

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S THEATER POSTERS: THE 2024 STATE THEATERS EXAMPLE

Merve ERSAN¹, Alya Ayşegül ÇETİN²

Çocuk Tiyatrosu Afişlerinin Göstergebilimsel Analizi:
2024 Yılı Devlet Tiyatroları Örneği

Öz

Bu çalışma, çocuk tiyatrosu afişlerinin, görsel ve metinsel unsurlar aracılığıyla nasıl çok katmanlı bir kültürel anlatı ürettiğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma modeline dayalı göstergebilimsel analiz yöntemi temel alınmıştır. Derinlemesine analiz yapılabilmesi amacıyla çalışmanın kapsamı, Ankara, İstanbul ve İzmir Devlet Tiyatroları'nda sergilenen 10 afişle sınırlandırılmıştır. Seçilen örneklem üzerinde, her bir afiş Roland Barthes'ın göstergebilimsel yaklaşımı çerçevesinde sistematik olarak incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın önemi, çocuk tiyatrosu afişlerinin yalnızca tanıtım amacı taşımadığı, aynı zamanda toplumsal değerlerin yeniden inşasında belirleyici bir işlev üstlendiğini göstermesidir. Yapılan analizler; oyun metinlerinden afişlere yansıyan masumiyet, özgürlük, umut, yaratıcılık gibi idealize edilmiş çocukluk temalarının yanı sıra, toplumsal ve bireysel kimlik, eleştirel düşünce ve özgür irade gibi temaları ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göstergebilim, Roland Barthes, Afiş, Tiyatro Afişleri, Devlet Tiyatrosu.

Semiotic Analysis of Children's Theater Posters: The 2024 State Theaters Example

Abstract

This study aims to reveal how children's theater posters construct multilayered cultural narratives through visual and textual elements. The research adopted a qualitative design based on semiotic analysis. To enable an in-depth examination, the scope was limited to 10 posters exhibited by State Theaters in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir. Each poster was systematically analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The significance of the study lies in demonstrating that these posters serve not only as promotional tools but also play a key role in the reconstruction of social values. The analysis reveals both idealized childhood themes such as innocence, freedom, hope, and creativity as well as broader themes such as social and individual identity, critical thinking, and free will.

Keywords: Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Poster, Theater Posters, State Theater.

Makale Türü: Araştırma makalesi

Paper Type: Research article

1. Introduction

Theater posters are important tools of visual communication, with their functions of promoting theater art, attracting audiences, and conveying cultural messages. The importance of these posters has increased during the historical process, especially with the spread of mass theater events in the 19th century. Originally intended mostly for information and announcements, theater posters have

¹ Doç., Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi, Sanat ve Tasarım Fakültesi, Grafik Tasarımı, merve.ersan@hbv.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0587-7875>

² Tezli Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi, Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü, Grafik Tasarımı, ayse.cetin@ogr.hbv.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2446-6940>

been transformed into visual expression tools with esthetic and cultural values over time. While textual elements were at the forefront in early theater posters, a multi-layered language of expression through visuality, color, typography, and symbols began to dominate modern poster designs. Today, theater posters are not only limited to their promotional function, but are also considered a form of artistic expression.

Children's theater posters have a special place in this general context. Since they appeal to a specific age group, the visual elements used in such posters are designed in accordance with the perceptual level and interests of the target audience. Children's theater posters designed with colorful, entertaining, and attention-grabbing elements not only introduce the content of the play; direct them to the theater, or, conversely, may have a negative effect. In this respect, children's theater posters are visual texts worth examining in terms of both design and meaning production. At this point, semiotics, as an interdisciplinary method that examines signs, symbols and meaning-making processes, offers an effective theoretical framework for analyzing visual communication elements. Rooted in the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure and initiated with the concepts of signifier and signified, this field has developed further with the contributions of Roland Barthes and has become widely used, especially in the interpretation of popular culture, media and art products. Barthes used semiotics not only on a linguistic level and also to analyze the processes of social meaning production through myths. In this respect, the semiotic approach offers an effective method for the in-depth analysis of visual communication tools such as posters. This study aims to reveal how children's theater posters produce a multilayered cultural narrative through visual and textual elements based on semiotics' theoretical framework.

2. Method

In this study, semiotic analysis was used within the framework of a qualitative research model to reveal the cultural and ideological functions of children's theater posters in depth. Based on Roland Barthes's approach of analysis at the levels of plain meaning, connotation, and myth, this study examines the multilayered narratives of the visual and textual elements in the posters. This approach is preferred because it is an effective tool to clarify not only the superficial esthetic features of children's theater posters, but also how symbolic language, cultural codes, and social myths are reproduced. Thus, the implicit meanings in the posters can be critically evaluated in the context of childhood themes and social representation processes.

Within the scope of the study, in the first stage, the posters of children's theater exhibited by state theaters in 2024 were scanned, and 28 posters were identified. However, to conduct a detailed and in-depth analysis, the study group was limited to 10 posters exhibited in three major cities: Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir. This limitation increased the intensity of the analysis and clarified the focus of the study.

The data collection was conducted through the official website of the State Theaters. In 2024, the posters of all plays exhibited by the State Theaters were systematically recorded. Data analysis was carried out by examining the three dimensions of signification of the semiotic analysis method at the level of plain meaning, connotation, and myth.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Semiotics in Visual Disciplines

Semiotics is a theoretical field that emerged from the intersection of three main sociological disciplines, namely, linguistics, cultural anthropology, and information theory, focusing on the analysis of meaning, especially in the 20th century (Kiran, 1990: 51). Semiotics is an interdisciplinary field that

examines all elements that can be used in communication (Çeken & Aypek Arslan, 2016). Semiotics, which has a profound impact on communication and cultural theories, offers important insights by examining how signs and symbols acquire meaning in social and cultural contexts (Günay & Parsa, 2012). In this respect, all elements that convey meaning (e.g. words, symbols and signs) can be analyzed from a semiotic perspective (Ersan & Önder, 2023). The theoretical basis of semiotics is the concept of signifier and signified. While these two elements form a whole under the name of signifier, they produce multilayered meanings in social and cultural dimensions beyond their surface meanings (Rifat, 2017, p. 115). Thus, semiotics sheds light on the processes of cultural meaning production by analyzing the functions and symbolic roles of these signs in society. The idea that human thought and communication function through signs has been expressed by different philosophers since ancient times. This situation reveals that the semiotic approach was laid early in history (Güneş, 2013, p. 333). In this context, questions about how linguistic and visual signs play a role in the human mind's processes of making sense of the world and communicating have formed the intellectual infrastructure that has contributed to the development of semiotic theories (Bati, 2016).

John Locke, one of the first thinkers to define semiotics, introduced the term "Semeiotika" to the literature and argued that this field should be accepted among scientific disciplines (Ersan & Aras, 2023). Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics divides signs into three basic categories: icons, indexes, and symbols. This classification is determined according to the relationship between the sign and the object. According to Peirce, icons represent objects through similarity. Accordingly, a portrait is an icon because it directly represents the person portrayed. Indexes, on the other hand, are signs that relate to their objects through a causal or physical connection, such as smoke signifying fire. Symbols are signs that produce meaning based on social and cultural conventions. This tripartite classification allows us to analyze not only linguistic signs but also visual, sensory, and cultural signs, revealing how social context shapes the processes of meaning-making. In Peirce's semiotic approach, the structure of a sign consists of three basic components: a representamen, object, and interpretant. This triadic model provides a basic framework for explaining how signs produce meaning and how they are perceived in a social context. While these three components of the sign allow for an in-depth analysis of its nature, they also make it possible to examine the different subcategories that emerge in the process of its interpretation. In this context, Peirce defined various subcategories of the sign in terms of its qualities, its existential relationship with its object, and how it is perceived by the interpreter (Peirce, 1978, p. 122). This approach goes beyond the surface meanings of signs and offers important insights into the processes of multilayered meaning production in social and cultural contexts. Thus, Peirce's theory allows semiotic analyses to consider cultural functions as well as linguistic and visual elements.

Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the most important figures who laid the foundation of modern semiotics, developed revolutionary ideas about language and the meaning of signs. Saussure shaped the theoretical framework of semiotics through his revolutionary contributions to linguistics (Bircan, 2015b). Emphasizing that language is a mental structure within a social system, Saussure stated that signs are the embodiment of this structure (Erkman, 2005, pp. 59-61). Thus, Saussure laid the foundation of semiotic analysis methods, which are widely used today, by suggesting that language and signs should be considered as an inseparable whole.

Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics provides a basic framework for understanding signs, according to which language signs consist of two components: a signifier and signified. The signifier is the physical situation (sound or writing) that constitutes the sign, while the signified is the concept that this sign represents. Saussure's distinction helps us understand how the meaning of a sign is shaped in social and cultural contexts. According to Saussure, the meaning of signs is situational and changes over time; therefore, the meaning of a sign is formed in relation to other signs surrounding it.

In this context, considering language as a system allows us to understand how meaning is formed and perceived in social and cultural contexts. Emphasizing that language is a mental structure and that signs are the embodiment of meaning, Saussure reveals that language is a complex and inseparable system (Erkman, 2005, pp. 59-61).

Saussure's theory has formed a fundamental basis for the work of other semioticians such as Roland Barthes. Barthes expanded Saussure's binary distinctions and analyzed the social and cultural meanings of signs (Bircan, 2015a). According to Barthes, signs not only carry basic meanings but also produce deeper social meanings through myths and symbols. In this context, semiotics has become a comprehensive tool in media and art criticism, enabling an in-depth understanding of the audience's meaning-making and perception processes (Macit & Öztekin, 2021). When a signifier is seen or heard, its signified (i.e., what it means) is formed in the mind. This process initiates the emergence of meaning. One of the most important areas of semiotics is the section on plain meaning and connotation, which are collected under signification. These concepts are based on Barthes' theory (Çağlar, 2012, p. 26). While explaining the processes of meaning production, Barthes analyzed how different levels of sign meaning are structured and how they function in the social context. According to Barthes, myths are shaped as normalized and widely accepted beliefs that support certain ideologies through the power of language and symbols. Barthes argues that myths legitimize and support existing power relations and social order (Ersan & Şen, 2023). While plain meaning refers to the direct meaning of a sign, connotative meaning includes deeper, indirect meanings attributed to this sign in cultural and social contexts. These two strings of signification are interrelated, but they also function as two opposing strings (Barthes, 1979, p. 87). Roland Barthes, an important figure in the field of semiotics in the 20th century, defined semiotics not only as a branch of science but also as a school characterized by his personality. According to Barthes, semiotics is an adventure; it is something that happens to the thinker and is treated as a personal perception and experience. However, when this adventure is evaluated from a subjective point of view, Barthes argues that semiotics develops in three phases and that this process goes beyond the limits of semiotics. These phases are defined as fascination, science and text.

3.2. Posters and Theater Posters as Visual Communication Tool

In today's rapidly developing digital world, visual communication is critical to effectively conveying information and emotions. Visual communication is the practice of using visual elements to convey a message, inspire change or evoke an emotion (Delil, 2023). Posters are among the oldest and most effective forms of this communication. Poster art, an element that influences and directs contemporary culture, is considered a symbolic means of expression and display (Çeken, 2016). A poster is a visual communication tool that is usually designed in large sizes for promoting a message or event and contains design elements. Throughout the history of art, posters have been used as an effective tool to announce economic, social, and cultural events (Lehimler, 2018). Thanks to artists such as Chéret and Toulouse-Lautrec, poster art has evolved into artworks since the 19th century (Duncan, 2019). This evolution has enabled posters to gain importance as social communication tools as well as their esthetic value. Posters can also contain various clues that stimulate the audience to think and arouse curiosity (Ersan & Önder, 2023). Theater posters are a form of communication with esthetic and emotional elements that function to promote an artistic event and establish a bond with the audience.

Theater posters undertake the task of conveying not only the name of a play but also the emotional atmosphere related to that play to the audience (Tufan, İşeri & Çapan Tekin, 2022: 91). In this context, theater posters have become a part of art and culture that attracts audiences' attention (Göktaşan, 2017). Through posters, the theme, characters, emotional depth, and general atmosphere of theater

plays are conveyed to the audience. Theater begins not only on stage but also off stage (Craig, 1911). For theater posters to be effective, they need to be designed with the user's visual perception in mind. The elements frequently used in posters are color, typography, composition, and visual hierarchy. While color has the function of attracting the attention of the audience by creating emotional connotations, typography ensures the readability of the message and the clarity of the expression. Different fonts are intended to reflect a certain mood or theme and to create a unique experience for audiences (Hollis, 2006). The visual hierarchy in posters directs the viewer's eye to the important elements on the poster. The arrangement of visual elements determines what is remarkable at first glance and increases the viewer's curiosity (Kosslyn, 2006). Theater posters not only serve an informative function, but can also convey social messages or cultural norms. The visuals and symbols used in posters shape audiences' expectations and introduce the historical or social context of a work. In contemporary theater, posters can serve as a tool for social criticism. Banham (1998) asserted, "The theater poster is a platform not only for a show but also for an idea".

Theater posters play an important role in visual communication and have a significant impact on how artworks reach audiences. The elements used in the design of posters aim to attract the audience's attention and increase their participation in the event. For this reason, theater posters are considered important tools in both artistic and social terms.

4. Findings

State Theater posters for children's plays are design products that should be examined not only as promotional tools but also as carriers of cultural codes, esthetic values and visual communication elements. Poster designs intended for adults are widely present in public spaces, whereas visual communication products targeting children are considerably fewer in number and variety (Pehlivan Baskin, 2022: 175). These posters designed for children aim to both use a language suitable for the target audience and to present the art of theater attractively. In this context, the design elements of posters, when analyzed from a semiotic perspective, offer layers of meaning that reflect social and cultural structures. According to Roland Barthes, visuals contain the ideological and cultural elements of societies; in this context, posters of children's plays can be considered communication tools that shape the perception of the target audience (Barthes, 1982).



Figure 1. "Magic Mirror" children's dance theater poster

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devletiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/4067?a=sihirli-ayna>

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of “Magic Mirror” Children's Dance Theater Poster

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Woman	Young female figure in a theatrical costume	The image of a fairytale guide or sorcerer.	An idealized representation of the guide and sorcerer character that often appears in fairy tales.
Background	A galaxy in shades of purple, blue and pink.	Imagination, cosmic universe.	A fairy tale universe full of imaginative possibilities.
"Magic Mirror" Title	The title of the play is written in a decorative font.	A reference to the Western fairy tale tradition; magic, prophecy, and the transition to a fantastic world.	The classic myth of magic with the phrase "Mirror, mirror tell me".
Jacket	A dark-colored, military-style outfit with buttons and epaulets.	Discipline, authority, leadership, order, and seriousness	Representations of leadership, heroism or power.
Shoulder detail	Bright and intricate details in the woman's costume.	Splendor, authority.	The connotations of kingship, authority and magic are common in fairy tales.
Collar detail	Big white with ruffles	Nobility, theatrical elegance and stage panache.	Production of a playful or fantastic identity that deviates from the "normal".
Dramatic Makeup	Exaggerated lines and facial expressions on the woman's face.	The performative nature of theater.	Detachment from reality and transition into the imaginary world.
Color Palette	A combination of purple, blue, pink, and gold.	Creation of a fairytale atmosphere and a fantastic world.	The myth of magic and imagination.

