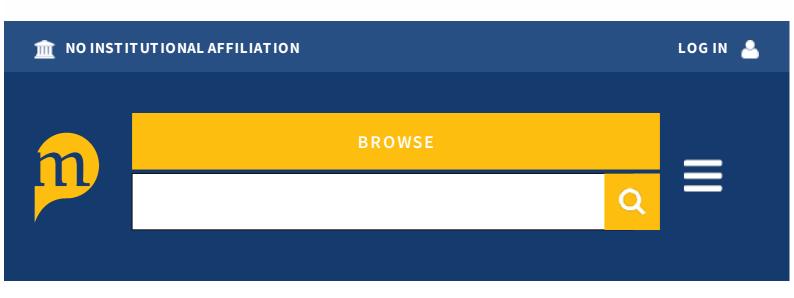
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Instruction and Delight in Moses Goldberg's Plays for the Maturing Child.



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Anthony L. Manna

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<u>In lieu of</u> an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Instruction and Delight in Moses Goldberg's Plays for the Maturing Child

Anthony L. Manna

The theatre is not a set of separate kinds of plays for different ages, but a continuous art form, inviting an increasing sophistication.

Moses Goldberg, *Children's Theatre: A Philosophy and A Method*

Throughout his careers as a children's playwright and as a director of children's theatre, Moses Goldberg has focused on the personal and aesthetic development of children as audience members. Drawing on his training in developmental psychology, Goldberg has attempted to delineate the stages and changes that characterize children's needs and interests in the theatre in light of both their emotional and intellectual development and their natural inclination, from a very early age, to represent and interpret their experiences through play and dramatization.

Appropriately, he calls his approach Developmental Theatre, a concept that encompasses a consideration of the evolution and history of theatre as a social phenomenon and the ways in which theatre affects the perceptions and attitudes of the playgoers. In his essay "The Theatre: A Side View," Goldberg posed the questions that guide the practitioner of Developmental Theatre: "How does the theatre become increasingly relevant to the life of the growing individual?" and "How does the art of theatre emerge from our basic inner needs?" (127; 128).

Questions such as these, Goldberg believes, would require a change in the perspective from which theatre critics usually operate. Traditionally, the tendency has been to describe what Goldberg has called the "surface manifestations of theatre," such as forms and styles of presentation and play text. In contrast, a critic approaching dramatic art from a developmental perspective would be concerned with theatre as an ongoing process, examining, for example, the transformations that theatre has gone through in various eras of history, and the stages in aesthetic maturation that can be nurtured by the theatre experience.

In order to investigate the latter—namely, how aesthetic maturity

develops in the theatre—Goldberg has argued for the establishment of a theatre that would function as an experimental research laboratory, in which the expertise and methods of the theatre artist and the behavioral scientist would be used to discover how particular characteristics of plays affect audience members at different stages in their development, and, consequently, how specific characteristics of the playgoer can guide theatre artists in their effort to develop plays that are both entertaining and personally relevant. For example, the playwright who works in a developmental theatre laboratory could study such factors as the nature of the audience's identification with stage characters of varying ages, its responses to particular performance styles, play topics and themes, and the degree to which the age of the playgoer determines his or her response.

It is within this philosophical and artistic framework that Goldberg continues to develop what he has described in Children's Theatre: A Philosophy and A Method as "a 'master plan' for the child's theatrical exposure" (101). Translated into theatre practice, Goldberg's plan is a carefully sequenced continuum of theatre experiences that is rooted in his sense of the changing needs, concerns, and interests of children from early childhood through adolescence. The author of over twenty plays and the director of at least twice that number, Goldberg has developed his theatre pieces for specific audiences in order to nurture their sophistication as playgoers and to increase their knowledge of various theatre forms and styles. And although he has been critical of practitioners of children's theatre in this country who, in merely setting out to cater to the interests of children, sacrifice sincerity to marketability, he believes it is possible to write for children without necessarily writing down to them. He addressed this issue in Children's Theatre: A Philosophy and A Method when he wrote

It is not wrong to know one's audience What is wrong, in my opinion, is to allow one's conceptions of the audience to dictate completely the material and treatment of the play The creative artist's first duty, as anti-social as it may seem, is to

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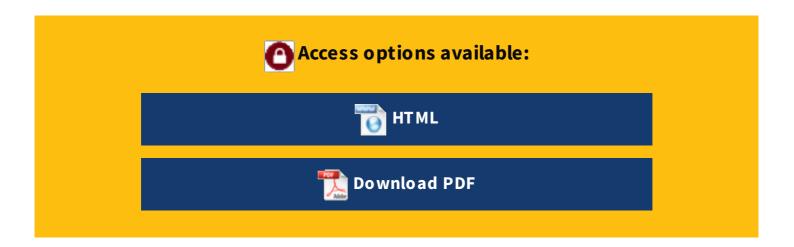
It is not wrong to know order audience . . . What is second, in try opution, o to allow one's correptions of the audience to dictate completely the material and irrestored or the play The emotive array's riset duty, as any second as it may second as himself, to bus and the please both himself, to bus and the audience, he ought to. But he can move please his audience and so it made to the tributory of the please his audience and so it made to the tributory of the please his audience and so it made to the tributory of the please his audience and so it made to the tributory (121).

Goldbergs as published plays reteal what he has in mind for the various audiences for whom he writes and produces plays. Collectionly, these plays upon the concurrant he has developed bifurcase his dramal carrion of "Haned, and Criefel" and his adaptation of the Aladdin

story are performed for younger children that experiencing live throup. The Children Robin Hood. The Mevic Cottage, and The Analyses of Meuroid # 4, contains and in that order, are intended to lead children gradually toward adult orenems as audience moreher. The Wind in the Williams, on the other hand, certains the electrosts of what Coldberg cails "family dresses," a d'struct category that he established for plays that, because of their centers, thomas, and styles, can appeal to audiences of all ages. Each to those plays highlights a specific stage in the maturation process that Goldberg emidwants for playpeers.

Developed as participation plays for as diences from approximately live to right years of age. Hansel and Gretel and Alsolder are intended to help children make the transition from the spontaneous, imitative play of infancy, in which they are the main characters, to the sesthets participation that characterizes the rudiren's Schavius during a frontal staged per-ormanico. As traquitional theatre pieces, these plays occasionally give children an opportunity to become invalved in the development of the plot, often because a character needs help in solving a problem, while at other tim they require the acidence to keep its distance by witnessing the unfolding of a story. In either case, the distance betw the audience and the players is always meant to be slight; Goldberg's direction cell for an arma style preduction in which he actors establish a bond with the children as soon as they are scated in the auditorium by interacting with their, in role and by moving among them freely throughout the performance. Thus, Goldberg extends the play's action beyond U.e (ourth well and late the nisles of the auditorium, so that the young playarers are not easy enveloped by the experience but also have a hand in helping to

The participation play is also meant to introduce children to the basic conventions of a health performance by allowing knowledge of these conventions to enumge naturally not of the characters' actions and dialogue. The rhamaters, sometices in role and servet rive out of role, that is, as actors perionsing a play and responsible for keeping. I merius, descensivate, rather than sorplain, such concepts as role, stage etc. consume, and the difference between stage illusion and reality. In Figural and Control and Aladdin, the actionne is intendeced to these concepts during a vigorous, often cany pre show, in which a



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