

Normative Aesthetics, the Ideal Audience and Art Education

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Abstract: Reader-Response Criticism proposes a new way of looking at literary text. One of the writers of this criticism discusses about 'literary competence' which entails the idea of 'ideal reader'. The writer proposes the idea of 'ideal audience' to work with fields of art other than literature. In an attempt to give the proper appreciation of art, norms are required, and norms in art can be arrived at using the concept of 'ideal audience'. It is a fact that norms are normally contextual, not universal, and change according to the change in the concept of art creation. Then the question is why take the trouble of forming norms if they keep changing?

Key words: norms, normative aesthetics, ideal audience, art education.

In the beginning it is the work of art. The artist using his imagination and creativity produces a work of art. He is stirred emotionally and intellectually by objects in nature, situation, incidents and even by his own conscience; empowered by his imagination, he creates a concept which he will build in a certain form, taking a certain structure. When he has accomplished with his dreams about putting his concept into

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reality, the artist will hand in his work to the public, and, simultaneously he can reflect on his own work for the betterment of his creativity in the future. The artist, just like the audience or a critic, when confronting with his own works can contemplate on all the requirements of a good work of art that he has already met, on all the steps that he has taken, the processes that he has struggled in, to come to his present work.

A work of art is said to be beautiful because it has met the requirements of norms of beauty. Normative aesthetics believes that it requires the process of contemplation before you can say that a work is beautiful, and this process results in a set of norms that we must use as reference to decide that a work is beautiful. However, some questions should be put forward. First, who has the privilege to do contemplation and to set norms? Second, how is the process of contemplation; and third, how should we believe that the result of his contemplation can be accepted as norms? When we have come to norms, are these universal or contextual? How could we come at universal norms if you have various different materials used for contemplation, and the individuals doing contemplation differ culturally, socially, and politically?

IDEAL SPEAKER, IDEAL READER, AND IDEAL AUDIENCE

In linguistics the term ideal speaker is used to refer to an (ideal) figure who masters a certain language actively and passively. He masters the grammar of the language, masters all the lexicon of the language, the expressions, proverbs of that particular language. In short, he is a perfect master of the language. But, as the term refers, there is no one like this in real life. He is only an ideal speaker, a term used to picture the most superior figure to master the language. Based on this ideal speaker you can decide about proper use of certain word, expression, or structure. To come to the ideal speaker, linguists collect data from native speakers of the language, and using the data collected, together with data from various written texts, the dictionary and grammar of the language are written. Temporarily, the dictionary and the standard grammar of the language are used as reference, as temporary norms, for you know that language as well as norms change. Words and (least frequently) grammar come and go in the language. A dictionary normally gives indication about word usage, telling, for example, that a certain word is no longer used. New words form new entries in the future.

The concept of an ideal speaker is also used in literary criticism. It is Culler (reprinted in Tompkins, 1986) who proposes a new term, i.e., 'literary competence' which is similar in a way with another term in linguistics, 'linguistic competence' or 'communicative competence' in applied linguistics. Culler writes that anyone wholly unacquainted with literature and unfamiliar with the conventions by which fictions are read, would be quite frustrated if presented with a poem. He might understand the phrases and sentences, but would not know what to make of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it as literature because he lacks the complex 'literary competence' which enables others to proceed. 'Literary competence' requires internalization of the 'grammar' of literature which would permit him to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings. 'Literary competence' is a set of conventions that directs the reader to pick out certain features of the work corresponding to public notions of what constitutes an 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' interpretation. The concept of 'literary competence' entails the concept of an 'ideal reader' just as 'linguistic competence' entails an 'ideal speaker.' In reading a text, the question is not, according to Culler, what actual readers happen to do but what an ideal reader must know implicitly in order to read and interpret works in ways which we consider acceptable (in Tompkins, 1986).

The term 'ideal reader' refers to an ideal figure or construct that has read all the literary works in the language, i.e., an ideal reader of Indonesian literature. He is supposed to have read all Indonesian literary works, so, it is believed that he can give his evaluation and appreciation of them. Again, there is no figure like an ideal reader in reality. HB Jassin, a prominent Indonesian literary critic, in his long time of life is unable to read all Indonesian literary works, let alone Korrie Layun Rampan, the much younger critic, has yet not enough time to read them all.

