1-1-1990

A phenomenological criticism: A phenomenologically based methodology for analyzing theatrical works

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Order Number 1341648

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITICISM:

A PHENOMENOLOGICALLY BASED METHODOLOGY

FOR ANALYZING THEATRICAL WORKS

by

Roberta Sterman Sabbath

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August, 1990

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Beverley Byers-Pevitts for her continued support and inspiration. Her ability to challenge and guide without smothering is the characteristic of a great teacher.

I also wish to thank Dr. Cyril Pasterk for his guidance in the domain of phenomenology.

Abstract

The thesis presents an objective, descriptive way to analyze theatrical works. The essence of an aesthetic experience is the production of feeling in the audience. This methodology analyzes the feelings. Feelings are intentional experiences, i.e. they have an affective and an intellectual component according to the philosophy of Phenomenology, developed by Edmund Husserl, a philosopher in the transcendental tradition of continental philosophy.

At the heart of the tool is the rational analysis of feelings. Thus, the methodology consists of two parts: "feeling" and "meaning"; specifically, the feelings the analyzer experienced during a work and the meanings of those feelings. Another, introductory, part of the methodology asks the analyzer to describe the basic elements of the work which exist without the audience: use of time, space, sound, character and so forth.

Other paradigms, in addition to Phenomenology, are incorporated into the method to help make it richer and more complete in its analysis. They include Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which helps analyzers to think of feelings in a more complex way, and Edith Stein's discussion of empathy, which focuses on the experience one person (here the viewer) has while reacting to the feelings another person (here the character) is experiencing. In addition, Ernst Cassirer's categories of cultural expression (history, science, religion,

myth and so forth) are used to organize the analysis of the content of a work.

The method also proposes that the work has a lasting quality only if it can be said to enlarge upon our understanding of ourselves through the uniqueness of the issues and the manner in which they are presented.

In order to show the versatility of the proposed methodology, three non-linear works have been selected for analysis: Caryl Churchill and David Lan's A Mouthful of Birds, and Jean Genet's The Screens, both plays and Holly Hughes' Dress Suits for Hire, a performance piece. Non-linear works were chosen because this type of work has heretofore resisted another objective, analytical tool, i.e. Aristotle's Poetics. However, it is hoped that this methodology will provide fruitful analyses for both linear and non-linear theatre events.

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them.

Tolstoy 666

Listen...I feel...
I'll tell you in a moment...what I feel
I have thought somewhere in my head
It's a fine thought. I'm sure it is.
It feels like a fine thought. Like a fine day.
And I know just what makes it fine.
Listen I feel, and I know just what I feel.
Listen, listen I feel. Listen I feel. Listen I feel.

Fornes 271

Introduction

Many analytic tools examine theatrical works for their content, using for example a Marxist, semiotic, Lacanian, or Feminist approach. On the other hand, Aristotle's Poetics does not judge a work by its content not does it prescribe a specific style. Rather the Poetics describes universal characteristics of theatrical works with which Aristotle was familiar. Only on occasion does the Poetics advise on a particular element and only in the most general terms does it suggest content. To this extent only, the Poetics is prescriptive.

However, the Poetics is often used as a prescriptive tool. Because it is a standard, works are often distinguished by their resemblance to or difference from the categories elaborated in the Poetics. And as is the case with standards which dominate, because of their general acceptance and ageless quality, what does not conform is often devalued. The devaluation

may be only that the work is "different," "odd," "atypical." However, these labels given to an otherwise exemplary piece, do not promote the general appreciation of the work.

For example, in the classroom, whether in secondary school, college, or graduate school, theatrical works are often subjected to analysis using Aristotilean standards. These standards are very specific. They define plot as a series of events, one following the other, by probable cause and effect linkage. Time progression of the action is marked by the clock. Characters are defined in terms of their action. All events accumulate to produce one great moment, the climax. Theatre is divided into categories of comedy and tragedy. Emotions are classified as to appropriateness within these specific categories, e.g., pity and fear for tragedy.

Sue-Ellen Case proposes another poetics in Feminist Theatre. This poetics reflects the need to analyze the multitude of exemplary works that do not conform to Aristotilean standards. It is a fact that works abound whose action is not comprised of a plot line of events one following the other in probable cause-and-effect sequence. Time is not measured by the clock. It is the time of stream of consciousness. It is the perpetual present that exists only in our minds. In many of these plays, action does not define character. Rather the opposite is true. Character defines the action. A clear, single climax is missing. Instead, multiple peaks sustain interest throughout. And instead of these works representing a separation of tragedy and comedy,

the opposite occurs. These works represent a synthesis. Any one work may include a rich spectrum of emotions.

These plays portray the world of consciousness, an interior world distinct from the exterior one. Our consciousness links events, people, and experiences which could never be joined in exterior time or "clock time." Consciousness layers events; it selects, joins, and separates them using a logic of its own. The rational form that these plays take is not the Aristotilean form of probable cause and effect. Rather the association of events gather like a cluster of flowers on a stem, joined by an feelings/meanings that exists in the mind of the creator.

Both types of works mentioned above represent valid theatre. Works of both types can transport the spectator into forgetting the everyday self. Then, future-time does not exist and the audience experiences the perpetual present. Once enraptured, the mind of the spectator can play and explore the truths of the work. And if the work is successful, because the audience has forgotten itself, and because it has placed its familiar world to the side, there is a chance for it to learn something new about the world and thereby something new about itself.

This is the reality of the theatrical experience whether the work is linear, as Aristotle describes, or non-linear, as Case articulates. Because what I perceive as an absence, it is necessary to me to find a way to analyze both types of works whereby the strengths of both could be described without any

inappropriate or unhappy comparisons. It is necessary to develop such a descriptive tool for theatrical analysis which includes but is not limited to the types of theatrical works described by Aristotle. Today theatre covers a far broader spectrum of events than existed during the Golden Age of Greek theatre. To try to describe and by description appreciate and evaluate more modern pieces using the Poetics seems unfortunate. Yet I could find no comprehensive descriptive tool which does not also judge content as a specific measure of the value of a piece. While I want content addressed as a critical element of a work, I do not want content to be at the heart of the standard. I want the methodology to describe not only what the content is, but more importantly how the audience reacts to the piece. Although semiotic and structural analyses do not judge content, these tools encourage an analysis which, I think, is too intellectual to properly judge the aesthetics of a work. I also want this tool to be usable in classrooms ranging from high school through graduate school.

After about a year's work of exploring possible approaches and finally putting together the methodology, I tested it on a handful of college classes which included freshman through graduate students. What was striking about the methodology is its ability to trigger breakthroughs of understanding. When students focus on their personal and immediate experience of the work itself, they disregard for a few

moments their intellectual reactions. This fosters spontaneous, fresh reactions to the piece.

Thus, the methodology recognizes feelings as legitimate and personal. Because no one can say to students that their feelings were "wrong," the methodology promotes a more relaxed atmosphere and develops trust between teacher and student. Through discussion of this type, the theatrical work can become a more personal experience resulting in students offering examples from their own lives which they connect with the piece. This results in new perspectives, more creative thinking, and inevitably a greater understanding and appreciation of the work.

Explanation and Purpose of The Outline

This objective, descriptive standard for analyzing theatrical works places feelings as the essence of the aesthetic experience; the analysis of feelings is critical to the understanding and appreciation of any work. Using Phenomenology as presented by Edmund Husserl, a philosopher of the transcendental tradition in continental philosophy, this methodology proposes what heretofore has evaded us, i.e. a rational analysis of the feelings experienced during a theatrical piece.

Here, feelings are treated as intentional acts. This means that when human beings experience feelings, these feelings are <u>about</u> something. This is the same as saying that when I have feelings, they are about my ideas. And when I have ideas, I experience feelings about these ideas. Feeling implies meaning; meaning implies feeling. Feeling creates meaning; meaning creates feeling. Thus, a phenomenological analysis includes these two basic phenomenological components: the noesis (experience of feeling) and the noema (meaning of the feeling).

When putting together the methodology, I decided to use both the phenomenological analysis as well as an objective analysis of the work. Thus, the approach is two-fold. At the heart of the analysis is the phenomenological approach. It is a reflective activity which examines the experience the analyzer had during the presentation of the theatrical work and the

associated meanings of those experiences. Placed before this analysis in the methodology is the objective analysis of the work. Style addresses both the universal and the unique aspects of the work absent the experience of the audience. I place this section first, because I think that a typical class of students is familiar with these categories. Starting with familiar turf, students and teachers alike can then proceed more securely on the less well-known path to phenomenological analysis. It must be remembered, however, that these elements, when placed before an audience, produce feeling as an intentional experience.

