

## **The Operation of Imagination in Reading Plays: Based on the Directing Notes of *Hong-Dongji Is Alive***

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- I. Problems in Reading Plays in Literary Education
- II. The Genre Characteristics and Structure of Imagination in Reading Plays
- III. The Aspects of Imagination in Reading Plays as Presented in Directing Notes
- IV. The Remaining Tasks

## **I. Problems in Reading Plays in Literary Education**

To have readers read literary works using their imagination is one of the main purposes of literary education (우한웅, 1998: 68–71). The same goes for reading plays. The present study will discuss the principles of the operation of readers' imagination in reading plays in order to propose ways to educate readers to read plays in the light of the genre-specific features.

A play refers to a written text in which an individual's life is represented in language as well as a script for a performance. Among these two roles of a play, however, current education emphasizes on its former role as a written text rather than as a script. It has long been criticized that the theatricality of plays is not implemented in textbooks. It is not to say that play performance is not covered in textbooks (김재석, 1998; 황정현, 2006). In fact, staging plays is one of the most frequently proposed learning activities in the genre of drama. The problem, however, is that such activities are not carefully designed.

Assign the roles and try performing the play in the small-group.

(1) Find friends whose characteristics are likely to suit each role and assign the roles.

Character	Characteristics	Cast	Reasons for Casting
Nora			
Helmer			

(2) Prepare props and play the part imagining you are performing on the stage. (홍신선, 2011: 281)

As cited above, learning activities are comprised of simple exercises such as assigning roles and performing the play. However, as performing refers to the act of interpreting and presenting plays, it is difficult to be carried out in such a simplistic format. In England where plays account for an important part of literary education, full-length plays are presented in textbooks without any abridgment, and more importantly, the guidelines and assignments required for performing are presented in detail (이용숙, 1996: 243). To incorporate the genre-specific features in the education of plays, the guidelines including structured knowledge about how to understand and present plays should be provided to learners.

In this regard, the present study focuses on the ability to imagine. In literary education, imagination has been noted as an essential ability for learners to possess. Imagination, defined as the power to picture all kinds of phenomena or objects regardless of one's actual previous experiences, plays a role in all activities related to creating and interpreting literary works. Literary works are indeed the result of imagination, and they inspire people's imagination. Especially, imagination is regarded as the key purpose in liberal education as it allows human beings to establish orders on their own and acquire their ontological value (최지현, 2007: 171).

In response to the recognition of such problems, this study aims to

contribute to reading plays in the light of the genre-specific features by identifying the structure of how imagination operates in reading plays. One's imagination is maximized in the course of directing a play. Thus, the directing notes a director writes for a performance after reading a play can be the ideal target for an analysis of how imagination works. In the present study, Yoon-taek Lee's directing notes for Kwang-rim Kim's *Hong-DongJi Is Alive* will be analyzed and discussed (김광림, 2005; 이윤택, 1993).<sup>1</sup>

## II. The Genre Characteristics and Structure of Imagination in Reading Plays

The present study examines the characteristics of play reading in order to examine the points at which the imagination intervenes and the structure of the imagination's operations in reading plays. Through a review of how play reading is realized, it is possible to shed light on the generic attributes of the imagination that operates in reading plays.

Any understanding of literature must be based on generic attributes. Reading plays likewise must be based on "dramatic" (양승국, 1996: 62). In order to practice play reading based on generic attributes, none other than this concept of the "dramatic" must be determined more clearly. To accomplish this, it is necessary to examine the two attributes of plays.

Commonly, plays are evaluated as constituting a genre that possesses both theatricality and literary features. Possessing literary features refers to the fact that plays, like other branches of literature, are

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1 The play *Hong-DongJi Is Alive* (by Yoon-taek Lee's directing notes) was premiered at the national theater in March 26, 1993.

“linguistic representations of valuable human experiences.” Consequently, reading plays, like reading other literary genres, is a “process for empathizing with works created by writers.” No matter how important theatricality may be, reading plays, too, is “reading life” and “reading narratives.” In accordance with the educational purposes, reading plays must constitute reading that empathizes with others’ lives.

On the contrary, possessing theatricality means that plays, unlike other literary genres, are implemented through performances and, going beyond readers who have read the written texts, meet with audience members inside theaters (Shank, 1969: 8). In fact, elements called “dramatic limitations”—i. e., the unnaturalness of temporal and spatial movement and restrictions in the management of locations within plays—all stem from the fact that plays are created on the assumption that they will be performed onstage.