The “Magic Mirror” poster in Figure 1 shows a highly layered meaning structure in terms of visual and textual elements. In the plain meaning dimension, the young female figure in the central position directly promotes a children's play theater with her theatrical costume and dramatic facial expression. While the gold-shoulder decorations, large white collar, and exaggerated make-up emphasize the performative nature of the theater, the background of the poster is dominated by a smoky appearance in purple and blue tones reminiscent of the galaxy theme. The title "Magic Mirror" is the main announcement of the play poster and is written in a large and decorative font. The phrase "Children's Dance Theater" underneath clarifies the message that the play is aimed at its target audience.

The elements used in the poster have many symbolic meanings. The young woman's costume and dramatic make-up on her face not only promoted the play but also appealed to the emotional and esthetic experience of the audience. The character's theatrical stance, slightly sarcastic facial expressions, and direct gaze at the audience all refer to the archetype of the "dark but charming figure" in classical children's narratives. This can be read as a contemporary representation of deceitful or ambivalent characters such as witches, wizards, the persona in the mirror, etc., which are frequently encountered in fairytale universes. The military-shaped jacket she wears, with its golden shoulder details and large tulle ruffle collar, contains a combination of militaristic details and soft, feminine colors; thus, it contains a visual tension regarding gender norms. The militaristic jacket evokes meanings such as discipline, authority, leadership, order, and seriousness, implying that the character plays a powerful role. The frilly collar is associated with nobility, theatrical elegance, and stage panache

in both historical and cultural contexts. Especially reminiscent of Renaissance and Baroque period costumes, collar shapes are frequently used in classical performing arts such as theater, ballet, and opera. The exaggerated shape of the ruffle, which is not seen in everyday life, suggests that the character has a playful or fantastic identity that deviates from the "normal". The galaxy theme in the background symbolizes a fantasy world and a cosmic universe. While these elements create a fairy tale and magical atmosphere, the title "Magic Mirror" refers to classic fairy tale motifs, making children interested in the play through familiar cultural elements. The gold details used in the actor's costume and the ornaments on the shoulders evoke authority, splendor, and magic, making the character perceived as a magical and authoritative figure. In addition, the dramatic makeup and facial expressions on her face aim to emotionally connect the audience to the story. In summary, the poster design implies that the narrative of the play offers an experience that stimulates the imagination.

Barthes highlights that at the level of myth, signs are no longer just objects or ideas; they become the bearer of a certain ideology. Although the "Magic Mirror" poster is positioned on the surface as fairy-tale-like and aimed at children, its deeper structure reproduces or transforms various myths about the concept of childhood in modern society. The "mirror" motif is used as a powerful metaphor for the reflection of individual identity and the internalization of social norms. Here, the mirror is not only an element of fantasy but also assumes an ideological function as a tool that structures the child's self, their relationship with the other, and their perception of reality. In addition, the visual esthetics of the poster breaks the educational, innocent, and traditional structure of children's theater and produces a representation that emphasizes contemporary, critical and esthetic dimensions



Figure 2. "Dream Shop" children's theater poster

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devletiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/2783?a=hayal-dukkani>

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis of "Dream Shop" children's theater poster

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Two Main Characters	Two characters wearing hats and	It highlights a story of discovery and adventure;	The myth that stories of imagination and

	casual clothes are seen during a stage performance.	heroes that children can identify with.	adventure encourage children.
Door	A door decorated with flowers.	A symbol of a journey into the unknown; a passage into a fantastic world.	The myth of stepping into the world of imagination and developing abstract thinking.
Color Palette	Vibrant colors such as purple, pink, and orange.	To attract children's attention and emphasize that it is an activity for them.	The myth that creativity and energy are important for children.
"Dream Shop" Title	Name of the play.	That the theater stage is a space where imagination can be unleashed.	The myth of the importance of imagination and creativity in child development.
Flower Motifs	Floral patterns around the door.	The enchanting atmosphere of a fairytale.	The myth that imagination thrives in a pleasant and positive environment.

Figure 2 shows a poster of the children's theater play "Dream Shop" staged by the State Theaters. The image features two characters that appear to have been filmed during a stage performance. The characters' costumes are designed to emphasize a typical adventure or discovery story, and they wear hats and comfortable clothes. Their body language and facial expressions were surprised and curious. The door in the background and the stage design around it, which is decorated with flowers, highlight the fantastical nature of the play. The overall design of the poster aims to reflect both the entertaining and educational dimensions of a theater play for children.

Within Barthes' semiotic theory framework, the level of connotation behind the visual and textual elements presented by the poster invites the viewer to a deeper context. At this level, the phrase "Dream Shop" evokes the consumer society's discourse of "buyable dreams" and feeds the idea that even childhood dreams can turn into "products". The adventure-themed costumes worn by the two main characters imply that the content of the game is centered on exploration and adventure. These characters are positioned as heroes that children can easily identify with, thus triggering their imagination. The poster's color scheme of purple, vibrant orange, and pink tones symbolizes imagination and enthusiasm, emphasizing the fairytale world of children. The characters' hats and exaggerated facial expressions reinforce the humorous and fantastic atmosphere of the play. In addition, beyond being a physical element of passage, the door represents a step from the physical world to an abstract world of imagination, and the floral motifs surrounding it emphasize that this journey will take place in a pleasant and magical atmosphere. All these elements imply that imagination is actively employed throughout the play.

The visuals and texts used in the poster are based on the idea that children's ability to dream is valuable and that this ability can be supported through artistic activities such as theater. At the level of myth, the poster shows an "idealized" world of innocence and unlimited creativity of childhood through the theater stage. In this context, the poster reveals not only an innocent artistic activity that encourages imagination, but also how concepts such as childhood, creativity, and art are idealized and commercialized. Although the metaphor of "shop" in the poster carries a playful and attractive meaning at first glance, the connotations of this word directly related to consumer culture are striking. Presenting imagination as a "product" and putting it on stage can be criticized in the sense that it means transforming the inner creativity inherent in childhood into an external, marketable, and

presentable object. Contrary to the liberating nature of art, this situation creates a structure in which imagination is controlled and served within certain limits.



Figure 3. “Red Sphere” children's theater poster

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devlettiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/2995?a=kirmizi-kure>

Table 3. Semiotic Analysis of “Red Sphere” children's theater poster

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Woman Figure	A woman in a red and white striped dress with an enthusiastic and happy expression on her face.	A childlike purity, happiness and energy.	The myth that childhood is associated with innocence, happiness and purity; that childhood is an idealized stage of life.
Hands	It is ambiguously positioned in the gesture.	Dynamism of the play, interaction with the audience, stage energy.	The myth that theater is a collective experience that prioritizes participation and interaction.
Color Palette	Red and warm colors.	Happiness, energy, passion, excitement.	The myth that theater art is a warm and energetic experience.
"Red Globe" Title	Name of the game.	Adventure, a fantastic story, imagination.	The myth that children's games contain magical narratives that nurture creativity and imagination.