Before starting out on an explanation of the analysis, an understanding of how "feeling" is here defined is critical. Feelings are considered here in their largest meaning. They include our perceptions, intuitions, senses, i.e. our immediate experience of the world. Stephan Strasser clarifies the definition of feeling:

> According to the principle of "totalization," man in his psycho-physical unity constitutes the point of departure for philosophic consideration of man. He is the primary subject of all philosophical-anthropological judgment. This means, negatively, that an emotion, for example, should not be treated as a state of the soul which then somehow "influences" the body and there produces "accompanying phenomena." Likewise the opposite position, that emotion is basically housed in the body and from there calls forth psychic phenomena, is disallowed for the same reasons. Both theories rest upon a dualistic anthropology, ultimately going back to Descartes and Locke. The author expressly repudiates the dualistic scema and, derivative from it, the alternatives between "introspective" and "extrospective" directions of vision....An emotion, for example, appears to us at first as the emotional excitement of a man. It further flows from an inwardness and comes to "ex-pression" in

> dealing with persons and things... Still, one must hold fast to the primary fact that emotion is, first of all, a determinate mode of man's gradually accustoming himself to the world and that the unity of this gradual accommodation is more fundamental than its "stratified" details. Only because of the totality of the emotional "motus" can we explain how it happens that which precedes in the sphere of animated bodiliness is "expressive" and makes possible an understanding of inner excitement as well.

And later Strasser writes that according to Husserl:

> ...Feelings are thus in no way "purely subjective" states; they are rather attuned to their intentional objects (xxi-xxii).

Therefore, according to Strasser, Husserl and others, feelings are always related to something. Feelings are not isolated phenomenon. They always have a reason for being.

Another critical point for the ultimate credibility of the methodology is the understanding of what an aesthetic experience is. Obviously, theatrical works produce aesthetic experiences. Placing their specific form aside for a moment, let us examine to what extent they are like all aesthetic experiences. That the essence of an aesthetic experience is the experience of feeling by the audience in response to a representation of expression has been largely reported. The two epigrams to this paper refer to Tolstoy's and Fornes' statements about the central role feelings take in the production of an aesthetic experience. Fornes, in addition, indicates the <u>experience</u> of emotion which is spontaneous and <u>immediate</u> as distinct from the knowledge of the meaning of the emotion which comes later. Furthermore, regarding directing theatrical works,

Clurman speaks about the emotion of an entire play: "The truth or 'emotion' of a Shaw play is not that of one by Maeterlinck, Chekhov, Pirandello or Beckett" (On Directing 148). His standard play analysis as a director typically includes an answer to the question of mood. Ernst Cassirer also wrote eloquently and similarly about the aesthetic experience:

> All aesthetic theories which attempt to account for art in terms of analogies taken from disordered and disintegrated spheres of human experience--from hypnosis, dream, or intoxication--miss the main point. A great lyrical poet has the power to give definite shape to our most obscure feelings. This is possible only because this work, through dealing with a subject which is apparently irrational and ineffable, possesses a clear organization and articulation. ...Every work of art has an intuitive structure, and that means a character of rationality. Every single element must be felt as part of a comprehensive whole. If in a lyrical poem we change one of the words, an accent or a rhythm, we are in danger of destroying the specific tone and charm of the poem...It [art] may give us the most bizarre and grotesque vision, and yet retain a rationality of its own--the rationality of form (Essay 167).

Thus, according to Cassirer and others, the essence of the aesthetic work lies in the experience of feeling. Cassirer even refers to the rational character of those feelings.

Yet it is Michel Dufrenne who addresses most completely the essence of an aesthetic work as feeling. He articulates the entire creative process from artist to aesthetic object to viewer/participant in terms of the transmission of feeling. Here Dufrenne talks about the aesthetic object from the point of view of the artist. He articulates the distinction between what the artist represented and what the aesthetic object expressed:

> The expressed is, as it were, the possibility of the represented, and the represented is the reality of the expressed. Together with the style which gives them body, they compose the world of the aesthetic object (186).

Thus, Dufrenne notes the distinction between the work as part of the artist's need to express and the work after it has entered into the consciousness of the viewer/participant. He continues:

> We already know that representation is not the goal of art, since the work represents only in order to express. In relation to the expressed, the represented is both a means and an effect....Expression gives birth to representation because expression needs representation.

He also articulates the linkage between representation and viewer/participant:

> The vivid emotion which ...[the aesthetic objects] inspire [in the viewer/participant] crystallizes itself in images which become a means of entry into a world [i.e. of the aesthetic object] (437).

Dufrenne also writes that the aesthetic object is not inert. By its very nature, it only exists when it is experienced (xxx). It is through the experience of feeling of the viewer/participant that the work exists. In a sense, the viewer/participant completes the cycle of creation begun by the artist. The translator of Dufrenne's work writes:

> Consequently, it is through feeling, and through feeling alone, that the human subject becomes present in the aesthetic object....The aesthetic experience [is] global, prereflective, and at one with the body....[i.e., the] force of the sensuous...[We] submit ourselves to this force through the agency of the body (Dufrenne xxviii).

Therefore, given the importance of feeling when considering an aesthetic work, this methodology proceeds to analyze the feelings experienced by this analyzer in each of three theatrical works.

Two non-linear plays and one performance piece have been selected to exemplify the method: The Screens by Jean Genet, A Mouthful of Birds by Caryl Churchill and David Lan, and Dress Suits for Hire by Holly Hughes. Because the linear play has had its standard in Aristotle, I have chosen these non-linear pieces to exemplify this methodology. Each piece was selected for its uniqeness both in style and in content as well as the high quality of presentation. These three works epitomize the role of theatre which is to expand and enrich our consciousness of our selves and our world.

Definition of Terms in The Outline

Viewer/participant

Viewer/participant refers to the spectator. The term using the word "participant" reflects the active dimension of the spectator not only as one who brings the work to life, but also as one whose life is affected by the experience.

Style

This section examines the work alone, without an audience. It seeks to clarify what are the universal elements of the theatrical work. As mentioned earlier, these elements communicate both feeling and meaning.

Structure

This section covers how the piece is organized in terms of time and space. The sequence of segments marked by changes in time and space dimension is important to note.

Time

This section asks the analyzer to distinguish between the use of exterior or "clock time" and interior time or time within our consciousness which can mix past, present, and future time. Both or either time-structure may exist within a play.

Space

This section asks the analyzer to distinguish between the use of exterior locus, interior locus, or a mixture of both within the work. An exterior locus is a location that represents our external environment. An interior locus represents on stage what is happening in the mind of a character (often a state of mind, or a fantasy, like the land of the dead in Genet's play The Screens).

Form

This section refers to all the sensual input that is produced for the viewer/participants and includes sound, movement, environment, and actor/agent.

Sound

This section refers to each noise that is produced during the performance, whether language, music, animal sounds, object sounds and so forth. Language includes choice of words, rhythms, music or sound patterns produced by words, frequency, placement, and the orchestration of sound. Language may be ordinary or specialized. The latter refers to poetic, elevated, philosophical, or technical language. Sound also refers to music, its style and its use. Music may emphasize or minimize action or dialogue.

Movement

This section covers any physical activity on stage. It covers the blocking of the actors, stunts, dance, gestures, and activity of inanimate and non-human living things.

Environment

This section includes all that the viewer/participant and the actor/agent experience that is not mentioned above: costuming, staging, lighting, and anything which may reveal the existence of sight, sound, tactile, olfactory, and taste perceptions to the characters as well as the audience, i.e. fabrics may be lush; a kitchen smell of fresh bread; a hen taste succulent.

Actor/agent

This section refers to two theatrical realities. First, a human being plays a part. This is "actor." The actor has characteristics which greatly affect what is communicated during the piece. Second, the character that is being portrayed is an "agent" who represents a reality in the mind of the author. As Kenneth Burke writes, human beings, here actors, can become instrumental devices, or agents in the creation of feelings or "attitudes" which are the critical element in an aesthetic experience:

> [The] notion of persuasion to <u>attitude</u> would permit the application of rhetorical terms to purely <u>poetic</u>

> structures; the study of lyrical devices might be classed under the head of rhetoric, when these devices are considered for their power to induce or communicate states of mind to readers, even though the kinds of assent evoked have no overt, practical outcome (50).

If a character is a means for the artist to express emotion, then that character promotes an emotional response in the audience. In this sense, the character becomes an agent for the expression of feeling.

Actor/agent also addresses every aspect of the actor/agents themselves: the number of characters, their description, whether they exist in external time and space, their relationship to each other and so on.

Feeling

This section has three dimensions. The first is the feelings of the actor/agents. The second is the type of expression (the communicated representation) of the work reflected in the expression of feeling by the viewer/participant: laughter, enjoyment, anger, tears, appreciation. The third dimension is the feelings of the participant/viewer which exist at two levels. One is the experience of personal feelings and the other, the experience of empathy for the actor/agents.

The concept of empathy describes what the viewer/participant feels about the feelings of the characters. The phenomenon is discussed by Edith Stein in On the Problem of Empathy. The work, by a woman whose

doctoral professor was Edmund Husserl, studies empathy from a phenomenological point of view. She describes the process which transpires between two individuals who interact with one another. I have used her thoughts in a theatrical context to describe what an audience experiences as it becomes involved with the characters being presented in the theatrical work. Stein distinguishes the emotions of the subject from the emotions which the subject shares in a linked consciousness with another person, in this case the actor/agent on stage. The production of this phenomenon is critical to the creation of a successful work. Audiences must become involved with what the characters are doing.

For example, Charlie Chaplin as a bum slips on a banana peel. The bum is shocked, embarrassed. This is the first reality. Comedy is created, we laugh. This is the second reality. The viewer/participant feels relief that it was not herself and vulnerable that it could happen to her. At the same time, she feels shock and embarrassment for the bum. This is the third reality.

