

The Impact of Theatre on English Political Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Theater and politics are historically and socially connected to each other, politics is practically theatrical, and Theater has always been colored with Politics throughout the changing of the political movements. Both of these fields had been originated from the same fundamental sources which are (power and persuasion). They are completely different expressions of the same concept, and this can be seen in the shared (Theatrical-Political) focus on argument. Theater and Politics have the same target, which is "convincing people" and lead them to certain conclusions. Politics and Theater focus on getting people to believe what the speaker is saying. The speaker of Theater or Politics requires his audience to believe in his character and the world he creates. The politician, requires his followers to trust in his decisions, and delegate the authority to him. In this way, Politics and Theater are both principally regarded as tools of Persuasion, a functions of the power one person has in relation to his audiences. As representation of the power , Theater gives the permission for experimentation in human relationships, or an examination of the society and the power relationships contained within it. Theatre can be a tool for illuminating what the power structures exist now, or arguing for which structures should exist. By revisiting the theatre's history with a view informed in political theory, i attempt to outline the changing impacts implied by different theatrical movements throughout the development of English Theater. Unlike other kinds of literature, the result of the examination of the power through the use of theatre relies on what the spectators received from a piece of theatrical work and give this piece the capacity to be a useful political experience. One act of theatrical play can have a multitude messages and discoveries of power that are worth pursuing. Theater can fulfill this function by allowing the participants to live through whatever power struggle can be imagined and learn something about power through the experience. Audiences of the theater also live vicariously through the performers, and have some knowledge as well.

Keywords: Drama, Theater, Politics, Power, Authority, Persuasion.

INTRODUCTION

Theater and Politics are different expressions of the same concept. This can be seen in the shared theatrical or political argument. Theater and Politics have the same target which is convincing people by leading them to certain directions and get people to believe what someone is saying. The performer carries his audience to accept his thoughts and his character and lead them to accept the new world he creates. Politician requires his followers to trust in his decisions and entrust authority to him. In this way, politics and theater are both principally the tools of persuasion, a function of the power one person has in relation to other people. Power is inherent in all relationships between people, working in concert to create new things. politics is a function of power and so do the theatre. As an expression of power, Theater allows for experimentation in human relationships and an examination of the society and the power relationships contained within it. Theater can be a tool for illuminating what power structures exist now, or arguing for which structures should exist.

Theatre, Religion and politics:

The rise of the "Catholic Church" was frankly detrimental to the development of the English theater. It was seen as an immoral venture and 'Against Christian Ethics and Values'. The early "church Fathers" particularly hated, and refused the prospect of the theater. "Tertullian", the first Christian author and producer of the extensive corpus of Latin Christian literature, warned against the sin of the spectacle, saying that Theater inspires a "violent agitation of the soul". He argued that it represents a very negative loss of self-control (Carlson, 28). "St.

Augustine of Hippo" also did the same against the theater, regarding it as a kind of 'Roman paganism and decadence', calling the idea of inspiring passions of "Pity and Fear" as sinful (Carlson, 29). Augustine, called this catharsis perverse because it draws the audience into feeling for the tragic hero and his suffer, and being truly unable to help him.

The Christian church used the theater to express "Preach Values" such as 'innocence' and 'virtue' which took the form of "morality plays" or "mysteries." This form of plays used 'Abstract Concepts' as characters rather than 'Individuals', and attempted to show their universality as well as applicability to the audience. The most famous, and the best example of this form is "Everyman" from the 15th century (Nicoll, 164). This play is talking about an 'average person', called "Everyman," detailing his death, and then his entrance to the afterlife. This play regarded as an explicit piece of 'Religious Dogma' and presented in a very effective structure, to follow the goal of the 'Medieval Church Theatre' by teaching a very specific moral lesson to the audiences, to spread the views of the church. The play was very effective, because of the "Unknown Playwright, has made his figures, despite their abstract names, vital human characters" (Nicoll 165). It was regarded as a typical representation of all the 'Church Teachings', in an accessible form. this is not surprising that the form of the play was allowed to continue, and grow under the influence of the Church. The individual subordination, who wanted, and desired "Divine Reward" is a powerful tool, and promoted the influence of the Church for centuries.