In the center of the poster of the play “Red Globe” in Figure 3, there is a female figure wearing a red and white striped outfit, looking upwards with an enthusiastic and happy expression on her face. In the background, hands are blurred in various gestures. The warm colors used in the poster represent happiness, energy, and excitement. The woman’s enthusiastic facial expression creates an atmosphere that stimulates children’s curiosity and imagination. This emphasis on joy and dynamism is suitable for children’s theater. The title “Red Globe” evokes the theme of an adventure or fantastic story. This title promises a story in a universal sense that red symbolizes power, passion, and energy. At this level, the poster is seen as a remarkable visual material that aims to introduce a theater play to audiences.

At the level of connotation, the focal point of the poster, the figure of the happy woman, can be seen as a symbol of purity, happiness, and energy of childhood. The female player’s upward gaze and

smile convey a sense of admiration, imagination, and discovery. The hands in the background symbolize enthusiasm, playful companionship, and the desire to be involved in the story. The title of the play, with its energetic and passionate connotations of red and the emphasis on the sphere, carries multilayered meanings such as cyclical time, wholeness, world, and play. At the level of myth, the elements in the poster present a narrative that idealizes the innocence and limitless imagination of childhood. This narrative can be criticized in terms of how childhood experience is stereotyped as a universal cultural code and how it limits original creativity by becoming clichéd from time to time. Although the poster glorifies the exuberance of childhood, it also reveals that this exuberance can be guided by the established norms and expectations of society. Thus, the effort to create an idealized universe of childhood, feeding a static and uniform understanding of imagination that does not coincide with real experiences, paves the way for the reproduction of a critically questionable myth.



Figure 4. “Garbage Monster” children's theater poster.

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devletiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/4025?a=cop-canavari>

Table 4. Semiotic Analysis of “Garbage Monster” children's theater poster.

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Woman Figure	A actress in the spotlight, with an expression of surprise on her face.	Curiosity, surprise and amazement.	The myth that childhood is a time of curiosity and excitement.
Puppet (Garbage monster)	A large, green figure with sharp teeth.	Fear, containment, and theatrical representation of a supernatural threat.	The allegorical representation and narrator of environmental problems and the myth of coping with fear.
Color Palette	Red, green, black shades.	Red: Danger and warning; Green: Nature and hope; Black: Threat and unknown.	The myth of the exploitation of nature and the call for awareness.
"Garbage Monster" Title	Name of the game.	A frightening threat, the embodiment of environmental damage.	The myth that nature-damaging waste grows like a monster.

When the poster of the play “Garbage Monster” in Figure 4 is examined at the level of literal meaning, the first thing that catches the eye is the actor looking with an expression of great surprise or enthusiasm and a puppet-like “monster” figure next to him, which seems to be made of colorful materials. The title "Garbage Monster" clearly indicates that this is a children’s game. In the text, information on set, costume, and lighting design is provided, along with the names of the author and director. The color palette comprises warm tones, and a stage atmosphere is projected directly to the audience, with the character and puppet in the foreground.

In the connotation dimension, the interaction of the puppet with the human in the poster implies that the play offers fun and creative content. The depiction of the puppet as a living being demonstrates that the story has a fantastic dimension. In addition, the expression "Garbage Monster" refers to the themes of environmental awareness and recycling. The dynamic interaction between the puppet and the actor provides a visual language that stimulates children’s imagination. The title "Garbage Monster" stands out as a metaphor that simultaneously evokes environmental awareness and entertainment. While the image of the monster triggers children’s curiosity, it has become a symbol that aims to transform the negative perception of the concept of garbage.

At the myth level, "Garbage Monster" reinforces the idea that waste can pose a "threat" if not managed properly by identifying the image of the monster, which represents fear and the unknown in the children's world, with an ecological problem. This approach offers both children and adults a fairy-tale universe in which environmental problems can be explained through a simplified story. However, this fairy-tale framework can obscure the deeper economic and social dimensions of environmental problems. The comical and colorful atmosphere of the play can be criticized for reducing the complex process of "getting rid of garbage" to a level that children can understand while simultaneously creating a narrative that places the responsibility on individuals and renders the necessity for collective solutions invisible. From this perspective, "Garbage Monster" can be considered not only as a symbol with the potential to raise environmental awareness but also as a reproduction of a myth in which social problems are simplified in a fairy-tale framework.



Figure 5. Poster for the children’s theater “Fairy Tale Road”.

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from

<https://www.devlettiyatrolari.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/2810?a=masal-yolu>

Table 5. Semiotic Analysis of Posters on the Children's Fairy Tale Road"

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Woman Figure	A character who appears on stage in fabulous costume and make-up.	One of the extraordinary and fascinating beings of the fairytale world; remarkable and authoritative.	The myth of the existence of characters such as witches, fairies, and queens in classic fairy tales.
Apple	The red apple in the character's hair.	The symbolic object of fairy tales; the forbidden, the allure or the transformative effect.	The myth of the apple as a magical or fate-determining object.
Color Palette	Contrasting and intense colors like green, purple, and red.	Supernatural, mysterious, and magical.	The myths of danger, glamor and magic.
"Fairy Tale Road" Title	Name of the game.	A discovery made by children in their imagination.	The archetype of the hero's journey; a myth of development toward the unknown.
Background	The atmosphere is created with natural elements and purple tones.	The warmth of fairytale nature and a sense of abundance.	The magical power of nature and myths surrounding sacred spaces in fairy tales.

When the poster of the children's play "The Fairy Tale Road" in Figure 5 is analyzed at the level of literal meaning, the first thing that catches the eye is the actor looking at the audience with an apple on his head and a fantastic costume and make-up. While the title "Fairy Tale Road" emphasizes that the work is a children's play, and the dim and colorful stage lights in the background draw the viewer's attention to the magical atmosphere of the play. Details such as the actor's extravagant red costume, red make-up, green hair, and the apple on his head are symbols of the fairy tale world. The character's gaze can create an intense emotion and leave an eerie effect in some children. The visual treatment gives the viewer the impression of a fantastic and magical journey.

At the level of connotation, the actor's appearance appeals to children's imagination and opens the doors to a fairytale world. The title "Fairy Tale Road" gives the audience the feeling that they will embark on a journey and encounter different characters and stories around every corner. The green hair and costumes symbolize the relationship between nature and fairy tales. The apple tree in the background symbolizes the connection between fairy tales and nature. In addition, the apple on the actor's head represents universal images of fairy tales. The use of vivid colors in the poster fosters a sense of enthusiasm and curiosity, while the concept of fairy tales highlights the purity and unlimited imagination of childhood.

In terms of mythology, the poster is based on the timelessness of fairy tales. The expression "Fairy Tale Road" invites the viewer to become a part of the imagination and adventure. The poster illustrates the myth that children's games are often associated with fantastic worlds. The apple also refers to the moral and symbolic meaning of fairy tales. The poster is a repetition of traditional representations rather than a more innovative and modern representation of fairy tales.



Figure 6. Poster for the “Snowman Who Wants to Meet the Sun”.

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devletiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/2641?a=gunesle-bulusmak-isteyen-kardan-adam>

Table 6. Semiotic Analysis of the “Snowman Who Wants to Meet the Sun” theater poster.