The three realities are again: first, the shock and embarrassment of the bum (the feelings of the actor/agent); second, the creation of the comedic (the representation of the actor/agent) and the experience of laughter (the expression of feeling by the viewer/participant), and finally, relief and vulnerability (the feelings experienced

by the viewer/participant) accompanied by shock and embarrassment (the empathetic experience).

In a similar vein, Henri Bergson writes that the comic is quite predictable and reflects an emotional attachment between observer and observed:

> Now, the effect of absentmindedness may gather strength in its turn. There is a general law...: when a certain comic effect has its origin in a certain cause, the more natural we regard the cause to be, the more comic shall we find the effect. Even now we laugh at absentmindedness....Still more laughable will be the absentmindedness we have seen springing up and growing before our very eyes, with whose origin we are acquainted and whose life-history we can reconstruct (12).

Here Bergson indicates the clear connection between internal feelings of the character/agent, expression of the emotion, and the feelings of the viewer/participant both personally and empathetically.

When using the methodology, I ask students to be as specific about naming the feelings of the actor/agent as I was in the example of the bum just given. It is also critical that the students express the feelings they experienced during the work. They must complete the sentence with an articulation of specific feelings, e.g., I... felt....when....." For example, I felt upset when the hand of Little Peter reappeared to threaten Deeluxe and Michigan. (Dress Suits for Hire).

When "anger" is named as a feeling, ask the students to analyze the feeling further. Feelings of anger are usually

secondary, caused by primary feelings such as fear or shock. As analyzers, we do have the benefit of hindsight.

Examples of feelings are : puzzled, silly, curious, interested, disconnected, alienated, joyful, abused, sexy, aroused, disgusted, hateful, powerless, undecided, thoughtful. Included are drives such as: hunger, cold, lonely, afraid, powerless, ambitious.

Abraham Maslow, in his Hierarchy of Needs, presents drives in an organized manner. Their enumeration may be helpful to articulating the drives which produce feelings. [1] The goal is to think of feelings as a complex array of realities which can exist simultaneously, alternately, and erratically and still successfully submit to rational analysis.

Always keep in mind that the connection between the feeling and the meaning sections of this methodology is not a linkage of two separate phenomenon. Rather these two

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[1]The hierarchy of needs describes the motivation of behavior in terms of satisfying needs. It gives an order to the degree of urgency with which a human being experiences need. The hierarchy begins with the most urgent need (in terms of survival) and progresses forward as the individual is able to satisfy each subsequent level: physiological needs must be met first (hunger, sexuality, thirst, temperature moderation and so forth) followed by: the need for safety (emotional and physical); the need for belonging and loving; the need for esteem; the need for self-actualization.

The reality is that need satisfaction is not always based on this order. It is revealing to notice when a character decides on an action which defies this typical ordering. Thus a character may decide to risk her life to sustain principles. That act may be determined as self-actualizing even though it disregards survival needs (Maslow 80-106).

sections represent two dimensions of one process, i.e. of the way human beings react with the world.

Writing about or discussing a work that has either been read or viewed, involves reflection. The phenomenon of reflection is what analyzers are doing when they respond to the methodology. As Cassirer writes (he also quotes Herder) about the reflective process:

> ...all language is rooted in feeling and its immediate, instinctive manifestations...This form comes into being only with the operation of a new "human function," which from the very outset distinguishes the man from the beast. [This is] Herder's conception of this specifically human faculty of "reflection,".... (Symbolic 153).

Thus, even while we as analyzers are reflecting upon our experience of the theatrical work, we reexperience the work and are able to express through the use of language both the affective and intellectual dimensions of our thoughts. With this in mind, we enter the dimension of meaning.

Meaning

Dufrenne says the following about content in an aesthetic work:

> A theory of artistic truth risks making a false start by establishing itself on an observation which is nevertheless correct, namely, that art cannot be true in the way science is, because science demonstrates and art only displays. One then asks of art what he does not ask of science--that it reproduce the real to the point of competing with the real. One does not ask that a physics book portray thunder but that it explain thunder....Between the real and the represented there is no more an equivalence than between ordinary perception and aesthetic perception, and the truth of art cannot consist in realizing such an equivalence. That which art says is not the reality of the real but

> a meaning of the real which art expresses. This meaning is true because it is the affective [feeling] dimension through which the real may appear and not the reality of the real which a physical formula could capture (516).

Thus, when this methodology addresses "meaning," it is not meant to be a reality that exists outside the experience of the viewer/participant. This section therefore uses categories which are standard in the expression of meaning using typical cultural constructs. It groups the content of the theatrical work into categories or cultural forms. They are what Ernst Cassirer (a neo-Kantian who like Husserl is a representative of the transcendental tradition of continental philosophy) calls "symbolic forms" (Cassirer Symbolic 80). These forms are fields of thought which human beings have developed to express and thereby explain themselves and their world.

> [With] all their inner diversity, the various products of culture--language, scientific knowledge, myth, art, religion--become parts of a single great problem-complex: they become multiple efforts, all directed toward the one goal of transforming the passive world of mere impressions, in which the spirit seems at first imprisoned, in a world that is pure expression of the human spirit (Symbolic 81).

Here, Cassirer mentions a limited list of these cultural forms. There are others which he discusses in The Myth of the State. History, sociology, and political theory explain group behavior and patterns. Psychology explains individual behavior. Religion explains what cannot be explained. Morality explains how people should behave.

Cassirer also writes that the use of more than one symbolic form to explain or describe phenomena produces myth. Before the specialization of fields of study, he explains, cultural forms were undifferentiated. "Myth became the first teacher of mankind" (Myth 49). Alchemy was the mother of chemistry; astrology the well from which astronomy sprang; witch doctor practices the fountainhead of medicine, and so on. Only later, as the empirical sciences developed, did these explanations progress into differentiated fields of study or symbolic forms:

> Here we grasp one of the most essential elements of myth. Myth does not arise solely from intellectual processes; it sprouts forth from deep human emotions. Yet on the other hand all those theories that exclusively stress the emotional element fail to see an essential point. Myth cannot be described as bare emotion because it is the expression of emotion. The expression of a feeling is not the feeling itself--it is emotion turned into an image. This very fact implies a radical change. What hitherto was dimly and vaguely felt assumes a definite shape; what was a passive state becomes an active process.
> ..."Who knows," asks Euripides, "if life here be not really death, and death in turn be life?" In mythical thought the mystery of death is "turned into an image"--and by this transformation, death ceases being a hard unbearable physical fact; it becomes understandable and supportable (Myth 43, 49).

We human beings find myth comforting. When we cannot use one symbolic form to understand why something happens, we mix forms. When we wish to enhance the justification or credibility of one symbolic form, we use more.

For example, in our everyday lives, we witness the use of science and religion, political theory and the aesthetic

experience, history and science mixed to explain something that happened or a way we felt.

I maintain that the mixing of these symbolic forms are the proper tools of the artist who uses them to create an affective and intellectual reality. These are the tools for the artist's expression. Within the aesthetic work, imagination takes free reign. It should be given the license to mix symbolic forms: to think the improbable, to explore the possible, to grasp the new. That is the imperative of the aesthetic work. It is far less dangerous to do this within what is recognized as an aesthetic work, than to present a work which is ostensibly scientific, religious, political, psychological, and so forth and say the work uses one symbolic form when in fact more than one are used. An educated, interested public must understand and protect the mixing of symbolic forms in art and be cautious about the mixing of forms outside the aesthetic arena.

Another point to remember when analyzing aesthetic works is that no work has one essence. The nature of the aesthetic experience is its multiple meanings and the multitude of emotional experiences that it can engender in an audience. There is no "final" meaning, no "right" meaning. A work is essentially ambiguous and experiences multiply with the viewer/participants.

Autonomy

The value of an aesthetic experience which is determined by the amount the work expands the everyday reality of the viewer/participant. Frank Moore's commentary about performance holds true for theatre in general, "PERFORMANCE, LIKE ANY AVANT-GARDE ART, IS THE WAY SOCIETY DREAMS; IT IS THE WAY SOCIETY EXPANDS ITS FREEDOM, EXPLORES THE FORBIDDEN." (Moore 122). In discussing the phenomenon of liminoid space and time, Victor Turner asserts that built into the culture of every society is the time and place appropriate for experiencing the liminoid. This, according to Turner, is the experience of the passionate, the possible, the revolutionary, the new, i.e. that which does not happen during our everyday, run-of-the-mill activities (Turner 54). A theatrical work provides just that sort of liminoid experience. It is the time when an audience can be "at play"; when the past and the future can be forgotten; when the not-what-is becomes the what-might-be. Herb Blau writes:

> ...I suspect we must live with it, the most perversely obsessive subject in the theatre, what makes it detestable (to Plato, to Tolstoy, to Augustine), the "subject of perversion," what we want to see and shouldn't, in the theatre or in the living present--what immemorial wall or membrane between?--to which the theatre is always tempted but refuses, refusing to live on anything but its own terms (119).

Herein lies the measure of the work. Given the experiences of the work, does the play explore a reality which is

improbable to our everyday lives? Do we face and have to contextualize new information? Are we being challenged to understand the world in a new way? If the answer is yes to one of these questions, then the work has a degree of quality.

