



Narrative Construction in Poetry Theatre

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Abstract

Poetry theatre uses poetic texts which are not primarily meant for presentation on the theatrical stage (distinction from verse dramas) adapting and dramatising them using intermediality and the means of expressions typical of theatre (music, kinesics, speech, lights, video, stage props etc). Oral presentation of poetry raises the questions of creating intimacy and immediacy, bringing attention to the personality of every speaker's voice, its characteristics and the opposition between the author's voice and the presenter's voice. Voice is a powerful reminder that sign systems such as language are also dynamic material structures, we sense sound as a vibration in our bodies and also via mental perceptions. Therefore oral presentation is at the same time mental and corporeal experience, creating a new meaning and essence for a written text (P. Middleton 2005).

Oral expression has existed long before written, but we seem to have forgotten it. Written cultures cannot exist without oral culture (W.J. Ong 1999), since 1960's a focus on the oral expression in different disciplines (ethnology, anthropology, folkloristics, performance studies, phenomenology) has emerged. In my article I will use theoretical material from these different research fields.

Each oral presentation of a poem is a separate event - occurrence - and changes the message of the text, giving new meaning to the text with new contexts. Every text acquires new

interpretation for the new generation; in the history of poetry theatre we can see constant usage of the same classical authors.

Romantic belief in the connectedness of the creation and biography of the author (all is drawn directly from life and personal experience), is apparent in recent poetry performances in Estonian theatres, e.g. "Ennola", written by M. Kõiv and based on the life, poems and autobiographical texts of E. Enno. Also examples under this approach are "Under" based on the life of Marie Under and "Võlg" ("Debt") based on the life of Betti Alver. These are two of the most famous Estonian female poetry writers, whose poems have been used over the decades in many different performances, and according to some sources also the first poetry performance in 1960's was composed of their texts.

In my article I would like to give an insight into the construction of a theatrical narrative from various texts which are related to one author – poetry, diaries, letters, and also fictional dialogues with friends and family. I would like to explore how do the narrativity, orality and time limits of theatrical performance change the essence and meaning of poetry as a written text.