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Young Girl Figure: The Little Mermaid	A warm-eyed young character with a beret and braids.	Hope is the dreamer personality.	The myth of the pure and hopeful individual, which represents the individual worlds shaped by children's imagination.
White sphere	Snow mass	Impermanence, fragility and the relationship with nature.	The myth of a hero whose fate is sealed by his purity and transience.
Color Palette	Orange, red, blue, and white.	The contrast between inner warmth and outer cold; a metaphor for an emotional transition.	The myth of increasing emotional depth through the contrasts between nature and the cycle of life and death.
"The Snowman Who Wants to Meet the Sun" Title	Name of the game.	A state of mind in which transformation is ready.	The myth of hope in spite of the finitude of life
Snow	Frozen white water vapor.	Pure, quiet, fairytale-like atmosphere.	Myths of transformation and rebirth.
Red Beret	An accessory at the head.	Warmth and vitality.	Myths of life force, protection and struggle.

The poster of the children's play "The Snowman Who Wants to Meet the Sun" in Figure 6 promotes a winter-themed children's play at the level of literal meaning. While the title of the play emphasizes the contrast between snow and sun, the actor is leaning against a white, spherical object thought to be snow and looking at the audience with a peaceful and innocent smile on his face. The choice of soft

colors on the poster implies that the play has a warm and sincere atmosphere. Information such as author name, translation, and director indicates that the poster also serves as an introduction. The visual elements create a warm story atmosphere that will attract the attention of the target audience.

At the level of connotation, the poster conveys a warm, sincere, and hopeful message. The snowman's longing for the sun symbolizes the desire to reach one's dreams, and the idea of bringing the snowman and the sun together reflects the limitlessness of children's imagination and that even seemingly impossible wishes can turn into fun, hopeful stories. The happy and hopeful expression of the character on the poster and the yellow sunlight illuminating his face represent the fun and positive atmosphere of the play. The actor's smiling expression, braided hair, and red beret on his head evoke warmth and vitality, contrasting with the cold atmosphere of winter. This reinforces the message that the work has an optimistic and cheerful tone. The presentation of a colorful and bright scene, despite the cold winter, emphasizes the enthusiasm and dreams of childhood.

At the level of myth, the poster of the play" reproduces a cultural narrative that places the child's dreams above everything else and tries to make the impossible possible. The snowman's longing for the sun symbolizes idealized themes such as going against a natural cycle and maintaining hope despite everything. The joyful, hopeful visual narrative of the poster feeds into the myth of an innocent and "anything is possible" childhood, presenting a cultural framework that identifies this period only with joy and happiness.



Figure 7. Poster for the “Playground”

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devletiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/4041?a=park>

Table 7. Semiotic analysis of the poster of the “Playground”

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Masked Character	A figure in a mask, in a colorful costume, and in the spotlight.	De-identification, unconventionality, theatrical alienation.	The myth of the faceless or shape-shifting character in fairy tales.
Orange Umbrella	A large, striking umbrella in the character's hand.	Protection, freedom, relationship with the outdoors, fun atmosphere.	The myth of the umbrella as a protective, inclusive, and adventure-initiating object.

Color Palette	Vivid and contrasting colors such as bright orange, yellow, and purple.	A fun and fantastical world that captures children's attention.	The myth of vividly colored worlds encountered in fairy tale universes.
"Park" heading	Name of the game.	A playground and a universe of imagination representing the world of children.	The myths of discovery, adventure and growth.
Background	Dark background.	The opposition of the unknown and the known; awareness and mystery.	The myth of the threshold of the unconscious or fantastic unknown, the narrative of self and transformation revealed through light.

In the poster of the children's play "Playground," the first element that draws attention at the level of literal meaning is an actor posing on stage with an umbrella in his hand and a mask of a child with blond hair on his face (Figure 7). Colorful and vivid elements are dominant in the poster, and this situation gives the audience a message that the play will have a cheerful and lively scene. The dark background helps elements such as the actor and the colorful umbrella stand out, aiming to draw the viewer's attention directly to the character.

In the connotative dimension, the large umbrella and the masked character imply that the game offers a fun and fantastic world. The orange umbrella evokes the theme of the park, associating it with the outdoors and symbolizing freedom. The mask is intended to create a mysterious and fun character. The umbrella strongly supports the atmosphere of the game and the theme of the park, while the masked character offers a mystery that can stimulate children's imagination. However, the facial expressions of the masked character can be perceived as frightening and create a negative impression for young children.

At the level of myth, "Park" idealizes childhood as a stage of endless freedom, colorful discoveries, and untroubled happiness. The mask emphasizes the theatrical and fantastic side of the character, while the umbrella is a symbol of fun, protection, and perhaps a sense of discovery. This emphasis allows other elements of the story to be relegated to the background. The dark tones of the background imply that the park can be both mysterious and entertaining. Thus, while the poster offers the audience the promise of an exciting scene, it also contributes to the reproduction of a myth that idealizes the concepts of childhood and play.

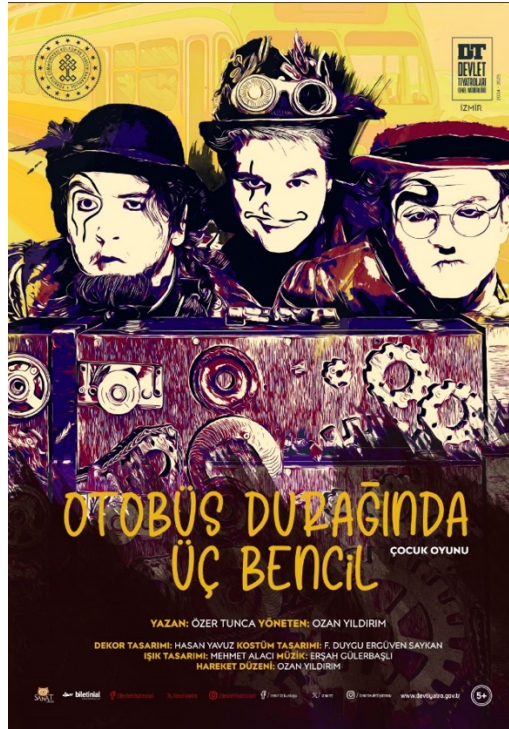


Figure 8. Poster for the “ Three Selfish at the Bus Stop”.

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devtiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/2842?a=otobus-duraginda-uc-bencil>

Table 8. Semiotic analysis of the poster of “Three Selfish Children at a Bus Stop”

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Three Characters	Three figures depicted in different makeup and costumes.	Individuals representing different personality traits; staging conflict and individual attitudes.	Myths of individuality, loneliness and the search for identity in society.
Bus Stop	The expected venue for public transportation.	A symbol of waiting and transition; the intersection of different lives.	The myth of the temporary cessation of life and the intersection of destiny.
Color Palette	The visual atmosphere is structured with contrasting colors, such as yellow (cheerful) and purple (melancholic).	Emotional duality: a dark or critical atmosphere under a seemingly playful structure.	The myth of creating emotional complexity through visual conflict.
"Three Selfish People at the Bus Stop" Headline	Name of the game.	Irony with a social message; tension between individualism and social relations.	A sociological myth about the individual-society relationship in which the egocentric attitudes of modern man are criticized
Mechanical Gears	The decorative elements on the banner are wheels and gears.	Referring to the functioning of a modern system; questioning the place of the individual in the system.	The myth of man-machine relationship and the impact of the social

			mechanism on the individual.
--	--	--	------------------------------

When the poster of the play "Three Selfish People at the Bus Stop" is analyzed at the level of literal meaning, the first element that catches the eye is the presence of three characters with different costume and makeup styles in the same frame. While bus-themed drawings or photographic elements can be seen in the background, the title of the play indicates that these characters take place at a bus stop or in a stage setting related to the bus.