The amount of quality is thus determined by the degree to which the elements of a piece permit the audience to enter into that work and experience it. Thus, it expands the accommodation with the world in a new or challenging way.

Theatre of good quality helps us face the frontier of the possible. Theatre shows us the passions that make us alive. Once aware of our passions, we as viewer/participants can then properly direct them. This results in improved autonomous behavior which means that we know better how to fulfill ourselves.

The Outline

The following is an outline of the methodology. The outline has proven helpful in both oral and written analysis.

During classroom discussion, dialogue begins when the facilitator models some honest reaction of her own. For example, "I felt uneasy when Said continually badgered Leila." "I felt defensive and protective of Leila when Said badgered her." (The Screens) "I felt confused when Deeluxe woke up, after Michigan said she was dead." "I was both embarrassed and fascinated when Herculine caressed Derek" (Dress Suits for Hire). Then, the facilitator helps the students express what feelings they experienced during the reading or the viewing of the play. She does this by listening intently. Only when the student begins to show signs of approaching the expression of an emotional response, does the facilitator take an active role by saying, "You feel....about...." and fill in with a good guess. This is done with great caution and sensitivity and only if the facilitator senses that the student is aware of the feeling that is being suggested. Otherwise the facilitator will exert too strong an influence on the student and may confuse a spontaneous discovery.

To be on the safe side, it is better for the facilitator to struggle against guessing the students feelings. Realize, too, that at first, students are embarrassed to express feelings in a classroom setting. But once the facilitator serves as a model by giving her own emotional responses, the students

may be more comfortable. There usually is nervous laughter and irrelevant comments as students try to express their emotions. A facilitator must not halt these initial reactions, but rather gently lead the discussion by giving other personal experiences and encouraging the sharing of feelings.

To give an example of the written analysis, I here complete three outlines of the process. None of the pieces are easy to analyze. I had not seen productions of any of the three works when I did the analyses and had only participated in a class discussion about A Mouthful of Birds.

Shortly after writing the analysis on Mouthful, I directed a performance piece based on the character of Derek. Rather than using the narrative of events, the dancer and I focused on Derek's feelings before, during, and after his sexual transformation. This focus stimulated the dancer to express the identified feelings through dance and produced a richly choreographed work.

As analyzers become more sophisticated in using the method, it will become clear that every aspect of Style produces a feeling/meaning reaction in the audience. This type of analysis should be encouraged, because as Ernst Cassirer writes, "Every single element must be felt as part of a comprehensive whole" (Essay 167).

A Phenomenological Analysis: A Process for Analyzing Theatrical Events

The Outline

I. Style -- Describe the following elements. Also indicate their uniqueness and universality. Also indicate your reaction to each element.

A. Structure

1. Time

a. Indicate where interior, exterior, or mix.

b. Indicate the sequence.

2. Space

a. Indicate where interior, exterior, or mix.

b. Indicate the sequence.

B. Sound

1. Language.

2. Music.

3. Other sounds.

C. Movement

1. Characters.

2. Other.

E. Environment

1. Lighting, props, and costuming.

2. Special effects.

3. Other sensory experiences.

F. Actor/agent

1. Number of characters, and their use.
2. Description.
3. Their relationships.
4. In what time and space dimensions do they exist.

II. Feeling

A. Feelings experienced by the actor/agents.

B. Describe your expressions of emotions as a result of the representation.

C. Describe:

1. Your feelings during the work using the words, "I feel or felt...when...")
2. Your empathetic feelings about the actor/agents.

III. Meaning

A. Did the work express any universal and/or unique ideas relating to...

1. religion?
2. moral doctrine?
3. psychology theory?
4. aesthetic appreciation?
5. a mixture of the above (myth)?

B. Did the work express any universal and/or unique ideas relating to...

1. science?
2. history?
3. politics and sociology?

4. a mixture of the above (myth)?

IV. Autonomy

A. Did you have any fresh feelings and thoughts while experiencing the work?

B. Did these feelings and thoughts change you in any way?

Analysis of A Mouthful of Birds

Caryl Churchill and David Lan

Overview

A Mouthful of Birds is a play about passion. It is about people who deny their passions, and, consequently, become possessed by them. The result is violence. Initially, says Caryl Churchill, the play was written "to recognize women's capacity for violence and men's for peacefulness." It is a very free adaptation of Euripedes' The Bacchae which Churchill says shows what she wanted to say about violence and gender. Churchill and Lan did change the ending of the Greek original. As Churchill explains, in the Greek version, the possessed women or Bacchae give up their desire to be possessed. (In The Bacchae, women are possessed by the violent passion of Dionysus which causes Agave and her female companions to dismember Agave's son Pentheus.)

However, in A Mouthful of Birds, the women and men come to understand the passionate forces within them. Whether the expression of their possession comes in the form of alcohol, money, violence, or sexual expression, these characters ultimately learn to recognize that the passionate forces within them can be vented in healthy ways. They learn that if their personal desires are recognized and understood, passion can be controlled and directed towards gratifying and fulfilling activities. Instead of living

someone else's idea of what they should be doing, characters choose jobs and activities that reflect their personal interests and desires.

For example, at the start of the play, we learn that Lena tries to be the perfect wife by never expressing herself. Instead, she agrees to whatever her husband wants. Her eruption of violence comes as no surprise. She drowns her daughter in the bathtub and then comes out and tells her husband in a matter-of-fact way what she has done. Later on, she understands the destructiveness of her passivity. She realizes that denial causes frustration which, in turn, causes her violent explosion.

Derek, another character, is introduced as a man unemployed for seventeen months. His life is filled with meaningless activity. His father says that a man without a job is not a man. That is how Derek feels. In fact, later in the play, Derek discovers his female sexuality. He dances the transformation on stage.

The play has many short scenes. The logic of their sequencing may escape the first-time reader. But upon analysis, the logic reveals itself. It is the story, at first, of unfulfilled lives; secondly these lives are taken over by the eruption of frustrated passions; and finally, they are put back together with the help of self-awareness and self-acceptance.

Characters are either contemporary or allegorical. Dance is used by the allegorical characters as a metaphor for the possessive forces being experienced by the contemporary characters. The play is a complex weave of several theatrical elements: naturalistic dialogue, dance, surrealism, and allegory.

Style: Time

Time in A Mouthful of Birds is both interior and exterior, often simultaneously. For example, while one character speaks to another in clock time, a third character exists in interior time. The allegorical characters exist only in interior time. Contemporary characters exist in either exterior or interior time.

For example, the Spirit, an allegorical character, speaks the violent inner reality of Lena, while Lena speaks blandly to her husband. Or, Marcia is herself one moment and, a moment later, a medium possessed by a spirit. Or, Paul talks to his stock broker co-workers one moment and dances with Pig, who represents obsession with money, the next.

For several reasons, the narratives do not follow a traditional linear plot line. One reason is that the plot does not follow the same contemporary character(s) through a complete, cause and effect, beginning-middle-end series of events. Derek is the only character whose story is sketched for us using this traditional sequencing. Yet, as with all

the characters, the viewer/participant learns very little about what triggers his transformation from frustration to fulfillment. We are left, if we so choose, with filling any explanatory details ourselves. This "filling in" is part of the experience of the work and encourages participation in the work.

Another reason for the lack of a traditional linear plot line is that the story of each contemporary character is confined to a few short scenes. On the other hand, the allegorical characters weave their way throughout the play, providing a weft to the woof of the story of the contemporary characters.

Style: Space

Space like "Time" in A Mouthful of Birds is also both interior and exterior. The chair scenes are an example of interior time and interior space. The chair is a location for the representation of the seduction of characters by Dan, a vicar. It is interior time, because the action does not follow clock time; rather it disregards clock time. The chair is metaphorical. It is used to represent another locus. In this case, the chair represents sexual arousal.

While the above action, representing interior time and space, occurs on stage, another action is also represented. This action occurs in exterior time and space. Two prison officers talk about a dangerous prisoner. Their time and

space are exterior. Their dialogue follows clock time. The physical location represents their external environment. One might infer, from the juxtaposition of the two events, that external bars are helpless in controlling internal possessions.

The Death of Pentheus scene is an example of exterior time, because conversation follows clock time. It is an example of interior location, because the locus is a metaphor for a different location, i.e. mythical. The same is true for the scene with Herculine and Derek; it is exterior time and interior space. Dialogue follows clock time. However, the locus of the action takes place inside Derek's head. The repetition by Derek, a contemporary actor/agent, of the exact words of Herculine, a mythical actor/agent, suggests a character transformation, i.e. exterior time and interior space.

The Baron Sunday scene is an example of interior time, because the dialogue of one character disregards clock time. Marcia, a medium, possessed by Baron Sunday, speaks for him. This represents interior time. On the other hand, Decima and Margaret, to whom Marcia speaks, are contemporary characters who speak in exterior time. The scene is an example of exterior space, because dialogue takes place around a living room table and appears to be in an everyday environment.

Style: Sound

The language includes different dialects and jargon. There are two characters with a Trinidadian dialect, one character with a German dialect; others use business jargon, musical language, and ordinary simple language. Characters sometimes speak simultaneously creating a crescendo of feeling through sound. Interest is also added when the tone of voice changes as a character becomes possessed.