Renaissance and political theatre:

The Renaissance was a complete re-working of current ideas in all disciplines and a celebration of Man and Reason. Drama of this period reflected the secular turn and the power structures reflected in theatre changed perceptibly. Indeed, the 'animating spirit of that time was secular rather than religious' (Roberts 108). Drama shifted its focus away from the religious abstraction to the secular themes of individuals and their struggles. This kind of change, allowed for more direct display of 'Power and Power struggles' between individuals or groups, even internally. This kind of theatre had much different goals than in the Middle Ages, showing a kind of characters who live or die by their own behavior, rather than Fate or "hamartia". The stories depicted involved more 'realistic interactions' and attempt at real characterization, rather than the medieval focus on 'Concepts'. Despite the differences from earlier theatre, the Renaissance theatre also has the ability to "delight and instruct" the audiences in a secular sense. We should mention two most great playwrights of the Renaissance in particular who prioritizing this 'individual focus', "Niccolo Machiavelli" and "William Shakespeare". Both playwrights are very concerned with the Power relationships. Their conclusions about the use of the power have very different conclusions, expressing their conclusions through the depiction of the fate of their protagonists. Yet Machiavelli is best known for his theories about politics, but his comedy drama "*Mandragola*" was very important as well. It is recognized as highly political, Despite its comedy stile, by offering a 'biting criticism' of the society he was lived in. The plot of the play was rather "Straightforward", when Machiavelli disregarding 'self-reliance', even if it is accompanied with a complete disregard for morals. Machiavelli prioritized his belief that "The End Justifies the Means". "Swindle" is a particular weapon of Machiavelli's heroes. They tell lies and keep secrets, even bribe the Church for the help of their goals. This form of theater is very direct commentary about the concept of power, "Take What You Want and Do it Any Way You Can". Callimaco and the others simulated *The Prince*, they are practical to the last and is able to disregard everyone in order to obtain happiness (emachiavelli.com). This argument has an obvious implications for society (Boal, 66/67). These concepts definitely still resonate with modern society and have rarely been as boldly stated. When compared to Machiavelli, the messages of Shakespeare are more complex, not because he wrote more plays than him, but also because of the depth and detail in all his works of drama. His tragedies are easier to identify the reflections of power by tracing the development of drama from the classical forms we have examined. Vera Mowry Roberts puts it in her book "*On Stage*":

"William Shakespeare produced Plays, as marvelous in their way, as those of 'Sophocles' had been. He balanced Plot and Character. He integrated main, and subplots. He used elements of Romance, and he reconciled Comedy and Tragedy, By using comedy to heighten the tragic effect. He is our greatest dramatic genius; not only for the characters he created and his magnificent poetry, but for his consummate skill in Dramaturgy, and his most explicit and effective use of the theatre for which he wrote. In his plays the Classic tradition and medieval heritage are wonderfully combined and blended." Roberts, 144.

Shakespeare's dramatic works have a lot of discussion, regarding Authority and Power. In *'Macbeth'*, he portrays a familiar plot about someone who was lusting for Power and Authority, taking them by force; but eventually destroyed for his greed and pride. This form of drama is greatly similar to the Greek tragedies. Macbeth and his Lady can be understood as tragic heroes, who are destroyed for their guilt. However, Shakespeare was much more than Greek Tragedians; his characters are truly *'Multidimensional' individuals rather than 'Abstractions'* (Boal, 62). The spectators can be empathized with Macbeth; but at the end, it is his lack of willpower to resist his Lady as well as his pride; all that lead to his destruction. This is the more direct message about the connection with the Power than the Greek. Rather than heroes being destroyed for simply being doomed or flawed. It is because of the choices they make. Macbeth and his eschewed their rightful place and attempted to force their way to the top of 'Power', but they were destroyed. *"Richard III"* did the same things to get Power, but ends up punished. Both Richard III and Macbeth were destroyed for their ignoring the morals, and doing what is in favor of getting what they wanted but not what they deserve. Both of them worked hard, using violence and coercion, rather than legitimate 'Dialogue' or 'Political' processes. By punishing these *'power-hungry character's'*, Shakespeare was clearly arguing against this *Machiavellian* behavior, in which, such 'Deception' and 'Ambition' are rewarded. Shakespeare condemned illegitimate attempts to the Power in the form of 'Treachery' or 'Violence', showing that the power's rewards are impermanent and unworthy. He would seem to be arguing for more 'Just' and considerate action, using legitimate Power and Dialogue.

Both Shakespeare and Machiavelli told intriguing plots with developing Characters, and the lengths they go to, in order to the form of 'Succeed Individuals' who exhibited personal selfish, or opportunistic traits. In previous times, this kind of motivations were not represented in Theater, but as a secular nature of the Renaissance, encouraged the realistic view of the society. These dramatists of the Renaissance were examining the way that people interact, and the intricacies of Power between them with special focus on the theme of 'Lust for Authority and Power'. Although they come to different conclusions, Machiavelli and Shakespeare deal with the same questions about Authority and Power. The connections to the power are represented in the relationships between Man and Woman, Slave and Master, and even between the Nearest Friends. The essentials in the tragedies of Shakespeare and Machiavelli are the 'Character's willingness' to seek their personal goals at the expense of others and use them for their own ends. These behaviors do not represent the 'True Power', one should be able to convince people without resorting to the use of Wealth, Lies or Violence.