At the level of connotation, the facial expressions, theatrical make-up and exaggerated costumes of the characters give the impression that the play may have a grotesque or absurd style. The use of the concept of "selfish" in the children's play indicates that the play contains moral or social message in addition to its humorous aspect. The gears and mechanical details at the front of the screen suggest that the story occurs in an interesting and creative world. The characters differ in their expressions and make-up, implying that the play may contain various social messages, but the intense symbolism here is abstract and complex for a child audience. The yellow tones in the background and the theme of the bus represent the chaos of urban life and the people in a state of waiting. Thus, the poster presents a critical view of social or individual behavior while presenting a show that aims to entertain children.

At the level of mythology, the poster reflects a criticism of the individualism and selfishness of modern society. A waiting point, such as a bus stop, is conceived as a place where people intersect in daily life, and it is used to create a myth about social relations. The poster can create a myth that reflects universal themes such as selfishness and social intersections. The mechanical details provide a metaphor for the monotony and systematic aspect of modern life, while the gears symbolize the relationship between the system and the individual. The expression "Three Selfish People at the Bus Stop" creates a contrast that will arouse curiosity in the audience by emphasizing the concept of selfishness, in contrast to the themes of solidarity and friendship that are usually covered in children's plays. This approach is a critical touch to traditional narratives in which children are always told virtues such as cooperation and sharing. On the other hand, emphasizing selfishness with exaggerated costumes and masks has the potential to shake the widespread myth that associates the world of childhood with pure goodness and innocence by placing this phenomenon in a fairytale framework. In this way, the poster not only offers a different perspective in the field of children's theater, but also opens the door to a cultural reproduction that may question the narrative of the "always happy and cooperative child".



Figure 9. Poster for the “The Lion Who Doesn't Want to be King”.

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devletiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/2998?a=kral-olmak-istemeyen-aslan>

Table 9. Semiotic analysis of the poster of “the Lion Who Doesn’t Want to be King”

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Lion Figure	The largest feline species.	A character who aspires to leadership but rejects it; a theme of individual choice and freedom.	The myth of innate leadership versus the free choice of the individual.
Elephant Character	Oversized figure of a blue elephant in a hat.	A wise, loving and guiding guide.	The traditional myth of a guardian figure representing wisdom.
Color Palette	Vibrant and warm tones, such as blue, orange, and purple.	Create a fun, positive, and childlike atmosphere.	The myth of the traditional color world used in fairy tale narratives.
"The Lion Who Doesn't Want to Be King"	Name of the game.	Questioning conventional power roles, a message of authenticity for children.	Stand against power and the myth of freedom.
Forest	Colorful trees, plants and natural scenery.	Exploration of fairytale nature and fantasy universe suitable for children.	A narrative of growth, transformation, and self-discovery identified with nature; the forest myth.

At first glance, the poster of the children's play "Who Doesn't Want to be King" depicts a brown-toned lion and fox figure standing on either side of a blue elephant (Figure 9). While the title emphasizes that the hero of the play is a lion, the colorful and cartoon-like designs make it clear that the work is a children's play. At the level of connotation, the friendly appearance of the animals and the use of bright colors create a cheerful atmosphere that appeals to children's imagination. The fact

that the lion, which is essentially a symbol of leadership and power, "does not want to be king" points to a story that questions the concepts of authority and power, while the elephant and the fox are also part of the adventure as side characters. While the elephant character represents wisdom and loyalty, the colorful and vibrant forest scene demonstrates that the play offers a fun atmosphere. This visual arrangement triggers children's curiosity and supports the idea of "adventure together" by presenting the forest theme as both an exotic and safe playground. The relationship between the title and the visuals shows that no element in the visuals directly points to the theme of refusing to be king.

At the level of myth, the poster presents a story about leadership and individuality and offers a critical view on the concepts of leadership and responsibility through the lion, who is usually positioned as the "king of the jungle", eschewing power. The reversal of the "natural leader" or "king" archetype often found in children's literature gives the viewer a new perspective on free will and individual choice. The lion's refusal to become a king conveys the message that leadership in society is a choice and not a natural right.



Figure 10. Poster for the “The Starling That Does Not Lose Hope”.

Reference: Retrieved April 7, 2025, from <https://www.devletiyatro.gov.tr/DevletTiyatro/tr/oyundetay/4094?a=umudunu-yitirmeyen-sigircik-filozof-cocuklar-icin-hikayeler-projesi>

Table 10. Semiotic analysis of the poster of “The Starling That Doesn’t Lose Hope”

Indicator	Plain Meaning	Side Meaning	Myth
Starling	Colorful, cheerful looking puppet bird character.	A brave, loving, and resilient figure; a role model for children.	The myth of the little hero fighting against the odds.
Rainbow	A meteorological phenomenon.	A sense of peace, hope, and tranquility is evoked after bad times.	The myth of rebirth and inner enlightenment.
Color Palette	Colorful structure with bright, pastel, and neon colors.	Transmission of joy, hope, enthusiasm and positive emotions.	The myth of the colorful and optimistic world of the child universe.

"The Starling Who Never Gave Up Hope" Title	Name of the play.	The theme of struggle and hope.	The myth of a small but brave hero, a narrative of the triumph of hope.
Flowers	Yellow-white plants surrounding the puppet.	A connotation of freshness, life, renewal, and naturalness.	The myth of nature's compassion and regenerative power as a symbol of growth and transformation.

The poster of the play "The Starling Who Never Loses Hope" contains a starling bird figure on the level of literal meaning, accompanied by bright colors and a stage atmosphere (Figure 10). The phrase "Stories for Philosopher Children Project" indicates that the play is not only entertaining but also has an intellectual and educational aspect. The names of the author, adaptor, dramaturg and director, as well as information about the set, lighting and music designers, introduce the creative team behind the scenes of the work and increase the audience's curiosity.

The starling bird stands out as a symbol of hope and endurance in the layer of connotation. The rainbow symbolizes peace and happiness after bad times and expresses hope and imagination, while flowers represent the freshness and beauty of life. The theme of "not giving up hope" is a message for children to adopt positive thinking and determination while coping with difficulties. The use of vibrant colors and fairy tale-like scene elements in the poster imply that the play is both a joyful and emotional journey. The bird figure evokes freedom and a metaphor of spreading wings to the sky, triggering children's imagination.

In terms of mythology, the poster presents a story representing the individual's strength to fight difficulties and survive. The identification of starling with the "inexhaustibility of hope" reinforces a cultural narrative in which childhood is associated with pure optimism. The poster presents a myth that can help children understand universal values such as resilience and hope. This perspective can be criticized for ignoring the obstacles that real-life children may face and for fostering the belief that all problems can only be solved through determination and positive thinking. Thus, despite the philosophical aspect of the play, the figure who "does not lose hope" also invites a critical point of view by bringing forth an idealized narrative of optimism instead of a multilayered reality.

5. Conclusion

This study examines how state theater-staged posters of children's plays staged by state theaters produce a multi-layered cultural discourse through visual and textual elements. The analysis is based on the symbols, colors, typography and compositional arrangements used in the posters within the scope of Roland Barthes' semiotic approach at the levels of literal meaning, connotation and myth. The results of the study reveal that these posters are not only functional promotional materials but also function as visual media through which cultural and ideological discourses are reproduced. The findings provide a conceptual framework that enables the critical evaluation of contemporary culture by revealing the ideological dimensions of visual and textual elements and questioning the role of state theater children's play posters in communicative practices and social representation processes.

