category in most libraries and are thought of as a stepping stone for young learners to develop the necessary skills

needed to understand "regular books". At the same time it is erroneous to think that picturebooks are only for children and Endoh (2015) looks at it in detail:

> The busy and exhausted adult of today can be revived through the *power of picturebooks* to find their own content way of existence in their local living environment. Why would the free flow of ideas help the modern adult think more about an improved local living environment? Well, it is an adult's duty to love and to work. What gently embraces these two is the place we live in. To love more and to work better, inevitably the place we live in comes into play (p. 9).

Certainly, as picturebooks' influence and audience increasingly broaden, this hybrid type of literature is receiving new understanding and attention.

Although any book that combines narrative format with pictures might be categorized as a picturebook, Kiefer (2010) clarifies that "In the best picturebooks, the illustrations are as much a part of the experience with the book as the written text" (p. 156). "[A picturebook is] defined by its narrative framework of sequential imagery and minimalist text to convey meaning or tell a story and [is] different from the illustrated book in which pictures play a secondary narrative part, enhancing and decorating the narrative (Popova 2014). In the words of semiotic terminology Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) further add that images in picturebooks "are complex iconic signs, and words in picturebooks are complex conventional signs; however the basic relationship between the two levels is the same" (p. 1). In short, the fusion of art and text exceeds what each form can accomplish separately.
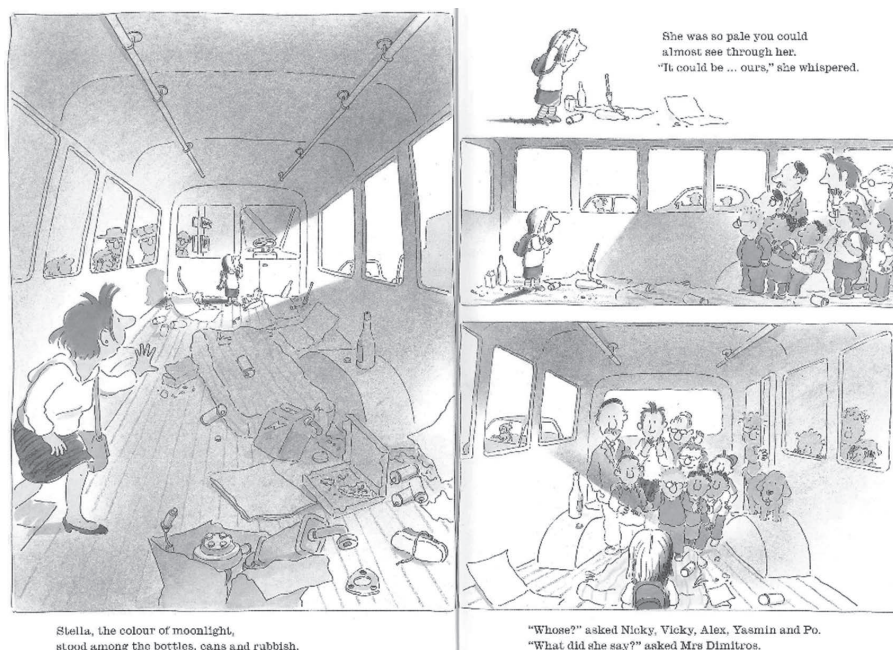

Fig. 3. Bob Graham, A Bus Called Heaven, Walker Books, London (2012)

Yasuhiro Endoh and His Presentation and Read-aloud Methods

Yasuhiro Endoh was born in 1940 in Osaka, Japan. Some of the areas he teaches and does research in include architecture, city planning, and community development. He holds a Doctor of Engineering from Kyoto University. Dr. Endoh has published over a dozen of books on city planning and community development. He is also a devoted collector of picturebooks (currently over 2000) that feature issues and elements such as hometown, community, local living environment, etc. This paper will look into his unique presentation style — *gentoukai*, a type of slideshow presentation, and *yomigatari*, a type of picturebook read-aloud.

Gentoukai (Slideshow presentation)

Originally *gentoukai* was a type of film or slide projection in front of an audience — seemingly the predecessor of slideshow presentations that use types of software such as PowerPoint or Keynote, that have become ubiquitous in classrooms and meeting rooms. While Dr. Endoh has switched to the modern way of (slideshow) presenting, he has made it a principle to use not one but two projectors, which he uses one after another, providing a more smooth transition between slides, with the audience experiencing a more even and tranquil storytelling presentation.

Another important part of Yasuhiro Endoh's presentation style is the use of a dialectic form of Japanese (he hails from Osaka, its form of spoken Japanese being arguably the most varied in intonation, making it easy and soft on the ear), as well as his skillful use of onomatopoeia.

When Dr. Endoh prepares photographic materials for his presentation (gentoukai), he collects the pictures himself by visiting the venue in advance and taking a large number of photographs himself or in a team. He often asks locals to also contribute by providing photographs of their own. He then makes a selection from the collected data and edits it into a presentation form to be run through two projectors attached to two computers. Also, as someone familiar with his own picturebook collection, it is easy for him to hand-pick picturebooks on the given presentation topic and smoothly interweave them with his photographs for an unusual, locality-specific presentation experience for the audience.

The combination of all this — collection of locality-specific data, two-projector slideshow, unique speaking style based on a dialectic form of Japanese language and use of onomatopoeia, and utilization of thematically-selected picturebooks — provides the audience with one-of-a-kind uplifting experience that more often than not leaves the audience inspired to make

Fig. 4. The author using Yasuhiro Endoh's *gentoukai* method of presentation.
(Megumi Nabata, 2017)

a positive change in their own community.