In fact, plays constitute an art with special agreements or conventions for theatrical performances. For example, when the stage is prepared for performances of the play *WonGoJi*, an agreement with the audience that it is to be perceived as the living room of an ordinary home existing in reality comes into being even though the space strictly is not so. The same applies to actors as well. An actor can play the role of Hamlet onstage because the audience believes that the actor onstage is Hamlet. When he dies at the end of all incidents within the play, he dies onstage, not in real life. Monologues and asides, too, are among the conventions created for performances.

In addition, plays constitute an art form that is expressed through actors and stage props. In other words, the characters’ lives can be broadly depicted through actors’ physical expressions and diverse means of audiovisual expression onstage. The evaluation that it is incorrect to emphasize language only as a means of expressing plays

stems from this as well.

The literary features and theatricality discussed above all constitute “dramatic.” Such drama-centered play reading is useful on two levels. First, learner-readers can approach valid interpretations based on experiences towed in plays. Second, they can understand actively when the plays that they are faced with have been constructed in ways different from the conventions of earlier plays. The topic that has been highlighted as the most important one for understanding literary texts in recent years is the “appropriateness of understanding.” This is not unrelated to the fact that discussions on reception aesthetics or constructivism have emerged as important discourses in literary education. Such discussions are meaningful because they serve as the theoretical grounds that can newly shed light on learners’ process of understanding and argue wholly for the value of internalization. The problem lies in learners’ “arbitrary understanding.” Although texts can be interpreted in a variety of ways, this does not guarantee the validity of all such interpretations. In other words, not all interpretations of the same texts can be acknowledged as valid interpretations (정진석, 2011: 384–385).

Consequently, learners must aim at the acceptability of interpretations. The acceptability of interpretations consists of the appropriateness of interpretations, which avoids excessive interpretations, and the creativity and richness of interpretations, which aim at outstanding interpretations. Perceptions of plays basically tow the former. In other words, one must possess an internal logic so that one’s interpretations will not be excessive ones, and perceptions of plays act as such an internal logic. Genres are norms mediating literary communication. While they understand plays, learners can secure the appropriateness of interpretations through the metaperception of the genres that tow their literary experiences.

Perceptions of drama in reading plays are all the more called for when

readers are faced with texts that have been created with new contents and forms. Certain plays perturb and, in extreme cases, even arouse antipathy in readers. For example, Choe In-hun's plays differ from existing plays, selecting vocabulary and lines that are usually found in poetry only. The new contents and forms of such plays do not agree with readers' preconceptions of plays. Such encounters between texts and readers are very important experiences for understanding new plays. This is because the convergence of horizons that arise between the unfamiliar horizons of plays and readers' stable horizons shake up existing horizons and open up new ones.

Play texts that readers have difficulties understanding are the results of expanding existing genres or creating and using new genres. Here, whether one can interpret the texts depends on both the degree of unfamiliarity and abstruseness of the texts and readers' ability to understand and attitudes in reception at the same time. In other words, when play texts created through new drama discomfort readers, readers can use their discomfort as a lever to reflect on their preconceptions regarding plays and to expand to a new awareness of plays (강진우, 2013: 141-144).

Imagination hitherto has been discussed in relation to images. Sangsang (想像), the Korean word for "imagination," literally means "to think about shapes," and the second syllable signifies images in the mind instead of images in reality. From such logic, the imagination is the ability to produce images. However, such a definition is inadequate for encompassing various uses of the term "imagination" and diverse functions of the imagination. A more nuanced definition is necessary, and discussions on the imagination have developed according to such problematics.

The imagination in cognition is the ability to see "what is beyond the given" (김광명, 2006: 236). However, this does not mean that one can see everything. Though the imagination in cognition sees beyond what is

given, it cannot be completely free from the sensory world and sensory concepts. On the contrary, the imagination in judgments on beauty can more freely see beyond what exists. The imagination in reflective judgments does not possess the concepts to subsume objects and discovers universality in the process of freely combining the given symbols (김광명, 2006: 235).

Such perspectives on the imagination serve as important guides in discussions on literary education. 우한용 (1998: 67–90) discussions are representative. After reviewing the status of the imagination in literary education, U proposes the concept of the imagination in literary education. According to him, the imagination in literary education is the “linguistic imagination.” Such a linguistic imagination sub-divided into three imaginations, in other words, imagination of awareness, imagination of world ordering and, imagination of world making.

The dramatic imagination operates best during play reading in none other than direction. Direction signifies the “task of sublimating the literary works of plays into the composite art of the theater.” If one wishes to present plays onstage as theatrical performances, those works must undergo direction. In the end, direction is the act of interpreting plays in a unified direction for the purpose of staging them.