At the level of literal meaning, the basic elements in the posters provide functional information to the audience through elements such as the title of the play, author-director information, decor, and costumes, and emphasize the play's fun and attractive atmosphere through the stage layout and color palettes. However, while this level of expression allows the audience to acquire only superficial information, it does not encourage the search for in-depth meaning. At the level of connotation, the vivid colors, fairy-tale figures, and symbolic objects create a joyful, hopeful, and liberating atmosphere

of childhood themes. Titles such as "Red Globe", "Fairy Tale Road", "Magic Mirror" and similar titles and depictions of fantastic characters, while presenting a discourse that romanticizes children's imagination, also contain messages that direct them toward certain idealized norms. This shows that posters are powerful tools that shape children's emotions and thoughts, but sometimes these narratives are reproduced in a reduced form through stereotypical images.

The analysis at the myth level has shown that the posters are shaped within the framework of cultural myths that are also reproduced in the content of the play; in addition to idealized childhood themes such as innocence, freedom, hope, and creativity reflected from the play texts to the posters, themes such as social and individual identity, critical thinking, and alternative leadership have also been revealed. While the visual elements in the posters mold children's emotions, thoughts, and imagination into certain patterns, they also show how these elements shape the social identity and value system. For example, the figure of "The Lion Who Doesn't Want to Be King" gives messages of free will, critical thinking, and individual choice by questioning traditional patterns of authority, and in this respect, it assumes an encouraging role for children to develop their own ego and independence. Similarly, the figure of "The Starling Who Never Loses Hope" glorifies the themes of maintaining hope and staying positive in the face of difficulties and contributes to children's adoption of a resilient and hopeful attitude toward life. Moreover, in the example of "Garbage Monster", by using elements symbolizing recycling and environmental awareness, the poster shows that waste gains positive meaning through an artistic transformation, and this narrative has the potential to raise environmental awareness in children. In examples such as "Fairy Tale Road", "Park", "Red Globe", "Dream Shop", "Magic Mirror", the multidimensional and complex nature of real life is ignored, and idealized and stereotyped childhood myths are reproduced. These games can be expanded to allow for a deeper exploration of individual experiences, social interactions, and emotional challenges.

In conclusion, this study reveals that the idealized narratives presented in posters shape the experience of childhood at both pedagogical and social levels; therefore, it is necessary to evaluate these narratives from a critical perspective. Posters should be evaluated as dynamic texts that assume decisive functions in the construction of social memory and cultural identity. Supporting children's theaters with multi-layered narratives integrated with individuals' life experiences and social realities will contribute to the creation of more comprehensive content both pedagogically and culturally. For this reason, messages that encourage environmental awareness, social values, and creativity should be conveyed more strongly in both play content and posters. Although the posters analyzed in this study predominantly reflect idealized childhood themes such as innocence, hope, freedom, and creativity, these representations also warrant a more critical and interrogative perspective. The frequent emphasis on notions like "childlike purity," "joyful and liberating atmosphere," or "an innocent and 'anything is possible' childhood" constructs a monolithic and romanticized image of childhood. This construction may obscure the plurality of real-life childhood experiences shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and familial differences. From a critical standpoint, such representations can be interpreted within the framework of capitalist myths that commodify childhood as a site of emotional nostalgia and ideal consumption. Furthermore, the posters' visual and textual language may function to reinforce normative social roles by perpetuating a singular, ideal norm of childhood, which aligns with middle-class, heteronormative, and culturally dominant discourses. In this context, when the analyzed posters are considered as a whole, it becomes evident that they present a homogeneous and culturally prescriptive model of childhood rather than offering diverse and inclusive representations. This indicates that children's theater posters play an active role in the reproduction of cultural hegemony and normative ideals.

Statement of Research and Publication Ethics

This study has been prepared in accordance with the principles of scientific research and publication ethics. The study does not require ethics committee approval.

Authors' Contributions to the Article

Author 1 contributed 60% to the article; Author 2 contributed 40%.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

References

- Banham, J. (1998). *The Cambridge guide to theater*. Cambridge University Press.
- Barthes, R. (1979). *Göstergebilim ilkeleri* (B. Vardar & M. Rifat, Trans.). Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları. (Original work published 1964)
- Barthes, R. (1982). *Göstergebilim üzerine* (Y. Sezer, Trans.). İletişim Yayınları. (Original work published 1964)
- Batı, U. (2016). *Reklamın Dili*. Alfa Yayıncılık.
- Bircan, U. (2015a). Roland Barthes ve göstergebilim. *SBARD*, 13(26), 17–41.
- Bircan, U. (2015b). Saussure’de dil, dilbilim ve göstergebilim. *SBARD*, 13(25), 43–66.
- Craig, E. G. (1911). *The art of the theater*. Constable & Co.
- Çağlar, B. (2012). Bir iletişim biçimi olarak göstergebilim. *EUL Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(2), 22–23.
- Çeken, B. (2016). Görsel cinas ve sosyal afişlerde kullanımı. *Akdeniz Sanat Dergisi*, 9(18), 1–12.
- Çeken, B., & Arslan, A. A. (2016). İmgelerin göstergebilimsel çözümlenmesi: Film afişi örneği. *Bayburt Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 11(2), 508–520.
- Çiçek, M. (2016). Göstergebilim ve sinema ya da sinema göstergebilimi. *Kesit Akademi Dergisi*, 2(3), 25–41.
- Delil, S. (2023). Hareketli posterlerde grafik tasarımın rolü üzerine bir inceleme. *Sanat Eğitimi Dergisi*, 11/1: s. 10–19. doi: 10.7816/sed-11-01-02
- Duncan, J. (2019). *Posters: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Erkman, F. (2005). *Göstergebilime giriş*. Multilingual Yayınları.
- Ersan, M., & Aras, O. (2023). Think Eat Save hareketi sosyal afişinin göstergebilimsel açıdan incelenmesi. In *All Sciences Proceedings* (pp. 111–119). Presented at the 1st International Conference on Contemporary Academic Research, Konya, Turkey.
- Ersan, M., & Emen, O. (2023). Mengü Ertel’in opera ve bale afişlerinin ikonografik ve ikonolojik eleştiri yöntemine göre çözümlemesi. *Journal of Humanities and Tourism Research*, 13(4), 701–717. <https://doi.org/10.14230/johut1513>
- Ersan, M., & Önder, B. (2023). Ankara film festivali afişlerinin göstergebilimsel açıdan incelenmesi. *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies*, 16(96), 149–164. <https://doi.org/10.29228/JASSS.71964>
- Ersan, M., & Şen, E. (2023). Reklam tasarımında mizah ve McDonald’s örneğinin göstergebilimsel analizi. *Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 10(64), 135–147. <https://doi.org/10.29228/SOBIDER.70260>
- Ersan, M., and Topbasan, V. (2021). Sigara bağımlılığına yönelik sosyal afişlerin göstergebilimsel yöntemle çözümlenmesi. *İdil*, 87(10), 1601–1612. <https://doi.org/10.7816/idil-10-87-04>
- Gökaşan, G. (2017). Digital collage, poster design, and Stephan Bundi: Semiotic analysis of theater posters. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcmmt/2599>
- Günay, D., & Parsa, A. (2012). *Görsel göstergebilim*. Es Yayınları.
- Güneş, A. (2013). Göstergebilim tarihi. *Humanities Sciences*, 8(4), 332–348.
- Güneş, A. (2013). Göstergebilim tarihi. *New World Sciences Academy-Humanities*, 8(4), 332–348. <https://doi.org/10.12739/NWSA.2013.8.4.4C0172>
- Hollis, R. (2006). *Graphic design: A new history*. Thames and Hudson.
- Kıran, A. (1990). Dilbilim-göstergebilim ilişkileri. *Dilbilim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1, 51-62.
- Kosslyn, S. M. (2006). *Graph design for the eye and mind*. Wiley.

