

Drama: In the Making

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Of all art, drama is that which expresses the dynamics of life most directly and undistortedly in that the shape and pattern of it is faithfully contained in its form. One must catch the dynamics of life in the drama because that is the essence which shapes the drama. The act of shaping is not only left to the author and the artists of the theatre but also to the audience. The faculty which assist the shaping is the histrionic sensibility possessed by all concerned. It is stimulated by visions created by the imagination to produce tangible forms on stage. Visions created in the mind are varied of course, but there is enough uniformity in the human mind for common understanding. The common understanding in drama is rooted in such physical qualities as the rhythm of life of growth and decay, of systole and diastole, and a constant but slow progress. These give to drama its kernel and the histrionic faculty of all concerned helps to produce a recognizable shape on the stage.

Art expresses the dynamics of life. Art as *œuvre* is the virtual dynamic image of life¹. But of all art, drama is that which expresses this dynamics most directly and undistortedly, in that the shape and pattern of it is faithfully contained within the form. The shape of the plum is determined by the shape of its "pit", the kernel. One can discern what the plum is like from its appearance but its essence can only be known by knowing the "pit." The extent to which the kernel's shape shapes the stuff of drama is owing to the creative intuition of the playwright, actors, directors and all concerned in the making of a play. However, the audience's participation in the creating is necessary also. There must be, therefore, a shared "pit" which "they may create upon." *Histrionicity*, the faculty in the making of drama, will shape the stuff from and on the "pit." It is a faculty which makes drama what it is, and shared by all participating in the making.

It is possible to see parallels in drama and in ritual, and even possible to detect a partial origin of drama in the ritual. Both are often mistakenly identified because similarity exists in their vital conditioning, that is, the participation of the congregation/audience. However, in no way is the actual participation of those presiding over ritual and those participating in drama identical. Those presiding over a ritual will necessarily be in full agreement and will believe in every detail of its procedure. Their belief will urge them into an active participation in the ritual for it must be accomplished properly and effectively since it is essentially a prayer, a supplication, for an immediate peace and order of their community. Drama is devoid of a purpose of this kind. Ritual, then, is practical and drama remains virtual. Yet drama is as popular as ever; nay, it has become more popular than in any other period in the history of civilization, mainly because today, there is more access to cross-fertilization among various theatrical activities throughout the world.

Moreover, no matter how fragmented the world may have become, a theatre would always emerge in one small group for all its members to participate and share in the producing of a play. This sharing is a different kind of sharing from the ritual, but it is in this act of sharing in the theatre that we may find the answer to the question—what is the essence of drama? It is not enough to look into the ritual. We must keep an eye on it but we must go beyond it.

Like the ritual, a drama comes to life and is fully established only when there is traffic between the stage and audience. From happenings on the stage the audience expect to be entertained but they also expect to be enlightened ultimately, even if unaware at that moment. However, enlightenment in the theatre is never that which is created from nought. Unlike the ritual, the audience do not attach a fervent belief on the goings-on on stage; they are free. But like ritual there is never an audience who preside without the least notion of the play or without the least inclination to consent or recognize what they are to see. The audience expect to be reconfirmed of a preconceived idea or vision of life, though that idea or vision of life may still rest in embryo and unformulated in the deep unconscious. The receiving attitude of the audience is not a "cognition" but a "recognition."⁸ The audience who come to see T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* are "enlightened" because they have come to see, say, their ideas on love-in-Christ marriage reconfirmed. In that theatre the audience who need a Brecht might very sensibly stay away from it altogether. To be "enlightened" as audience then means to let oneself be stimulated both intellectually and emotionally by the impact of the play which corresponds to the attitude or idea already harbored in the minds of the audience. The audience come to the theatre having already established a frame whose capacity allows them to respond readily to that particular play (to build a frame is not to narrow the perspective but to define the audience as recipient).