However, when reading plays for the purpose of direction, the imagination is called for on two levels. The first is the imagination as reading literature. This is because plays, too, are linguistic representations of meaningful human lives and require a “constructive ability in general, which shares meaning through language, coordinates opinions, and is concretized as a transformative ability that puts ideology into practice.”

The second is the “performative imagination” as the staging of plays. When reading play texts for the purpose of direction, one visualizes in



the mind the lives led by the characters. The images here, however, must constitute reading that presupposes the stage. For example, as for the scene in the dénouement of Cha Beom-seok’s play Forest Fire (Sanbul) where the mountain is ablaze with fire, it can be imagined as vividly as possible without any restriction when it is approached from the perspective of a “story of life.” However, when this work is read for the purpose of theatrical performances, scenes that are both “appropriate” for the conditions onstage and “possible” must be imagined. This is because reading plays for direction purposes “cannot avoid the stage or expand the stage” (Hayman, 1977/1995: 19).

The act of reading plays passes through the imagination of awareness, determines the path to be taken by direction while the imagination of world making is in operation, and concretizes that path into direction once again through the imagination of awareness. Below is a diagrammatization of such a structure of the imagination’s operations:

Table 1. The Structure of Imagination in Reading Plays

	the structure of imagination in reading plays	operation area
A	the display of the written world through imagination of awareness	scr ipt
	↓	
B	a critical investigation of the displayed world through imagination of world ordering	perf or man ce
	↓	
C	the stylization of criticized world through imagination of world making	
	↓ ↓	
D	the staging of the stylized world through imagination of representation	

### **III. The Aspects of Imagination in Reading Plays as Presented in Directing Notes**

In the previous chapter, the principle of how imagination works in reading plays has been proposed. This chapter will examine the proposal by looking at some specific examples. Lee's directing notes were written for a specific play performed by the members of the National Drama Company of Korea at the grand hall in the National Theater of Korea from March 26 to April 4, 1993.

#### **1. The display of the written world through imagination of awareness**

Imagination of awareness refers to the ability to recognize human beings and the world through literature. Recognizing the target is the initial stage of reorganizing or ordering through language. While reading plays, readers read written text and recognize the characters, the relationship between the characters, the incidents they provoke, and the world constructed by the characters. In other words, readers identify what kind of fictional world has been created in a play; they gain an understanding of which characters are involved in which incidents to face conflicts in the time and space specified in a play. A plot presented in directing notes, performance pamphlets, and a number of play reviews is brought about by the operation of imagination of awareness.

The queen who had no luck in convincing Hong-DongJi sticks a needle onto the head of the straw effigy of Hong-DongJi and chants her spell out of revenge. Hong-DongJi, not being able to feel the joy of getting married as he suffers from the sense of disappointment and doubt for people

around him, suddenly feels a pain in his head and falls down. Hong-Dongji strips off and loses his mind. A medical doctor is called in from out of town to treat Hong-Dongji's illness, but a eunuch who was expelled gets disguised into a doctor and sticks a poisoned needle into Hong-Dongji's brain. Hong-Dongji falls down as if a big tree collapses and everyone including the queen leaves. A group of clowns appear and begin a doll play to pray for the dead one (신현숙, 1993: 45-46).

The abovementioned citation is a plot provided by a reviewer after watching *Hong-Dongji Is Alive*. According to the plot, the organization of the characters, the incident, and the background of the performance is similar to that of a play. This indirectly shows how the director displays the fictional world of a play using text as a medium. While such display of the written world identifies a number of characters and incidents of the fictional world, it fundamentally establishes the direction of production for the fictional world and forms the basis for the staging.

## **2. A critical investigation of the displayed world through imagination of world ordering**

Imagination of world ordering refers to the ability to criticize the world through literature. Such imagination is related to the act of 'asking oneself of the grounds of being' and 'seeking one's own problems.' Readers may have different interpretations for a play. How readers interpret a play depends on their experiences and values. Their interpretations may lead them to actively participate in asking questions and raising doubts about the text of a play from their own point of view.

For example, readers may become curious about the details of a character's life which has been simplified in text. They may presuppose what kind of choices the leading character may have made in order to

avoid tragedy. They may believe the play does not reflect today's reality or criticize that the social issues are disregarded due to the overemphasis on the leading character's heroism. Readers develop a new awareness of problems in their process of seeking answers for critical questions they raise for the play (Courtney, 1990/2007: 20–24).

