Symposium: Childhood, Reading and Materiality

Reception studies share a common idea that reading is a relationship between text and reader. The text not even exist until it is read. Likewise, it is possible to think that the literary character exists only when somebody is reading about her. The books are material objects and literary characters representing people are simply, the pattern of black marks on a page. However, reading and interpretation of literary texts bring them to life.

Finnish girls have been avid readers and particularly books for young people are their favourite reading material. In my reception studies, I have collected written reading experiences on popular Finnish and foreign girls’ literature. Participants in my research are different ages, mainly women who remember their childhood and youth reading experiences about their favourite girls’ books. Libraries are important places where the reading material is acquired on readers’ childhood and adolescent. Many of the respondents have read a lot of girls’ literature and the others have continued reading books also as an adult.

Fiction reading usually evokes emotions and affects in readers. Emotions can be expressed through responses to fictive characters. In my research, girls and women wrote vividly and with affection about fictional characters as they were actual people. The most favourite literary girl figures were L.M. Montgomery’s Anne and Anni Polva’s Tiina who were described different individual’s qualities. In my presentation, I shall investigate readers’ emotional engagement in the fictional texts and portrayals of girl figures. Readers feel mainly sympathy and empathy towards characters and many of them have identified with girl figures on their childhood. In my analysis, I concentrate on readers’ emotional experiences of the characters and the impact of books on readers’ life.

Keywords: girls, reading, characters, reading experiences, emotions