- Lehimler, Z. (2018). Afiş tasarımının geleceği. *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 6(83), 163–176.
- Macit, K., & Öztekin, H. (2021). Futbol endüstrisi ve reklam ilişkisi: Euro 2016 Avrupa Futbol Şampiyonası'nda Türkiye'de yayınlanan televizyon reklam filmleri üzerine bir araştırma. *İNİF E-Dergi*. <https://doi.org/10.47107/inifedergi.977660>
- Pehlivan Baskın, Z. (2022). Çocuklara yönelik tasarlanan afişlerde tipografi kullanımı. *Journal of Social Sciences. The Journal of Social Sciences*. 59. 174-192. Doi: 10.29228/SOBIDER.64177.
- Peirce, C. S. (1978). *Écrits sur le signe* (P. Seuil, Trans.; M. Rifat, Ed.).
- Rifat, M. (2005). *XX. yüzyılda dilbilim ve göstergebilim kuramları*. Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
- Tufan, B., İşeri, K., & Çapan Tekin, S. (2022). “Macbeth” oyunu tiyatro afişlerinin göstergebilimsel çözümlemesi. *DEÜ Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 9(2), 90–111.

Extended Summary

Semiotic Analysis of Children's Theater Posters: A 2024 State Theater Example

Theater posters are important tools of visual communication, with their functions of promoting theater art, attracting audiences, and conveying cultural messages. Children's theater posters have a special place in this general context. Since they appeal to a specific age group, the visual elements used in such posters are designed in accordance with the perceptual level and interests of the target audience. Children's theater posters, designed with colorful, entertaining, and attention-grabbing elements, do more than merely promote the content of a play; they also carry the potential to stimulate children's imagination, encourage engagement with theater, or, conversely, exert unintended negative influences through the symbols and images they convey. In this respect, children's theater posters are visual texts worth examining in terms of both design and meaning production. At this point, semiotics, as an interdisciplinary method that examines signs, symbols and meaning-making processes, offers an effective theoretical framework for analyzing visual communication elements (Çiçek, 2016). Rooted in the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure and initiated with the concepts of signifier and signified, this field has developed further with the contributions of Roland Barthes and has become widely used, especially in the interpretation of popular culture, media and art products. Barthes used semiotics not only on a linguistic level and also to analyze the processes of social meaning production through myths. In this respect, the semiotic approach offers an effective method for the in-depth analysis of visual communication tools such as posters. This study aims to reveal how children's theater posters produce a multilayered cultural narrative through visual and textual elements based on semiotics' theoretical framework.

In this study, semiotic analysis was used within the framework of a qualitative research model to reveal the cultural and ideological functions of children's theater posters in depth. Based on Roland Barthes's approach of analysis at the levels of plain meaning, connotation, and myth, this study examines the multilayered narratives of the visual and textual elements in the posters. This approach is preferred because it is an effective tool to clarify not only the superficial esthetic features of children's theater posters, but also how symbolic language, cultural codes, and social myths are reproduced. Thus, the implicit meanings in the posters can be critically evaluated in the context of childhood themes and social representation processes.

Within the scope of the study, in the first stage, the posters of children's theater exhibited by state theaters in 2024 were scanned, and 28 posters were identified. However, to conduct a detailed and in-depth analysis, the study group was limited to 10 posters exhibited in three major cities: Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir. This limitation increased the intensity of the analysis and clarified the focus of the study. The data collection was conducted through the official website of the State Theaters. In 2024, the posters of all plays exhibited by the State Theaters were systematically recorded. Data analysis was carried out by examining the three dimensions of signification of the semiotic analysis method at the level of plain meaning, connotation, and myth. It was carried out with a three-stage application to the level of plain meaning, connotation, and myth.

This study examines how state theater-staged posters of children's plays staged by state theaters produce a multi-layered cultural discourse through visual and textual elements. The analysis is based on the symbols, colors, typography and compositional arrangements used in the posters within the scope of Roland Barthes' semiotic approach at the levels of literal meaning, connotation and myth. The findings indicate that these posters serve not only as functional promotional tools but also as visual mediums through which cultural and ideological narratives are constructed and perpetuated.

findings provide a conceptual framework that enables the critical evaluation of contemporary culture by revealing the ideological dimensions of visual and textual elements and questioning the role of state theater children's play posters in communicative practices and social representation processes.

At the level of literal meaning, the basic elements in the posters provide functional information to the audience through elements such as the title of the play, author-director information, decor, and costumes, and emphasize the play's fun and attractive atmosphere through the stage layout and color palettes. However, while this level of expression allows the audience to acquire only superficial information, it does not encourage the search for in-depth meaning. At the level of connotation, the vivid colors, fairy-tale figures, and symbolic objects create a joyful, hopeful, and liberating atmosphere of childhood themes. Titles such as "Red Globe", "Fairy Tale Road", "Magic Mirror" and similar titles and depictions of fantastic characters, while presenting a discourse that romanticizes children's imagination, also contain messages that direct them toward certain idealized norms. This shows that posters are powerful tools that shape children's emotions and thoughts, but sometimes these narratives are reproduced in a reduced form through stereotypical images.

The analysis at the myth level has shown that the posters are shaped within the framework of cultural myths that are also reproduced in the content of the play; in addition to idealized childhood themes such as innocence, freedom, hope, and creativity reflected from the play texts to the posters, themes such as social and individual identity, critical thinking, and alternative leadership have also been revealed. While the visual elements in the posters mold children's emotions, thoughts, and imagination into certain patterns, they also show how these elements shape the social identity and value system. For example, the figure of "The Lion Who Doesn't Want to Be King" gives messages of free will, critical thinking, and individual choice by questioning traditional patterns of authority, and in this respect, it assumes an encouraging role for children to develop their own ego and independence. Similarly, the figure of "The Starling Who Never Loses Hope" glorifies the themes of maintaining hope and staying positive in the face of difficulties and contributes to children's adoption of a resilient and hopeful attitude toward life. Moreover, in the example of "Garbage Monster", by using elements symbolizing recycling and environmental awareness, the poster shows that waste gains positive meaning through an artistic transformation, and this narrative has the potential to raise environmental awareness in children. In examples such as "Fairy Tale Road", "Park", "Red Globe", "Dream Shop", "Magic Mirror", the multidimensional and complex nature of real life is ignored, and idealized and stereotyped childhood myths are reproduced. These games can be expanded to allow for a deeper exploration of individual experiences, social interactions, and emotional challenges.

In conclusion, this study reveals that the idealized narratives presented in posters shape the experience of childhood at both pedagogical and social levels; therefore, it is necessary to evaluate these narratives from a critical perspective. Posters should be evaluated as dynamic texts that assume decisive functions in the construction of social memory and cultural identity. Supporting children's theaters with multi-layered narratives integrated with individuals' life experiences and social realities will contribute to the creation of more comprehensive content both pedagogically and culturally. For this reason, messages that encourage environmental awareness, social values, and creativity should be conveyed more strongly in both play content and posters.