

DRAMATOPHOBIA TO THEATROPHILIA

Dennis Bates

Forgive my penchant for neologisms and allow me to revel in my virginal thespian experience striding the Hostos Repertory Theatre stage as the ignoble Dr. Fine in “Six Degrees of Separation.” From a primal fear of being deluged by floodlights and upstaged by a talent deficit greater than our national debt, I was inspired by the avatar of the ancient muses and magically transformed into a loving and practicing devotee of the ‘emoting arts’ in rapt admiration for the team players, actors, staff members, etc. whom I rehearsed and performed with.

The catalysts of this metamorphosis were the Director, E. Randahl Hoey, the Executive Producer, Angel Morales, the Stage Manager, Bill Sorice, Marisol Carrere, who was marvelous playing Ouisa, and all of my fellow actors and stage personnel whose camaraderie and egalitarian persona elicited our very best theatrical performances. Last, but not least, were the audiences who elevated these performances to an epiphany - an enlightening revelation of the very soul of our shared humanity were reincarnated not only in the resurrection of each and every scene and vignette from the playwright’s pages onto the stage but also from the perspective of the audience and its interpretation and appreciation of each and every character’s nuances and psychology.

This transfiguration occurred anew with each new audience - from the genesis of my first performance where I amateurishly flubbed my lines and stepped out of character, a cardinal sin, to evolving revelations of how I should better portray my character, Dr. Fine. I was able to do this only after being given excellent advice and encouragement from my superiors, colleagues, and members of the audience. This character development also developed my own character and helped make me more confident and assured. I learned that not only was my performance enhanced but also those of the entire cast. I began to understand how we all inspire one another to deliver performances that exceed our usual limitations and impel us, together with the audience, to soar beyond the gravitational pull of everyday life.

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When actors truly step into their roles and elicit vicarious responses from a captivated audience then they have elevated themselves and their audience to a higher level of understanding of our shared human experiences of triumphs and tragedies.

We all enthusiastically embrace opportunities to gain insight into the human condition and enhance our understanding of ourselves and each other. Exceptional theatrical performances like great art and music can prove to be such opportunities.

Perhaps Shakespeare alludes to this desired self-awareness in his universally acclaimed play "Hamlet" when the protagonist Hamlet stages a play within a play of his deceased father's murder. Hamlet successfully attempts "to catch the conscience of the king" when he reveals the king to himself in all his despotism (2.2. 638-39). We all crave self-revelation of our dreams and desires, although preferably not the drastic self-admission of base evil as that of the king.

Wow, what an enjoyable, exhilarating experience! I learned that if you're true to your own self and you internalize the role you're portraying, then you can't be false when you present yourself in your own inimitable style as the embodiment of that role which the director had originally envisaged. I hope I accomplished some semblance of that.

As an added bonus, a bad word to use in this age of CEOs and their exorbitant golden parachutes, it's very nice to be recognized and complimented by Hostos students and staff whether familiar or unfamiliar - perhaps I did make a favorable impression after all.

Finally, the theatre, Hostos' in particular, proved to be a true self-actualizing experience and a wonderful addiction beyond my imaginings. Perhaps as the immortal Shakespeare evokes from Hamlet to Horatio: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (1.5. 332-34). That's what great theatre does for us, whether as actors or spectators - it encourages us to interact, think and dream beyond our routine everyday existence here on earth.

WORKS CITED

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. *Shakespeare: The Complete Dramatic and Poetic Works of William Shakespeare*. Red Letter Edition. Intr. Frederick D Losey. Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1952 1000-1040.