With this in mind, we can see Shakespeare arguing for a sort of power, and Machiavelli against it.

Modern political Theatre :

Moving into the 20th Century, even *"Realism"* was seen by some as a restrictive movement to the playwrights. The confines of portraying life 'Realistically' limited the creative playwrights of the theatre. Many 'Movements' raised in this period to reject the Realism's tenets; although they did not argued Realism's goals. *'Surrealism'*, *'Absurdism'*, *'Dada'* and *'Expressionism'*; all these Movements had focused on the portraying of life in more different and complicated way than the normal. In these types of theater, the message of the artistic work is more important than its content. The messages of these sort of works are extremely 'difficult' to determine, and based on 'complicated techniques' that performed the characters on the theatre. For these controversial kind of playwrights, "Art" as a concept is more "stretched" and examined to find out just what individuals are willing to accept.

Theater of the "Absurd" is focusing on the portraying of the 'Meaninglessness' of the modern life and individual's questions about the reason of his 'Being' by reflecting 'Nonsensical' and 'Arguing thoughts and events on the stage. 'Absurd Theater' often presents a feeling of 'Meaninglessness', 'Hopelessness' and 'Ignorance' of life that the majority of people feel in this time. *"Samuel Beckett"* is another playwright who regarded as the father of the 'Absurd Theater'. He explored 'Helplessness' in an 'extremely poignant' form in his Masterpiece *"Waiting for Godot"*, a Drama *"in which nothing happens"* (Crabb). The Characters of this play are typically strange as well as their dilemma. Both of the play's protagonists "Estragon and Vladimir" are stuck to each other and waiting for someone called 'Godot' along a 'Road'. Simply; despite their waiting for a long time, 'Godot' never comes. They keep waiting for "him?" and trying to fill their time of waiting in any possible way. Brilliantly, Beckett makes this situation interesting and compelling to the play's spectator. His main characters are trapped and even contemplate hanging themselves to escape the monotony and confinement of their world. However they lose the contentment even to do this, thus being denied their most basic right of ending life, are truly in the depths of

'Powerlessness'. There are many different political and social interpretations to Beckett's "*Waiting for Godot*", and he, himself refused to elaborate on his masterpiece. The meaning of this drama certainly changed depending on how you read it, however, it is difficult to argue with its public strength. The characters of the play perfectly represent the modern human Powerlessness through indecision and ignorance. The protagonists didn't know who is 'Godot' and if they are in the right time or place, and even why they should wait. They don't know the roles of the world they live in and they are confused in memory as well. The world of the play is quite strange and unusual for the spectator which put him in the same powerless position as the protagonists. *Waiting for Godot* It is a strong examination of personal relations between the characters and a warning against the modern danger of isolation without meaning. If the character Godot is read as God, it is also a very critical account of religion – casting it as a pointless endeavor that accounts to a waste of time. Perhaps Beckett is arguing for protecting your own power in the world, because his characters in their powerlessness are rather bleak and does not seem to be someone to emulate. It seems that the only thing his characters do understand is their inability to find meaning – "... in an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness" (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, beckett.net).

CONCLUSION

The exist of theater is demandable to examine the power of the social relationships between people and decide whether to change it or not. Theater's art is useful to specify political problems and creates a series of imagined circumstances. One act of theater can have many potential messages and discoveries about the nature of power and society that are worth pursuing. Theater can fulfill this function by allowing participants to live through whatever power struggle can be imagined and learn something about power through the experience. The spectators of theater also live vicariously through the performers and gain some knowledge as well. The primary conclusion of the potential of these theatrical techniques and methods is that a political theater should fulfill a didactic and enlightening role. Identifying political realities and essentially judging them, while offering alternatives to current situations and experimenting in new arrangements of power. Rather than serve as mere entertainment, the theater could be used as a political platform to take some of the uncertainty out of political science and bring the democratic citizen into a thoughtful engagement with their political life. As the purpose of art is to share ideas and initiate dialogue. The artist should have something to say to the audience, and believe that theater is the most effective way to have that discussion. And as an art form solely focused upon the interactions of individuals, the theater is well equipped to deal with questions of politics and it's power shed light on society's problems and participate in the attempt to solve them.

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