What if Agi-jangsu survived to grow up? How would he have enhanced the value of his being in such institutionalized reality? (...) The modern acceptance of hero folktales is in association with the power structure. The conflict of Hong-Dongji and the power structure in the system comprising the king-queen-head maid-eunuch-doctors has the melodramatic construction in the course of love, revolution and collapse. As a tragic victim in the myth, Hong-Dongji passes onto us a lesson that is critical of civilization and self-reflective (이윤택, 1993: 424).

As cited above, Yoon-taek Lee relates *Hong-Dongji Is Alive* to Agi-jangsu Folktale and questions how Agi-jangsu would have 'enhanced the value of his being in such institutionalized reality' if he did not get killed as he did in the folktale. Such question shows that the director identified the relationship of characters portrayed in the play as the problem of the institutional power. The power issues, which are associated with the institutional reality, are understood as the topic of the play. Such critical question highlights the play's aspect of being 'critical of civilization' and 'self-reflective.'

Hong-Dongji attempts to establish utopia in reality. He does politics. His political view is rather rousseauistic and also ideal like Jo Gwang-jo's politics. Yet, the reality is not in such harmonized world. Why is this so? It is because in reality, the world is acentric. The egocentric king and queen break the family ties by themselves, and the Minister of Defense, doctors and eunuchs are either flat headed or just like the beams of headlights due to their self-involved nature. That is why the standards of living are

collapsed and the acentric world of chaos gets created (이윤택, 1993: 425).

The critical question in regards to Hong-DongJi asks about the grounds of being in reality. As the citation shows, the director identifies Hong-DongJi's politics as 'ideal politics' and raises a question about whether it can be harmonized with the 'reality.' The director offers a negative response to the question as the 'egocentric people break the family ties by themselves' and 'the standards of living are collapsed.' Such imagination of world ordering forms the basis for imagination of world making which helps build the possible world.

### **3. The stylization of criticized world through imagination of world making**

Imagination of world making refers to the imagination of creating a new world while criticizing the world of reality. The transcendence of reality is relevant to 'an aim for an ideal world' and 'a proposal of a possible model.' reading plays is distinctive from other areas of literature in the sense that such transcendence of reality is actualized on the stage. Directing is a 'creation' performed beyond 'interpretation.' In the past, directing was thought to be the reconstruction of the author's intentions portrayed in the play, but it is now perceived as a way to create new meanings. Therefore, 'a play is not the source of performance; it is rather the other way around' (이인성, 1988: 39).

The ways of directing based on imagination of world making are two layered; one is related to the significance of the work while the other is relevant to the patterns of the presentation of the work.

Recreating the myth as the realistic symbol with dignity and sentiments – this is the direction of work set for *Hong-Dongji Is Alive*. We aim to identify the structured desire of human beings by examining why the myth

is lost in reality and to share with the audience what it means to help the reality through self-reflection (이윤택, 1993: 418).

In this respect, the direction of production is determined as 'the recreation of the myth as the realistic symbol with dignity and sentiments.' Here, the aspects of 'the loss of myth,' 'the structured desire of human beings,' and 'the meaning of helping the reality' are specified. Sharply, the director intends to ask how human beings came to lose the myth due to what kinds of desires in the modern society and in what ways the myth can be retrieved. This indicates the new orientation the director wishes the society to take.

The significance of a play directors try to show is what determines the way of directing. In directing, performances are stylized.

The present version of *Hong-Dongji Is Alive* is produced under the theme of 'the creation of a new way of performance by breaking and restructuring tradition.' In order to well illustrate the theme, various kinds of stage crafts and acting techniques will be tested to see if the play can be performed in a new way. The details of a performance including the settings, makeup, costumes, props, lighting and music need to be integrated while the performers' gestures and sounds should be appropriate for the audience (이윤택, 1993: 420).

The director is to set 'breaking and restructuring tradition' as the principle of staging the recreated myth. The principle focuses on showing 'our people's sentiments.' Based on people's sentiments, other aspects such as performers, props, setting, sounds, and lighting are integrated.

#### **4. The staging of the stylized world through imagination of representation**

Once the direction of production is determined through imagination of world making, the stage production should follow. To represent the world in detailed signs on the stage, imagination is required.

Plays are written to be staged, and they aim to establish communication ‘from the stage to the audience.’ The direction of communication is ‘from the stage to the audience’ rather than ‘from the performer to the audience’ because the audiovisual signs, in addition to performers’ speech, are used to communicate with the audience. Thus, play directors must give instructions on how to present the signs on the stage (Esslin, 1986: 17).