During the Gold Shoes scene, the sound of radios played in different pitches creates intensity and foreshadows possession. At first, just "a scrap of music plays three or four bars and stops"; later it becomes "deafeningly loud" (Churchill 56). Here music assumes the reality of a possessive spirit.

Style: Movement

The play moves like a ballet. Dance is used to emphasize interior time. Specifically, the dance is a metaphor for the process of possession. Whenever Dionysus 1 and 2 (the allegorical figures for the state of possession) appear, they dance. Similarly, the Pig and the vicar always dance, because they represent possession by specific compulsive behaviors, i.e. acquisition of money and religious fanaticism. Great interest is created because of the unusual combination of dancing partners. Paul dances with the Pig. Dan, the vicar, dances "dangerously" with The

Man and The Woman who "dies on the chair." When contemporary characters are possessed, they dance. The dance of extreme happiness is described:

> This dance consists of memories of moments of extreme happiness. After a while all the members of the COMPANY find themselves in a waterfall. They dash in and out, they stand letting the stream pour down on their backs--a moment of severe physical pleasure.
>
> In the midst of this, the four WOMEN become possessed by AGAVE and the spirits of three BACCHANTS (4).

The dressing of Pentheus, a dance, visually presents Derek's change from male to female sexual identity. The movement of the dance is often "dangerous," which seems to mean sensual: sexuality being one form of possession. Herculine, a hermaphrodite, is played by a woman dressed as a man. Derek, a man, takes a lace shawl and petticoat from Herculine, symbolizing his transformation.

Style: Environment

Characters present a cacophony of types and attires. Costuming is simple but suggestive. Dionysus, played by a man, wears a white petticoat. The Pig, clothed in a loin cloth, has big ears. A priest's collar and a pair of trousers clothe the vicar. Herculine Barin, physiologically described in the text as a male transvestite, is played by a woman dressed in the clothes of a Frenchman of the nineteenth century. When Pentheus is dressed as a woman by Dionysus 1 and 2, he still wears his trousers and sneakers.

Characters touch each other consistently throughout the

play. For example, in Part Two, scene nine, part one, Lena and the Spirit move in dance pantomime:

> He is a frog. She approaches threateningly as a snake. He seizes her arm and becomes a lover. She responds but as he embraces her he becomes an animal and attacks the back of her neck. She puts him down to crawl and he becomes a train....(25).

Style: Actor/Agent

The list of characters seen by the viewer/participant in the playbill or the reading script reveals a lot about the play. The first grouping lists seven contemporary characters whose names are given along with their roles in society: mother, switchboard operator, unemployed, an acupuncturist, a businessman, a vicar, and a secretary. We have three men and four women. (One turns out to be transsexual.) The descriptions suggest that character development will be limited to these description, that perhaps they will be caricatures. The second grouping lists mythological figures: Dionysus, Pentheus, Agave, the Bacchae, and Dionysus 2.

Upon seeing this list, we organize our thoughts around the Euripedian play, assuming we know it; or, if we do not know the play or its personages, we realize that the confrontation of the allegorical and the external awaits us. We know <u>not</u> to organize our reactions around an external time and space reality.

Feeling

The mythological figures are allegorical. These characters represent emotional drives: Dionysus, possession; The Pig, the passion for money; Agave, any woman or man possessed by destructive passions; Pentheus, a man destroyed by someone else's passion; the vicar, religious fanaticism.

The layering of the mythical and allegorical or interior time and space with external dialogue is fascinating. Obviously this is not a story focusing on one protagonist whom we follow through a beginning-middle-end story. We do not have a clear climax.

I felt frustration when the characters described their compulsive behaviors and tenderness as they failed in efforts to express themselves. Later when these same characters experienced the throes of tremendous life crises, I felt concern for their ability to cope. My empathetic reactions were discomfort at their pain and struggle. I found myself struggling with them as they explored their passions and cheering them on when they expressed themselves in more fulfilling ways.

Meaning

The authors explain their intended reasons for writing the play as a means to study violence and gender. Violence, although it comes in many forms, enters into everyone's

life. We have already discussed, in the "Overview" section, much of the meaning related to violence.

But other themes are important, too. Spirits, compulsions, and obsessions are difficult to confine. In fact, the only way to control these strong forces is by accepting them, understanding them, and redirecting them into gratifying, constructive behavior. Ultimately the individual must exert the necessary controls, using productive means.

Caryl Churchill writes in the author's notes about the transformation in the play:

> At the end of The Bacchae, Agave gives up following Dionysus, but in this play she and the other women stay on the mountain, accepting that they can't go back to their previous lives and welcoming further change; and all the characters change again in their final speeches into new lives that develop from what happened to them while they were possessed (5).

In the work, I understood a strong message to women; that they discover their passions and generate a productive expression for them.

Autonomy

A Mouthful of Birds explores the realm of violence in a new way. Too often men and women are boxed into their old stereotypes of women being peaceful and men violent. The fallacy of these stereotypes is just beginning to be understood and accepted by the public. This play says that violence exists in all women and tenderness in all men. Too

often, women are locked into dispassionate lives which deny their violence. A role they perceive as demanded of them by society. If they choose to let the mainstream of the culture determine their lives, these women will ultimately suffer frustration. Their unique strengths will go ignored and they will busy themselves with lives void of meaning. Similarly, society pressures men not to display emotion, encouraging denial and ultimately frustration.

A Mouthful of Birds also suggests that western culture neglects the spiritual side of life while putting too much emphasis on material wealth. The authors indict equally capitalism, socialism, and marxism. The play reminds the viewer/participants not to forget our own spiritual needs in the mad rush to achieve material wealth.

Analysis of Dress Suits for Hire

Holly Hughes

Overview

The play is about a lesbian love affair. Performance piece or one act play, the work involves two women, a character played by the hand of one of the women, and a mechanical dog. Action takes place in the living room where the two women live. Dialogue reveals the history of the women individually and together.

Action begins when Deeluxe, one of the women, sings a song about wanting to run away from her present life. She then dies, only to come alive again later in the play. While she is dead, however, her lover, Michigan, talks about her sensations as a woman and a lesbian. When Deeluxe reawakens they talk about Deeluxe's desire to leave.

Action continues with narratives about coming out as a lesbian, social ostracism, and Deeluxe's temptation to restart a heterosexual relationship. By the end of piece, the women resume their commitment to one another, but are threatened by Deeluxe's former lover and a letter falling from the rafters which, I think, is a metaphor for the inscription of lesbians as marginal by society.

Style: Time

Time in Dress Suits for Hire is both interior and exterior. Some events take place in clock time. Some

events disregard clock time. For example, during exterior time, the two women discuss their relationship. On the other hand, in interior time sequences, the women explain (often breaking the fourth wall) their past or present. In interior time, Deeluxe sings a song about her feelings of wanting to escape. She is possibly referring to her relationship with Michigan. Also, in interior time, Michigan narrates a myth about a goddess in the Michigan forest. It is a metaphor representing the violation of nature by human beings and the violation of women by men.

These characters explore several different interior realities which exist, one might say, on three simultaneous "planes." One layer of reality is their sexuality. Another layer houses their personalities. A third layer explores their feelings about society. Each reality is continuously in the present.

Style: Space

Space is exterior and interior. The location of most of the action is in an everyday space, a living room. The clothes worn are familiar. The drinks, the sexual interplay and their arguments indicate action taking place in a living room. On the other hand, when Deeluxe's right hand becomes the talking character of Little Peter, the viewer/participant understands that the location for the action has switched to an interior location. Little Peter

becomes a metaphor for Deeluxe's former lover who still has the power to possess her. When her right hand "becomes" Little Peter, Deeluxe speaks for the character and addresses the character as one would a puppet. While Deeluxe is doing this, Michigan speaks to Deeluxe, referring to the hand as a metaphor for Little Peter's power. Thus, from Deeluxe's point of view, the location is interior; from Michigan's point of view, the action is still located in the living room, and is, therefore, exterior.

Style: Sound

Music and aesthetic language is critical to this work. A rhythm is established in the opening song when Deeluxe sings "Run Run Run." The words "Gonna fill my...," repeated many times, create a rhythm reminiscent of wheels turning. Deeluxe wants to run away, as though to make wheel turn "round, round, round." Also established by the rhythm of this song is something we feel in the pit of our stomachs, i.e. that the story will represent something that goes on and on. For example, Deeluxe tells about the first time she knew that girls "turned her on." This was the first time she knew she had a "bad heart." The memory is delicious for Deeluxe, passionate.

> She's got a bad heart. The kind you die from. Runs in the family. I gotta bad heart too. Just not the kind you die from. The kind that makes you wear too much eye makeup. She's my cousin, come up from one of those sweaty states. She wouldn't sweat in a forest fire. Ice wouldn't melt in her mouth. I make a little bet with myself. I can make her sweat. The first time I

> know for sure I got heart problems is when my cousin came to visit. Heat spell (142).

It is followed abruptly by an intrusion of Little Peter, the character present in Deeluxe's hand, who represents not only heterosexuality and a former lover of Deeluxe's, but also, perhaps even more, the intrusion of the male into the lesbian or female world.