In this case, the audience willingly commit themselves into the

hands of all the artists involved (by artists, I mean the playwright, the actors, the directors, and all the designers engaged in the stage effect) in the performance of a play. The topography of a playing-area essentially distances the spectators from the actors who addresses the spectators as a sort of silent third person. "This exclusion however becomes a kind of inclusion," says Albert Cook³, by which he means that the audience is left free to be included or excluded and if a condition of inclusion were established, it would be voluntary and conscious. In any case, the audiences' first step is to receive voluntarily. It is simply that the audience follow and take in whatever is being given to them in whatever style and method. Thus the audience first must be voluntarily passive and be the recipient. The artist must be given a "hearing" with due respect to their oeuvre. Modesty on the audiences' part is required to allow room into which the artists may enter without obstruction. The artists are responsible for committing themselves wholly to creation and thus to the audience, and the audience will commit themselves into following the artists in their process of ordering their stuff on stage.

However, an opposite force works from within both parties to complete their inter-dependency. The audience are recipients but are simultaneously an indispensable nutrition and a feed-back for the artists. The audience must be passive but active at the same time. In turn, the artists must be open enough to receive their feed-back. The audience pays at the box-office not merely to sit back and enjoy themselves but to enjoy themselves by participating, that is, contributing in the act of creation. The artists are requited by giving themselves to the audience and also by being condescending to them. This kind of mutual traffic must continuously exist throughout the performance constantly stimulating the creative intuition of all concerned. Not only must the artists' creativity be stimulated by the audience but strangely enough the audiences' creativity must also be stimulated by the artists. The theatre is constituted of an artistic commune, audience included, and drama is molded from the smelting

furnace of the imagination of this commune. But the instrument which molds the creator's visions into a definite form on stage is the histrionic sensibility. It is a faculty which makes drama what it is and therefore it is an indispensable element in the dynamics of the theatre. It renders theatrical and dramatic experience possible. It is an innate quality which must be equally possessed by artists and audience alike, and if this is not shared neither theatre nor drama can truly exist.

The histrionic sensibility is the mimetic faculty which is accompanied by an urge to "exhibit" what is imitated or created as art. It can also judge the effectiveness. Francis Fergusson refers to histrionicity throughout his study of the theatre⁴ as its being an important ingredient in the act of dramatic and theatrical creativity in both playwright and actor. However, since the audience is no less a contributor in the making, this faculty is equally required of them also. Histrionic sensibility answers to a variety of stimuli, joins hands with the kinaesthetic for the actualization of mimetic action, judging at the same time the degree of effectiveness of that action. The playwright creates on the visions he has evoked and it is in the process of the act of creation that his histrionic sensibility works and takes on the responsibility to see his visions materialize through to the end. In other words his histrionic faculty must enable him to perceive the potentiality of performance, and if this faculty is sharp in him, his ability as playwright is assured. Creativity is required also of the actor of course, not only to read the text prepared by the playwright but also to read into the "subtext", a procedure pointed out by Fergusson who owes his view to the method taken by Stanislavsky to train actors. Moreover, the actor's role in the dynamics of theatre involves the most close-knit work with the kinaesthetic faculty inspired by the histrionic sensibility. It should be the least expected of the audience to be equipped with the same faculty, but any active participation of the audience in the course of a dramatic performance would not be possible without it, and the

accomplishment of any play would never exist without the audience. The audience would first be the recipient but from the stimuli gotten as recipient, their sense of histrionicity will immediately set to work and will assist in "the recognition" of happenings on the stage. The very act of "recognition" is the product of their creation through histrionic sensibility. They will perceive a potential action through stimuli received and see it carried out by the actors. The actors are, in a sense, agents for both playwright and audience. The playwright taxes the actor to satisfy his histrionic urges but at the same time is entirely dependent on the actor's histrionic sensibility. The audience are dependent on the actors to stimulate them and to rouse their histrionic sensibility, but at the same time since the audience is capable of ordering the future in the act of performance by their perception of action, the actor in turn is dependent on the audience to be their guide. Shakespeare ranks highest amongst all dramatists in his ability to suggest lucid directions for the actors in the words and rhythm of his poetry. Space allows only an example of a few words taken from *As You Like It* Act III scene v. Even in this brief extract, Shakespeare's histrionic sensibility is practiced sharply for the actor is given a clear vision of what he is to do and the audience is able to "recognize" the action and be directed on to future expectations. Phebe is pouting with anger, for her longing for Ganymede is spurned by the very person. We are made to know that Sylvius has been trying to grab every opportunity to get Phebe's attention. His efforts are feeble and yet persistent so that when Ganymede leaves, Sylvius approaches Phebe at once.