In a play, the elements of a performance are presented as directions. The elements presented as directions in a play are the target of understanding as well as the means of expression. For instance, the sound effects and lighting that are presented along with the speech of performers do not simply form the background for the speech. As signs of their own significance, these elements are as important as the speech itself; they conjoin and form meanings together.

Ensuring the typicality of each role is the foundation for seeking the facial expressions, gestures and sounds of our own, and our search for the typical sentiments and images is relevant to our acting techniques. In this respect, how performers dress up becomes the hierarchical or collective symbol. (...) Using the *dancheong* color, we will be able to make folksy stage costumes with various colors. The music arrangements in Eastern Asia’s archetypal dramas play the role of a narration and thus create an interaction with the performers. (...) The director intends to interpret it as the archetype of various characteristics and forms presented in our archetypal dramas. In other words, each role represents the diversity of

human beings with the fundamental awareness and sentiments of our people. Building the archetype for acting with such awareness is the main purpose of the present work (이윤택, 1993 : 421-422).

The abovementioned citation elaborates on performers' acting, music, stage costumes and makeup for performances. The meanings to be conveyed in the performance and the expression styles are being staged. In this respect, imagination of representation for staging corresponds to imagination of media language. The new world is being visualized on stage via selected and combined media language.

#### **IV. The Remaining Tasks**

A play refers to a written text in which an individual's life is represented in language as well as a script for a performance. To read a play the way it should be read means to read it with an intention to stage the play. In other words, readers transform the written text into a performance where the words change into diverse symbols. Among these two roles of a play, however, current education emphasizes on its former role as a written text rather than as a script. In fact, staging plays is one of the most frequently proposed learning activities in the genre of drama. The problem, however, is that such activities are not carefully designed. To incorporate the genre-specific features in the education of plays, the guidelines including structured knowledge about how to understand and present plays should be provided to learners. In this respect, imagination that operates in reading plays should encompass both the imagination required for the reading of literary works and the one needed for stage performances.



When reading plays for the purpose of direction, the imagination is called for on two levels. The first is the imagination as reading literature. The second is the “performative imagination” as the staging of plays. The act of reading plays passes through the imagination of awareness, determines the path to be taken by direction while the imagination of world making is in operation, and concretizes that path into direction once again through the imagination of awareness. In the present study, the structure of the operation of imagination, including ‘the display of the written world through imagination of awareness,’ ‘the critical investigation of the revealed world through imagination of world ordering,’ ‘the stylization of criticized world through imagination of world making,’ and ‘the staging of the stylized world through imagination of representation’ in reading plays is identified by discussing imagination and investigating theatricality in literature education. In addition, the aspects of the operation of imagination are examined from the directing notes in which the director’s imagination is revealed.

The principle of how imagination works identified in this paper is what transfers a play into a performance. Embracing a learner-centered perspective to education, further investigation should be made on how the principle of the operation of imagination identified in this study can be practiced in learning activities. While professional directors and readers read plays under the same fundamental principle, their ways of practicing reading and their aims in reading show differences. In literature classrooms, the focus of reading plays should be placed on examining the diversity of life and reflecting oneself while understanding the world and others by drawing on their imagination. In future studies, education-oriented action research should be implemented.

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## ABSTRACT

### The Operation of Imagination in Reading Plays:

Based on the Directing Notes of *Hong-Dongji Is Alive*

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This study discussed the principles of the operation of imagination in reading plays in order to propose ways to educate students to read plays in the light of the genre-specific features. Reading plays need two sort of imaginations, the imagination as reading literature and performative imagination as the staging of plays. These imaginations are maximized in the course of directing a play. This study analyzed the directing notes a director writes for a performance after reading a play to examine how imagination works.

Upon investigation, the structure of the operation of imagination, including 'the display of the written world through imagination of awareness,' 'the critical investigation of the revealed world through imagination of world ordering,' 'the stylization of criticized world through imagination of world making,' and 'the staging of the stylized world through imagination of representation' in reading plays was identified by discussing imagination and investigating theatricality in literature education. And the aspects of the operation of imagination were examined from Yoon-taek Lee's directing notes for Kwang-rim Kim's *Hong-Dongji Is Alive* in which the director's imagination is revealed. The present study is significant in that it contributed to reading plays in the light of the genre-specific features by identifying the structure of how imagination operates in reading plays.

**KEYWORDS** reading plays, imagination, dramatic, theatricality, directing note, *Hong-Dongji Is Alive*