The work is sprinkled with song and poetry. Furthermore, each woman has a characteristic style of talking. Michigan uses braggadocio. Deeluxe is more reserved. Both women use metaphor to express their sexual passions and experiences. In fact, the metaphorical speech is so typical of the work that it creates a satirical and even farcical "feel" that characterizes the entire piece. Characters seem to be laughing at themselves.

For example, Michigan speaks about her namesake, the State of Michigan. The narration is simple. This metaphorical story tells about the rape of the state's wildlife by trappers. It represents the violation and domination of women by men. Michigan's sense of helplessness, here expressed as relating to wildlife and gender, also characterizes Michigan's mood throughout the play. She loves Deeluxe, but cannot stop Deeluxe from being drawn to Little Peter. Helplessness is, thus, the key mood of the speech and reflective of Michigan's feelings.

> [What] Michigan was. All she grew was protection from the cold. Beaver protection, and weasel, fisher, marten, mink, red fox, gray fox, catamount, muskrat,

> lynx, and bobcat too. Fur. Pelts. And all of a sudden, Michigan was full of Frenchmen. They set their trap lines out on the ice. Along the Manistee, the Ausable. But the animals they caught didn't die right away they lay out on the ice freezing and snarling and bleeding until the stars, most of them, fled to Canada. And Orion bent down out the January sky and put a silver bullet in their brain. Silver on the brain, they changed. Became monsters out on that ice. Until the Frenchmen came back and the monsters became hats. Fancy hats and pocketbooks. But there was something else out there. Another sort of animal. Or a woman. They always called her a "she." She came along the trap lines before the Frenchmen. She ripped open the steel and tossed it into the Tittabawassee. She set free the monsters.....They said that women were monsters. Because they had teeth in their parts. (151-2).

The easy lyrical quality suggests a narrative poem. The poem moves from myth to reality within the space of a beat. The switch is hardly noticeable. I was lulled by the ease of the rhythms before hearing a cruel indictment of society.

Style: Movement

The fourth wall provides a window into the most intimate moments of this relationship. For example, the author indicates that, "DEELUXE's hand is resting on MICHIGAN's crotch" (140). Violent movement indicating sexuality as a form of domination weaves its way through the work. After Deeluxe's song at the start of the play, her right hand (which we learn later is Little Peter) chokes her to death. She collapses and remains dead during the first segment. Further on in the work, she abruptly "begins to sit, opening a giant fan as she does" (135). Further still, script notes indicate that "(DEELUXE attempts to

exit, but MICHIGAN grabs her breast.)...(DEELUXE's bodice rips. Pearls and magic flowers explode out of it as she breaks away from MICHIGAN.)" (150). Still later:

> (DEELUXE's hand is resting on MICHIGAN' crotch)....("A Man and A Woman" theme music up, DEELUXE takes out her toothpick as MICHIGAN spits her gum out into her hand. They kiss. After the kiss, they replace the toothpick and gum. Music fades as they begin to speak.") (140)

In this surrealistic kaleidoscope of images, while Michigan pours a drink for Deeluxe:

> "(MICHIGAN starts to raise her glass to DEELUXE's, but the upstage window shade flies up. There is a hand at the window with a pinky ring. DEELUXE and MICHIGAN continue staring at the hand as the lights fade down and out.)" (152).

These images of rebirth, the female hand on the other female crotch, the ripping of the clothing, the kiss, and the toast in the face of a despised reality call up powerful meanings from the consciousness of the participant/viewer: birth-death-rebirth in the first, lesbian sexuality defiantly asserted on stage in the second, violent possessiveness in the third, and, finally, women's solidarity in the face of the male challenge.

Style: Environment

The use of costuming creates a suggestion of sexuality. Putting on stockings, ripping a bodice, taking off a robe, broking a string of pearls, all are familiar suggestions of sexuality.

The setting in the piece is a contemporary living room. Special effects include, in the final moments of the play, a prop in the shape of a hand (Little Peter) rising up over a window sill. Also in the final moments, a letter floats down from the rafters.

Style: Actor/Agent

The two principle characters are Deeluxe and Michigan. Another is Little Peter, a disembodied character, and a fourth, Linda, is a mechanical dog whose sole role is to bark when she discovers Deeluxe's body.

Deeluxe and Michigan struggle to stay together and resolve their differences. They mix ecstacy and violence in a moment's time.

Deeluxe is the more traditionally feminine of the two women. She displays some of the passive and passive-aggressive behavior usually attributed to women. It is she who falls victim to the violence of both Little Peter and Michigan. She also defers to Michigan. For example, when, after expressing a desire to go to California, Michigan insists Deeluxe stay at home, Deeluxe submits without a word. Through the tension created by Little Peter, we learn that Deeluxe is the most vulnerable to male interference. Little Peter's seductive attempts rattle Deeluxe's composure. His coaxing lures her to resume her former relationship with the him:

LITTLE PETER: She may be weary,
Women do get weary,
Wearing the same shabby dress.
And when she's weary,
Try a little tenderness.
(To DEELUXE.) Yeah, go on and try it sucker, see what it'll get you.
DEELUXE: I can do it.
LITTLE PETER: We aren't talking about an "it" here to do. We are talking skirt, a woman, a Jane.
DEELUXE: So?
LITTLE PETER: So you don't do a woman. You handle her.
DEELUXE: Like you used to handle me, huh.
LITTLE PETER: Correction, carrot brain, like I did, do, and will handle you.
DEELUXE: Stay outta this.
LITTLE PETER: I'll sit out this fox-trot, but I'll be around (142).

When Michigan narrates a story about the moment when her lesbian identity was realized, she uses language more characteristic of disease, uncleanliness or inferiority. She refers to her sexual physicality as being "stuck in the mud," "animal," and "bad heart." She speaks in "macho" terms. There is an air of braggadocio about her manner, her language, and her behavior. Here, she speaks of Deeluxe's relationship with Little Peter:

> Maybe I was as big a sucker as him. Even a dog's got sense to be afraid of cats. One look at her pelt and I went stupid. Maybe I was as big a sucker as him. I knew what a hundred-fifty pounds of killer pussy'd do to a man. What I didn't know is what it could do to a woman....
> DEELUXE: You can see into the future, can't you? (138).

The dialogue reveals the intensity of desire in the lesbian relationship. It also casts the mood of foreboding which

suggests that the beginning of the play, portraying Deeluxe as dead, may be the final chronological event of the work.

Feeling

The feelings of the characters are many layered. Michigan acts tough. Her words are tough. Contrasting with this is her devotion to Deeluxe and her concern about other women and the environment. Deeluxe, on the other hand, struggles openly with her sexual identity and her attraction to her former relationship with a man. She speaks:

> I see it. Looks familiar. Looks like me. That was the year I was living alone in Bad Axe. Just wouldn't move in with him. "What's the difference?" he'd say. Then he'd go off and leave me trying whether to decide whether to be a lesbian today or put it off till tomorrow (145).

Later she describes her lesbian sexuality:

> I was never right
> Look into my eyes
> See the trouble
> See the fire under water
> ....
> There's no other way your ham sure hits my spot
> And if that don't grease the clock
> You gotta pump it.
> I call my private Jesus on the pay telephone
> Down on my knees in a booth filled with piss
> Asking the King Of Love won'tcha please
> Strike me dead (150).

Feelings expressed by the actor/agent include fear, love, and hate. The representation of emotion includes Michigan's braggadocio. Deeluxe expresses tender feelings towards

Michigan while she experiences painfully confused feelings about her Little Peter relationship.

Regarding the feelings of the viewer/participant, again, I can only speak for myself. My expressions of emotion included laughter at the mechanical dog, shock at the sexual violence, understanding of the political and social statement that the on-stage, intimate woman to woman sexuality made. My experience of feeling included initial confusion as a result of Deeluxe's death and then reawakening. I was upset when Michigan treated Deeluxe roughly. I was delighted at the openness of the woman to woman sexually. I enjoyed having woman working together to help each other solve problems. I was fascinated by the Little Peter character and amazed at how a hand could almost come alive enough to become an actor/agent. My empathetic reaction included being upset by the hand/Little Peter character because that actor/agent upset the two women.

Meaning

The tensions in the relationship, the pain and inevitability of admitting lesbian sexuality, the exploration of both the pull of heterosexuality and the presence of male domination, and the necessity for the unity of women in face of male domination are all themes in the play.

The play lends itself to the analytical pen of several schools of criticisms: Lacanian, feminist, and deconstructionist. These approaches to analyzing content are important, because, by their very multiplicity, they dislodge the tradition that one interpretation holds all the credibility.

A Lacanian interpretation would see these women as twice castrated: physiologically and socially. The Lacanian theorist might also view these women as marginal to mainstream society. They are powerless in the face of "The Father," which means the domination of the male in modern society. The descent of the letter at the end would be viewed with great significance. "Letter" often represents "The Word." "The Word" refers to texts which the Lacanians explain have inscribed male domination within the public arena: the biblical, philosophic, and political thinkers who are male and who insist upon the superiority of the male. Deeluxe mistrusts Christ because Christianity defines the female body only in term of an object for reproduction or male gratification. She feels rejected by the religion.