Sylvius: Sweet Phebe,—

The two-word phrase, the dash indicating a hesitant pause, and whatever "subtext" attached to it, stimulate the histrionic sensibility. Sylvius' hesitation in approaching Phebe would perhaps invite the actor to take a few steps toward her from up to down stage, obliquely from audience angle, with a desperate facial expression nearing tears,

and also that attitude echoed in the tone of his voice. Phebe is in a trance gazing on the retreating Ganymede. The appeal in Silvius' voice seems to bring her back to her senses. She is caught somewhat off guard so that her instant reaction is,

Phebe: Ha, what say'st thou, Silvius?

She had her back to Silvius so she turns her head toward him as she says this. Her tone is rough revealing her inattention to him but not devoid of compassion because she is herself experiencing an aching heart.

This kind of action owes to the continuous activity of the histrionic sensibility of both artists and audience. Shakespeare helps them more than any other playwright because every word and rhythm of his creation unfailingly becomes the "signifier" for the "signified," to use Saussure's terminology⁵; that is, his poetry becomes a positive "signifier" for the histrionic sensibility to catch on to. Consequently, Shakespeare writes a good deal of "subtext" right into the text itself⁶. The same can be said of any playwright worth considering. The "subtext" is no less an important "signifier" than the immediate text, for not only is the histrionic sensibility generated directly by the text, but by all preceding situations that are retained in the "subtext." Thus histrionic sensibility is capable of responding to every stimulus in the complex continuum and creates actions of increasing impact in the process of the structural and spiritual development of the play.

Here, in the complex continuum, the working of the histrionic sensibility of the audience should be taken into account for their reading into the "subtext" will often stimulate that faculty of theirs into formulating visions of actions a step ahead of what is happening on stage. The audience here have grown an "appetite" which, if satiated, will "recognize" the stage. In turn, the histrionicity of the artists will detect the "appetite" of the audience and will gear their creative faculty toward satisfying it. In relation to the audience,

such is the working of the playwright's histrionicity in the act of creation and such is the working of the actor's histrionicity in the actual performance. Thus when the audiences' "recognition" continues, the drama continues to live because there is established a constant traffic between stage and audience. One cannot afford to lose the audiences' attention. This kind of process of the audience finds affinity in Kenneth Burke's idea. He says that the form of art is established by the psychology of the audience⁷. Referring back to the brief scene in *As You Like It* discussed above, from the play's opening to this scene in Act III, Shakespeare has dexterously led the audience to the full knowledge of the irony of this comic situation and to their awareness of a metatheatrical function⁸ of the pastoral element. The audience's response and anticipation will surely be established on the subtextual conditions just mentioned.

The stimulus which sets the histrionic sensibility working has been so far mentioned as having been derived from the text and "subtext." What is this stimulus and how does the text and "subtext" work in relation to it? The stimulus which sets the histrionic sensibility working are visions created in the mind. These visions are ascribed to the imagination which draws its sources from both the conscious and sub-conscious realms of the mind. Hereditary aspects of physical constitution, hereditary memories and memories of past experiences, mental leanings conditioned by one's environment—these combine to form the idiosyncracies of the individual which affect the workings of the imagination, thence the kind of visions. Since these visions are private some denominator is needed.