In constructing an ideal speaker we have made use of native speakers of the language to come to a norm of the language, i.e., what is contained in the standard lexicon and grammar, while in coming at the ideal reader we have to collect opinions and writings of literary critics which have equal competence in literature as a native speaker does in language. From writings and interviews with prominent literary critics such as HB Jassin, Subagio Sastrowardjo, MS Hutagalung, Goenawan Mohammad, Korrie Layun Rampan, Popo Iskandar (as a literary critic; he is also a painter), MH Rustandi, Budi Darma and others, and the opinions of the

writers about their works, we can come to the concept of an 'ideal reader' who knows everything about Indonesian literature, and his 'opinion' will become a norm as a basis for evaluating the beauty of Indonesian literary works. But, again, we realize that, as language, literary works change from time to time, and it is not of a single type. So, we should have an ideal reader in poetry, short stories, or novels.

The concept of an ideal speaker and an ideal reader can be elaborated to cover other fields of art such as music, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture, drama and other forms of performing art. In the field of Indonesian art, the 'ideal speaker' which then forms 'the ideal audience' can be Zaini, Nashar, Popo Iskandar, Koesnadi, Soedarmadji, Sri Warso Wahono, just to mention a few names who are both painters and critics, also Jim Supangkat, Agus Dermawan T, Ibrahim Jean Couteau, Tubagus Andre and some others (who specialize in writing art criticism). The written opinion (in the forms of art criticism and essays) together with notes of interviews will construct 'an ideal audience' who knows everything about the beauty of Indonesian art. We then know that norms abstracted from the works of Basoeki Abdoellah are not the same as the ones written on the basis of Affandi's works.

If, from the beginning, we have already known that norms used as reference for normative aesthetics is not universal but is more contextual, how should we refer to norms which are supposed to be directing us, the general audience, to explore art? Our exploration in the works of art requires some kind of guide, not to blindly adopt the opinion of the 'writer' of the guide, but just to make the audience realize that there are some criteria and guidelines which will guide him in finding a meaning of, and in the works of art. At least, the audience will not be left lost in darkness because he does not know what to do. His spontaneous reaction can be 'don't understand', 'too difficult to understand', 'why is it beautiful?', 'what does it mean?', while an art critic following the idea of 'reader response' (which can be elaborated to include 'audience's response') will encourage the audience to explore the works and find the meaning of the works himself and for himself, not the general meaning of the works. It is hoped that there is a close relation between the audience and the works, and this relation, according to 'Reader Response Criticism' is a very personal relation which may form the personality of the audience.

Both an 'ideal reader' for works of literature and 'ideal audience'

for other fields of art become references for readers and art audience who actively re-create the works of art in themselves as mentioned by Reader Response Criticism.

THE PROBLEM OF ART EDUCATION

In art education, instructors require some guidelines, references, norms as basis for teaching. They can use writing of art critics, and books on the theories of art. In teaching aesthetics, they need the norms produced by 'the ideal audience' as mentioned above. As norms change, they have to be creative in deciding what norms should be adopted in art education.

CONCLUSION

Knowing that both readers and art audience have full freedom to create meaning of art in themselves, questions then arise: do we still need norms which have been produced by an ideal reader and ideal audience? The question is important to answer especially in making a policy in art education. Which norm should be used in art education and to what extent can it be used? In practice, it seems that the readers and audience will personally need to improve their appreciation of the works of art. This will be realized in their attempts to read art criticism which they believe can improve their art intuition and their appreciation of art. Although art criticism should be taken into consideration, the actual process of meaning formation takes place in the reader and audience, in their direct meeting with the works of art, and should be free from aesthetic ideas injected by other people. Reading literary works and directly confronting the work of art, music, or performing art, form the essential part of the process of art enjoyment, and simultaneously, the formation of meaning in the audience. Aesthetic norms are only supporting elements which may be taken into consideration. Moreover, aesthetic norms change in line with the changes in the concept of art.

REFERENCE

- Culler, Jonathan. 1986. Literary Competence. In Tompkins Jane P. (ed.). *Reader-Response Criticism, From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press.