A feminist viewpoint favors this female centered world. The thematic trends characteristic of feminist plays are clearly present in the work.[2] For the lesbian (woman-

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[2]Feminist thematic trends within plays by women about women address the following issues: social oppression, domestic oppression, the relationship of mothers and daughters as seen from the daughters experience, the search for autonomy, the examination of women as friends supporting and interacting with

centered woman) who is heterosexual, the work has tremendous personal impact as it does for the lesbian who is homosexual. The play focuses on the problems of being a woman both personal and societal. This very focus by the author inscribes Woman as being worthy of being at the center of a literary work. I see the implication being that women may be inscribed as marginal by some (including the Lacanians), but they when you see these characters so filled with life on stage (or feel them come alive from the page), it is impossible to called them "marginal."

The deconstructionists examine the ability of the work to attack the metaphysics and culture of the occidental world (Derrida 134). Thus, any judgment about a text providing multiple meanings, particulary those meanings which expand or even run counter to the mainstream culture, may be thought of as deconstructionist. One example of a deconstructionist analysis of this text is therefore showing that this text challenges the traditional concept of what is thought of as the essence of Woman. Woman in Dress Suits for Hire is portrayed as both aggressive and passive, decisive and indecisive, lustful and tender, violent and peaceful. When a woman, as does Deeluxe with Little Peter, falls under the influence of a man, it is something to be fought against. It is not desirable, in this work, for a

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each other. (Byers-Pevitts 176).

woman to be an object of man's desires, whether as subservient wife, baby maker, or sexual toy.

The last image of the work is the two women, glasses raised to a toast, suddenly dislodged from their solidarity by the vision of the rebirth of Little Peter's hand. One might call this a horror story for the inevitable recurrence of male dominion over the female that the play depicts. In this way, for me, the work demands that the lesbian world not be marginalized by society.

Autonomy

This section as mentioned earlier is a very personal one. I must answer the question about whether this piece kept my attention and gave me something fresh to add to my thinking about the world. What got my attention in Dress Suits for Hire were the clever songs, narratives, Little Peter/hand character, a dead woman on stage for so long, an all-woman cast, interesting characters, the sexual violence, the colorful language. What kept my attention and I think why the piece will remain unforgettable, is my experience of feeling the ferocious passions of this lesbian love relationship. I feel as though I lived in that relationship for a while and it inspired in me a sense that these passions are the similar to the ones I have for my own family. Although Michigan by her brusque manner defied me to care about Deeluxe and her, I did care about what

happened to them. I felt her love for Deeluxe. I was sad when Little Peter and the letter seemed to threaten their lives together.

I go back to my statement earlier that the work demands that the lesbian world not be marginalized by society. This piece showed me that even if certain aspects of society (through the law, religion, and so forth) marginalize it, the lesbian world is real and focal.

Analysis of The Screens

Jean Genet

Overview

The Screens is about both sides of the screen, i.e. the image projected and the image protected. In the play, an individual (and a country) is a screen. Onto this screen, other people project their stereotyped view or image of that person. Then, upon looking in the mirror, the individual sees the stereotype. Upon seeing this image and thinking it her own, the individual tries to mimic, and even perfect, the image, resulting in a reinforcement of the stereotyped behavior. For example, The General, in The Screens, says, "I'm wondering, after twenty-eight years in the service, if I hadn't admired my martial bearing in a mirror, would I have been brave enough to defend it?" (125). Or as The Lieutenant says, "It's not a matter of intelligence, but of perpetuating an image that's more than ten centuries old, that grows stronger and stronger as that which it represents crumbles, (119).

In the play, the French are their stereotypes as seen by the Algerians. The French are superficial, more interested in how they look in the mirror than in depth of character. The French live for the memory of past glory. They live and die for an antiquated image of their country.

Their family life is empty. They are vain, selfish, and blind. Soldiers are cruel, fighting machines.

The Algerian Moslems are their stereotypes as seen by the French. To the French in The Screens, the Moslems are are animals. So Genet has the characters make animal sounds. The Algerians are slovenly, immoral, and stupid. They are backward and still believe in superstitions like the mediums that are hired by the mourners to talk to their deceased loved ones. They are perpetual beggars or jailbirds. They never take responsibility for their actions. Even the killing of a soldier by a partisan was "an accident." They are incompetent idiots who, once independent, will only reestablish a new pecking order and destroy any chance the country might have for prosperity.

This pecking order is expressed in the three main characters: first is The Mother; beneath her is her son, Said; and beneath him, his wife, Leila, who is the lowest of the low. She is even too stupid to find the land of the dead when she dies. She gets lost.

Death, in The Screens, is the great equalizer. Only after characters die and burst through the screens, do they come to understand and accept one another as multi-dimensioned human beings, not stereotypes.

Style: Time

Time is most often interior time although at first reading it would appear that time was exterior. However, because Genet is portraying stereotypical behavior, dialogue is not that of self-motivated characters, but is rather the creation of the image maker.

Action is often simultaneous. For example, in one scene, Said is in prison. Leila is on the other side of the prison wall talking to him about escaping. The Moslem Guard comments on the couple's incessant chatter and affection for each other. The voice of a man condemned for sneakily killing his mother is heard saying that if he had it to do over, he would stab her frontally. The Lieutenant addresses five French Legionnaires about the glories of dying for France. Mr. and Mrs. Blankensee, French Algerians, fearfully listen as an Algerian intruder penetrates their rose garden.

Ironically, time becomes exterior when characters move to the land of the dead. Here, they become self-motivated characters. They loose their projected images and speak from their own experiences.

Style: Space

Space is interior throughout most of the work. Because Genet portrays stereotypical characters, they do not represent ostensibly self-motivated actor/agents, but rather screens for the projection of one-dimensional images.

As mentioned above, ironically, when action moves to the land of the dead and characters have figuratively and literally broken through the screens, they become self-motivated actor/agents speaking in clock-time, but remain in the imaginary space of the land of the dead.

Here "anything is possible." The dead proceed through transitional periods. At first, they are available for both the dead to see them and even address them while they are not fully aware of being dead. Once they become aware, they nevertheless act as though they are alive. It is reminiscent of what Euripides said, quoted earlier, "Who knows, if life here be not really death, and death in turn be life?"

Style: Sound

Genet portrays a potpourri of voices and sounds. Characters represent almost every walk of life, both French and Algerian. The language reflects the stereotypes:

> Our leaders have always encouraged us to regard ourselves as perfect objects, ever more perfect, hence more insensitive, wonderful death-dealing machines (The [French] General, 127).

> Did they [the French] let you [whore house customer/soldier] do anything else? They didn't. So? Here what do you fuck? Us."
> (Warda, the Algerian whore, 20).

Because one of the French stereotypes for the Algerian Moslem is that they live like animals, Genet has the Algerian Moslems making animal sounds:

> The Mother: ...Can you do the rooster?
> Leila: (intently): Cock...cock...cock-a-doodle-doo!
> The Mother (angrily): That's a damaged rooster. I won't have it! Do it again.
> Leila (in a vibrant voice): Cock-a-doodle-doo!....
>
> [stage directions:] We hear the imaginary barnyard sounds which Leila is imitating off-stage. The Mother doubles up with laughter that mingles with the crowing of cocks and cooing of pigeons.) (29).

Towards the end of the play, Sir Harold comes on stage crowing, "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" The revolution is won. Other sounds, including the scatological, are not left out. The following are French soldiers speaking about The Lieutenant who is dying in battle.

> Jojo:....he won't be on French soil, ...but even so we can...
> Roger:....When I left home, I filled up with local air. I unpleat my asshole and my country surrounds me.
> Jojo (very gently): Since that's all we've got...the Lieutenant'll have the illusion of dying on home soil....
>
> [stage directions:] Roger himself goes and places his ass above The Lieutenant's face. Nestor slaps his own face with his finger and makes a farting sound (153).

This kind of raw humanity is sprinkled throughout the play. It is a conceit that, among other things, reminds the

audience that even if the characters are stereotypes, they do refer to the real human beings behind the images.

Sound effects to describe events are used throughout; sometimes they are made off stage; other times they are developed by any character who happens to be onstage. The sound of burning is heard in the wings when the fire of the revolution is drawn on the screens. Leila makes the sound of the wind later on.

Style: Movement

Movement centers literally as well as figuratively (as we discussed before) around the screens. Actors enter the stage from behind the screens. Actors sketch events on the screens. Characters also break through the screens to enter the land of the dead. The movement around the screens is carefully orchestrated in the script. As mentioned above, multiple locations each with their own screens can be simultaneously active.

Pantomime is used throughout the play. The violence of death by gunfire is metaphorically presented by pantomime. A relationship is portrayed by a pantomime:

> The Sergeant (He takes out a package of cigarettes. He drops one. The lieutenant picks it up and hands it to him. Without a word The Sergeant puts it into his mouth): Got it. (81).

Genet is very specific about his stage directions. Here is one example taken from the introduction to Scene Seventeen, (part) VI:

> First floor. Screen representing the interior of a house, right. Leila and her husband emerge from behind the screen. Leila, her hair very neatly combed, squats in front of her husband, who walks about impatiently, and polishes his shoes (184).

"Polishing his shoes" implies a man both poor and socially inept. A rich man would have someone polish his shoes. A "polished" or cultured man would know not to shine his shoes outside his house because it is a sign that he is not rich enough to afford someone at home, like a butler or an obedient wife, to do it for him.