However, as Northrop Frye points out, "there is enough uniformity in the human mind, in the order of nature that that mind works with, and in the physical conditions of the medium itself, to account for . . . similarities."⁹ Amazingly there are always resemblances in blends, colors and patterns in human experiences and attitudes even where there is no question of direct influences. We know very little about imagination and the visions that it creates,

but when we confront a scene on stage, we see that it corresponds to something we have known all along and yet not known anything about until we have confronted that scene. One might not be acquainted with *Romeo and Juliet* but when confronted by the feud and its effect on the young lovers, one would recognize that pattern of experience immediately. One might correspond it to *The Miser* of Molière where the young lovers are in plight because of an indiscreet parent. Though the context is different the essential shape of the story is identical. Since all personal experiences are different, the histrionic sensibility may work the drama into disharmony. However, as Frye points out, although idiosyncracies may exist, at the basis, our experiences may be deduced to or ascribed to a few archetypal patterns conversant to the cosmic dynamism and therefore intuitively understood by all. These archetypal patterns are possessed commonly by the artists and audience alike thus giving access to easy traffic between them. The archetypal patterns feed their mythical imagination.

The ideal audience in the theatre are like poets who think in terms of likeness and identity, so that their mythical imagination finds correspondences in the shape of the events developed in the drama. This correspondence must be posited to the drama to derive any sense at all.

The archetype is a repeatable unit of imaginative experience conversant with the very rhythm of life¹⁰. In the rhythm of life, there is, first, the rhythm created by the repetitive pattern of growth and decay. This is the pattern which forms the basis for archetypal experiences. In more familiar terms, this rhythm is the repeated pattern of birth, growth, decay and death. Death, in the cycle of nature, should not be interpreted as an end but a necessary ingredient in the life cycle. All creatures know this pattern of life because it conditions the physical constitution of the very master molecule of life. Man intuitively understands this through the genetic library in the depth of his brain. He also comprehends his role in this rhythm

in the cycle of nature through brain-work of a more intellectual and conscious sort. In drama and literature the form taken to express this pattern is linear but the essential feature of nature which is cyclical exist as background. Thus in drama, the pattern of growth and decay supplies the bones for a linear dramatic development and structure. It is also one of the elements in the kernel of drama that drives and specifies the imagination into creating visions that explain the simplest but the most basic human experiences common to all men and thus giving guide to the histrionic sensibility to give dramatic expression of a more cosmic understanding.

In the rhythm of life, there are other kinds of rhythmic processes created from physiological functionings, but the most obvious one in connection to dramatic action is the heartbeat and respiration. In the rhythm of the heartbeat, the pattern of systole and diastole is repeated. In the pattern of breathing, the rhythmic process starts all the time throughout the body. When oxygen is used up and exhaled as carbon dioxide, there is an imperative need of oxygen so that it is immediately inhaled. This periodic dynamism of exhalation and inhalation is closely interconnected with the dynamism of systole and diastole. This dynamic form is understood by all creatures because it is the rhythm of every molecular cell's oxidation. In the very process of dramatic presentation, a fundamental duality asserts itself. There is a process of tension and resolution, balance and unbalance, and in the reaction of the audience in relation to the stage, there is identification and dissociation. But these dualities make rhythmic coherence, a precarious yet continuous unity. This rhythm then is fundamentally based on the physiological rhythm, the pulse of our living. And, in drama, this rhythm exposes man's emotive and felt life. From this rhythm, therefore, are evoked images, through the intermediary of the imagination, that correspond to the creator's life both emotive and felt; and these images will stimulate the histrionic sensibility for dramatic action in the theatre.

Finally, from the rhythmic cyclical process of life, emerges an

entirely different kind of process. So far we have seen the repetitive pattern basic to life, a pattern of the breaking down and reconstitution of every living part. However within and from this very cyclical process, changes occur. These changes in the history of the world have been random, therefore often harmful. It took a long wait until a tiny beneficent mutation made an organism work better. Scientific researches have ample proof now to tell us that life is essentially *mutadis mutandis*. Not only that, but they also tell us that life is a "striving upward"¹¹. However, life heading toward progression must experience trials and regression as necessary ingredients. The development of the brain system shows life's design for progress most clearly. So this movement, neither circular, nor repetitive, is a vertical movement heading toward the making of living beings of a higher calibre. Since mutations of this kind is found in the very life of the molecule, the pattern of the dynamics of progress is known in the physical constitution of ours and also comprehended in our mentalities.