Gentoukai is often followed by a workshop in which participants are given the opportunity to prepare a poster using materials (including photographs) provided for this purpose, combining pictures and text. After that, groups present the story they have created using the poster in a limited amount of time (same for all groups). Questionnaires are also distributed for participants to fill out providing their responses to the overall experience (as listeners and story-tellers) and afterwards collected as data to be analyzed later. This is yet another application of the Reader Response Theory.

Yomigatari (Picturebook Read-alouds)

Picturebook read-alouds take advantage of the fact that young learners have better developed listening skills compared to their reading skills, thus read-alouds engage readers in texts that they might not be able to read yet. Through this visual picturebook read-aloud process, young learners' imagination is expanded, new knowledge is provided, language acquisition is supported, vocabulary is built, and reading as a worthwhile, enjoyable activity is promoted. Read-alouds done by an articulate, passionate, and spirited reader can also help students more easily make parallel between written and spoken language.

Traditional read-alouds (*yomikikase*) though, tend to cover the entire book from beginning to end and stop there — they do not employ the Reader Response Theory. The way Dr. Endoh performs his read-alouds (*yomigatari*) differs in that once the picturebook (entire book or part of it) has been read, it will be the audience's turn to respond to the book. In

Fig. 5. Dr. Endoh in the midst of a *yomigatari* style of picturebook read-aloud.
(Megumi Nabata, 2017)

one form or another, the audience members are given a chance to share how they felt and what they learned through the picturebook read-aloud, thus not only providing them with an opportunity to share their emotions with the reader (facilitator) and the rest of the audience, but also in verbalizing their feelings and emotions to realize what they have absorbed from the literary work themselves. Yasuhiro Endoh and collaborators would then record readers' responses in written form (other forms would include photographs, video, etc.) for analytical purposes. This distinctive application of the Reader Response Theory as observed in Dr. Endoh's *yomigatari* is yet another way of focusing on the reader as an end-user and their experience of a literary work (picturebooks) by examining the extent and diversity of reader reaction and analyzing ways in which different readers make meaning of personal reactions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Reader Response Theory dates back to the first half of last century, if not earlier. It has evolved into several different branches and has been successfully applied in a variety of fields. This paper first looked into the history of this school of thought and its development, as well as its importance in recognizing the role of the reader as an active constructor of texts rather than a passive consumer of such. It then looked into the Reader Response

Theory's key critique role in picturebooks as multimodal texts, as an important variation from previous studies that had focused on written texts only. A brief look into picturebooks as a literary form important to both young learners who use it as a stepping stone in their journey into literacy, and to adults who can be rejuvenated from their busy and exhausted daily lives through readings of selected picturebooks. Yasuhiro Endoh and his presentation (*gentoukai*) and read-aloud (*yomigatari* instead of *yomikikase*) methods were the focus of the second half of the paper, where it looked into how he has been applying the Reader Response Theory methods into his activities throughout his career. Dr. Endoh balances his talks by ensuring that his audience has the opportunity to respond and react to what has been discussed in the activities by providing Q&A sessions and story-telling presentations opportunities, and by recording and collecting responses for analysis purposes.

Throughout his career, Dr. Endoh has, purposely or not, made a successful use of the Reader Response Theory school of thought, placing the importance not on the speaker (in presentations) or the literature work (picturebook read-alouds) but on the audience actively taking part in the activities. This principle has made him both popular with his audience — he is a well sought-after presenter domestically and abroad — and has helped shape his career during which he has made a point to use the two parallel narrative styles found in picturebooks — the fusion between images and text, rarely found in other types of literature (the fusion of art and text exceeding what each form can accomplish separately). By basing his presentations on this visual style, as a community planner and an activist, he has been accomplishing several things: he has made his presentations more easily understood on more than one level; he more easily motivates his audience to bring a positive change to their community; and in this way he displays the "bottom-up" approach in which community members, instead of waiting for someone to help them (top-down), unite to improve their own surroundings.

While this paper offered a basic look into two types of activities (presentations engaging the audience and picturebook read-alouds that do not end when the book has been completed reading) in which the Reader Response Theory is being incorporated, further research would be needed to shed more light on the variety of methods that put this theory into practical use both as an (non-formal) educational technique for young learners and in improving adults' daily lives, as well as for motivating community members to bring change to their area of residence.

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　Reader response theoriesは読者と文学作品を通じた読者の経験に着目し、読者の反応の多様性と程度を考察しながら、読者が経験的に受け継いできた、または文化的・歴史的背景から学んだ読み方を通じ、読者個々人が作品に対して紡ぎ出す異なる意味づけについて分析をする理論である。つまり、テクストそのものが含有する意味と読者の個人的な感情や読者個人を取り巻く社会に対する理解に基づいた読者個人の解釈を折衷するプロセスを伴うのである。読者は、テクストと自身の間に折り合いをつけながら、解釈をする。ある特定の文化、または特定のサブカルチャーや社会集団に所属するものとして、読者は、文学作品のもつ意味合い、満足感、表現方法と感動するポイントを（同時に）理解するのである。

　延藤安弘氏が実施する幻燈会では、その地元特有のデータ収集、２つのプロジェクターを用いた発表と日本語、擬音語、テーマ別に選択された絵本の３つを相互連関をさせた特徴的な語り方で構成されている。幻燈会を経験した聞き手に、他にはない高揚感を与え、彼らのコミュニティ内で、なにか好ましい変化をもたらそうという気持ちをおこさせる。

　伝統的な読み聞かせは本を最初から最後まで読むだけにとどまる。延藤氏の読み語りが異なるのは、絵本（全体またはその一部）が音読されたのち、聞き手が本に対して反応することを促す・期待する（相互関係により成り立っている）点である。