Style: Environment

The set for the screens is vertical as well as horizontal. Three stories of screens appear and disappear throughout the play. The screens appear in different configurations and colors. Actors draw scenes and objects on the screens. For example, the outbreak of the revolution is represented by the drawing of fire.

Costuming is also critical. Genet writes in the initial stage directions:

> If possible, they will be masked. If not, highly made-up, painted (even the soldiers). Excessive make-up, contrasting with the realism of the costumes. It is best to provide a large variety of false noses--I shall indicate the form of some of these as the characters appear. At times, false chins as well. All this should be artfully harmonized with the colors of the costumes. No face should retain the conventional beauty of feature which is played up all to often on both stage and screen. In addition to the imagination of directors, there are thousands of new plastics that can be used in presenting plays nowadays.

> The Arabs are to wear very curly, oakum wigs. Their complexion is--as the expression goes---swarthy (10).

Thus, instructions are given that The Mother's toe nails are painted violet, each in a different shade. Early on in the play, three French characters are dressed in French costume of the 1840's (this was another revolutionary period in French history). Later on, they appear in rags to show the desolation of the French image. Holes in costumes are often referred to both in the script and in the stage directions. Characters also are "full of holes" when they are shot.

Style: Actor/Agent

Each actor plays five or six of the ninety-eight characters. They represent the spectrum of French and Algerian society just prior to the revolution. Nevertheless, an Algerian elite is missing from this character list. There are no Algerian bureaucrats, technicians, business people, and sophisticated leaders portrayed in the play. To a large extent, this reflected the reality in Algeria at the time of the revolution. Upon their departure from Algeria, the French did not leave behind an equally skilled cadre of Algerians.

Directions about the style of acting are very specific, "The Acting: To be extremely precise. Very taut. No useless gestures. Every gesture must be visible." (10)

These stage directions suggest doll-like movements and emphasis the stereotypical nature of the character portrayal, make-up, and costuming.

Feelings

A paradox is created when I ask: What do the actor/agents feel? If the actor/agent represents a stereotype, then, what do stereotypes feel? The people being stereotyped are treated as objects having no feelings. Genet portrays screens not people. Nevertheless, I, as the viewer/participant, react with emotion to the representation of the characters who transcend their stereotyped portrayals, because the gestalt of the character portrayal is larger than any one part of that portrayal.

My feelings for the characters only grew after I was able to understand that what I was reading was meant to be stereotypical responses and that there was another layer, a deeper one, to these characters which I had to discover. When I found out that in performance, the character Said was sympathetic (a colleague saw the Guthrie production), I probed deeper into the text. I noticed, after rereading the play, that the dialogue of other characters or behavioral patterns of the character in question often revealed another dimension to the one-sided portrait. For example, although Said is represented as a bumbling, pathetic idiot (the French stereotype for Algerian Moslems), the French soldiers

refer to him as a threat and his comrades (towards the conclusion of the work) as someone worthy of respect. And although Said verbally assaults Leila, he nevertheless remains loyal to her and she, to him.

Once I understood that the characters operated in the interior space of those that formed the stereotypes, I was able to sense the suffering and the joy that must exist behind the projected stereotypes. I, then, was able to experience empathetic reactions to the sadness and hopelessness created by the poverty, the chaos, and the bleak future that the Algerians faced.

I sensed that although the Algerian characters were happy at the success of the revolution, they anticipated a bleak road after victory. I found the play characterized by a sense of foreboding. In fact, history has shown that the road has been difficult for the Algerian national effort.

Meaning

Kate Millet writes about Genet's work:

> an attitude of rebellious intransigence, which with Genet's expanding sympathy and humanity, his increasing interest in politics, grows into an identification with oppressed groups of both sexes: maids, Blacks, Algerians, proles, all those who are in the feminine or subordinate role toward capital, racism, or empire. The negative aspect of femininity as a slave mentality is now one which its victims struggle against with increasing fury, at first with futile self-destructiveness in <u>The Maids</u>, then with growing understanding and success in each succeeding play....Not until <u>The Screens</u> does Genet's identification with purely feminine circumstances

> clearly and decisively emerge....in The Screens, it is the women who are the revolution (Study Guide, 45).

Millet later points out that, because the play satirizes both sides equally, it is popular neither in France nor Algeria.

As of this writing, the foreboding that I sensed in the play about the future of the Algerian national struggle has been born out by history. Algeria continues to struggle against oppression In fact, the struggle for Algerian freedom is not over. Kim Murphy writes in the Los Angeles Times, June 5, 1990:

> Since independence in 1962, Algeria had been dominated by a single ruling party, and it was sinking under a cumbersome state-owned economy that was producing at less than a third of its capacity. Then, in little over a year, it legalized 23 political parties, adopted a new constitution, opened the door to limited foreign investment and asked hundreds of major state industries to begin turning a profit (Los Angeles Times, p. 1).

In the year 1989, when The Guthrie Theatre produced The Screens, the world saw the demise of numerous socialist and marxist regimes toppled by those struggling for political freedom and economic viability. The oppressed continue to struggle and to suffer. The Screens and its author, Jean Genet, have become metaphors for that struggle.

Autonomy

I read the play and have the distinct impression that the reading of the play does not communicate the passions that a live production can create. Because the dialogue is

meant to disguise the true character of the stereotypes, and because all I had was the dialogue, my reactions are bound to be on a more intellectual level than it would be during a live production. The colleague who saw the Guthrie production said the characters of Said and Leila were tremendously sympathetic; the character of Said, particularly magnetic. The production exuded the explosive passions of the time and brought the viewer closer to sympathizing with the struggles of third world countries.

Most of all, my colleague expressed the overwhelming sense of oppression that the performance portrayed, e.g. the oppression that characterizes life in the third world countries and particularly the among women who live there. In this Diane Akalaitis' production, women as revolutionary leaders was highlighted. In the text, these women are the characters with the most depth and dignity and receive the most respect from the other characters. This portrayal of women as successful revolutionaries is consistent with Kate Millet's comments earlier about Genet's portrayal of women as metaphor for the various stages leading to liberation, i.e. first, subordination; second rebellion, at first unsuccessful; third, independence.

For the most part, my reaction was one of admiration for the clever approach of creating characters who acted out their roles as stereotypes. I was fascinated when I realized that Genet used stereotypical identities to

disguise positive attributes, reflecting what happens in real life. This became clear after a few references from other characters to the positive attributes of the depraved stereotypes.

I felt a sense of irony at the jubilation of the socialist victory in Algeria in the late 50's as celebrated in the play because, just thirty years later, in 1989, so many socialist countries toppled--proven failures. My reaction was a feeling of satisfaction that the communist/Marxist way to relieve oppression has been largely unsuccessful. This reality made the democratic, capitalistic way we live with in the United States look superior in spite of its limitations. It made me want to work harder within the system to relieve the oppression that some experience here at home.

The difficulty I had with "getting to the bottom" of The Screens underlines the impact that plays are meant for the theatre. The aesthetic experience is heightened when the viewer/participant sees the page on the stage and not the other way around as I did with The Screens. I found the reading difficult because the emotional dimension was so deeply disguised by Genet. However, given the fact that I did not have the opportunity of seeing the play, the process the outline provided enable me to reach the window I needed to enter into the work and experience it.

Conclusion

This thesis presents a comprehensive tool for describing theatrical works. The logical analysis of the feelings experienced by the audience is at the core of the methodology. The methodology considers feelings to be intentional acts. Feelings are produced when a viewer/participant gives meaning to a part of a work. It also assumes that the meaning of a work produces feelings in the viewer/participant. Because the common characteristic of all aesthetic works is the experience of feelings, this analysis, although specifically adapted to theatrical works, can be applied to all aesthetic works.

Action is not considered to be the sequence of cause and effect related events on stage. Rather, action, in the representation, occurs as an interplay or interaction between the interior time and space realities of the viewer/participant with the representation. Thus, action is considered to be the experience of feelings by the viewer/participant.

By analyzing feelings and acting as facilitators to the analysis of feelings by those who are in the teaching field, the analyzer learns a great deal about the experience of life not only by the characters in the play, but also, as a teacher, by the viewer/participants in the classroom who experienced a work. This enriches the total aesthetic experience.

Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the analyzer broadens the repertoire of emotions; using Stein's concept of

empathy, the analyzer distinguishes the specifically empathetic feelings from other personal feelings.

The importance of using Cassirer's concept of myth is that it highlights the richness of myth-making in the aesthetic work as well as the importance of guarding the ability of authors to use myth in the aesthetic arena. Myth is considered to be the mixture of more than one explanatory paradigm; such as the use of science and religion to explain events.

This approach also encourages many interpretations to any one work and personalizes those interpretations. There is no one essence to any piece. Nevertheless, the content of the work is of principle interest only to the extent that it creates an emotional reaction in the viewer/participant.

In conclusion, placing the experiential dimension at the heart of this evaluation may have far reaching implications in determining which works are valued more than others, whether they be theatrical works or other aesthetic creations. Looking at audience reaction rather then self-contained elements of the work as a way to articulate the aesthetic experience, broadens the avenues of appreciation and enables the interested viewer, novice or sophisticate, to communicate what has heretofor evaded us: a comprehensive, rational analysis of the aesthetic experience.

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