Things immeasurably greater than man in every respect but brain have existed and perished. The megatherium, the ichthyosaurus have paced the earth with seven-league steps and hidden the day with cloud vast wings. . . . These things lived and wanted to live; but for lack of brains they did not know how to carry out their purpose, and so destroyed themselves.¹²

There is here a sincerity and reverence toward life underneath the seemingly audacious and playful tone of Bernard Shaw speaking through Don Juan in hell.

Life strives forever upward and its goal lies in the cosmic fulfillment of its original Designer. Teilhard de Chardin, as paleontological scientist and a profound thinker, was convinced of this fact. His idea was that Nature was the basis of a pyramid at the summit of which stood a Person upon whom all energies converged. "Multitude" had pre-existed in the "positive nothingness" and the work of creation

had been to unify them. Consequently the movement of evolution towards mind was the movement in the direction of the Absolute. Therefore in a universe where everything works together for the gradual formation of spirit which God is rousing toward a final union, every work of art, in its tangible reality, acquires a value of sanctity and communion.

In the act of creation of drama, the imagination evokes and assembles visions that correspond to the mode of aspiration. Thence the histrionic sensibility is stimulated and geared toward expressions of such that give the quality of sanctity to the dramatic performance.

The histrionic sensibility is necessary in the act of creation of all art forms but in drama its effect is most immediately manifest and thus it is a faculty that is vital to this form. This faculty collaborates with the imagination but will also delve into the deepest pit of the memory to reproduce an effective string of actions to punctuate the text and "subtext". The guiding visions for this faculty are numerous and could often be too subjective for common understanding. However "there is enough uniformity in the human mind" to render common sharing to the participants of drama. This uniformity pointed out by Frye constitute the basic patterns or "kernel" as discussed above: rhythmic patterns of growth and decay, of heartbeat and breathing, and a progressive move toward the higher and better. These patterns are the basic behavior and attitude of all men physically and mentally, therefore shared. Thus they become the principle guide to the histrionic sensibility making traffic between the artists and audience smooth and easy.

The playwright is able to supply a text rich in dramatic and theatrical quality when his histrionic faculty works sharply thus giving accurate directions to the actor. The actor who creates on the text will be able to probe more deeply into the "subtext" and will be able to express it rightly and vigorously when this faculty is manipulated adequately. The audience is always free to join in the performance. But a dramatic performance is never truly accom-

plished without their positive contribution in the making. Histrionic sensibility is needed in this making, though in the audience, this faculty is only able to create "images" of "potential" action. This faculty must be kept equally busy for all concerned but because it seems to be least needed in the audience, the significance of its functions in relation to the audience must be emphasized and truly acknowledged.

It seems that all has been said on this subject by erudite, experienced scholars so that this report may seem a mere babble. However I have ventured to launch into this formidable subject in order to execute my inner urge to organize and put into words the scattered ideas on drama acquired during the years of my study. This report is written as an experiment, therefore open to criticism for any revision. Even if it survives scrutiny, many points yet remain to be reexamined, expanded, and added.

Notes

- ¹ Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art*, Scribner, 1957.
- ² Takashi Sasayama, *Drama to Kankyaku: Kankyaku hannoh no kohzoh to gikyoku no imi*, Kenkyusha, 1982, p. 14.
- ³ Albert Cook, *Shakespeare's Enactment: The Dynamics of Renaissance Theatre*, The Swallow Press, 1976, p. 1.
- ⁴ Francis Fergusson, *Idea of a Theatre*, Doubleday, Co., 1949.
- ⁵ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, Methuen, 1980.
- ⁶ Katherine Burkman, *Literature Through Performance*, Ohio U. P., 1978.
- ⁷ Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*, Hermes Publications, 1953.
- ⁸ Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre*, Hill & Wang, 1963.
- ⁹ Northrop Frye, *On Teaching Literature*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972.
- ¹⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton U. P., 1957.
- ¹¹ Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, Act III.
- ¹² Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, Act III.