

Journal

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World Theatre History

Spring 2017

January 9th, 2017

What does Siegel believe is problematic about Croce's point of view? Identify some of the issues raised about the changing culture of art in the 1990s. You must write at least 300 words.

Siegel finds fundamental flaws in Croce's thoughts since she represents an old, unwavering, conservative, self-proclaimed guardian of what is actual 'art'.

Siegel says, "Arlene Croce's condemnation of choreographer Bill T. Jones was based on some anachronistic vision of a purer, calmer world." This is well explained using the example of 'victim art'. Croce believes that Bill T. Jones' show uses self-victimization in a disgusting manner to try and pose as art. Croce herself says, "Jones thinks that victimhood in and of itself is sufficient to the creation of an art spectacle.".

The culture is changing whether or not Croce is willing to admit it. As the 20th century progressed, income inequality rose, racial tensions grew, and there was a worldwide HIV/AIDS epidemic. This does not include the fact that the last few decades before the 90's included many wars and gruesome coverage which only aided in desensitizing people to the issues of violence and sex. Siegel proclaims, "If there is such a thing as victim art, I think its *purpose* is to shock us, to arrest our complacency about human catastrophe." This is what Croce fails to realize and why she seems naïve.

Siegel also says, "Art comes bundled with autobiography, fiction, mortality, politics, and merchandising today. Croce would rather not look at this impure mix." This is where this divide is most apparent and clearly stated between "modern" and "traditional" art forms that Croce seeks.

The definition-based confusion of what really constitutes enjoyable art shows clearly whereby Siegel accepts a much broader sense of what art can be. This is unlike Croce who cannot come to terms with the fusion of different styles of performance. This directly relates to our long discussion about what performance is during lecture. A simple question, according to me, ended up being a catalyst for a deeper artistic and philosophical discussion about what we view as performance.

My answer was more of a textbook definition and didn't have much inquiry. However, sitting back into my seat and listening to others go on about abstract, disjointed ideas of performance made me realize that they actually answered the question much better than I did. It was weird to imagine our entire lives as performance, which I debated against, yet there were compelling arguments on either side. The only difference I can draw between the differing viewpoints of performance in our class and Siegel/Croce's view of art is that none of our classmates made baseless claims but rather backed their understandings to the best of their ability.

January 13th, 2017

Read the beginning of Homer's Iliad (including the photocopied introduction) and Aristotle's Poetics Section I, Parts I-VI. How does Aristotle describe "modes of imitation"? How does he compare and contrast tragedy and epic poetry? You must write at least 300 words.

Aristotle believes that "modes of imitation" are a phrase to describe all arts/performances in the world. He goes on to say that even though all of the arts are said "imitations", "They differ, however, from one another in three respects- the medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct."

This is important since he does not mean to berate arts by clumping them together but rather explain his views on theatre in a respectable manner. Aristotle goes on to say, "First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other

animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated.”

He uses this expression to back his hypothesis that performance is imitation. By making it seem natural and pleasurable, it gives us an insight into why people do art/performance. Aristotle attempts to look at two of the most popular “modes of imitation” in tragedy and comedy. He does so by comparing and contrasting them while giving a hint that he is biased in his explanation. He says, “But when Tragedy and Comedy came to light, the two classes of poets still followed their natural bent: the lampooners became writers of Comedy, and the Epic poets were succeeded by Tragedians, since the drama was a larger and higher form of art.”

He says that tragedy, which is drama to him, is a better art form. One can argue that he meant to say that in a historical context but looking deeper into his thoughts, there appears to be some disregard for Comedy. “Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type- not, however, in the full sense of the word bad...”, he proclaims.

Who is to say that the characters are of a lower type? He tries to draw a distinction that comedy is “ugly and distorted”. It doesn’t seem that these statements have much backing to them but rather rely on his emotions and ego. He draws both a contrast and comparison when saying, “Tragedy- as also Comedy- was at first mere improvisation... Tragedy advanced by slow degrees; each new element that showed itself was in turn developed.”

It seems more or less that Aristotle tries to differentiate between tragedy and comedy but does so inadequately due to his own partiality.

January 18th, 2017

Read the article on Peter Brook's adaptation of the work, which is included in the folder, and answer the following prompt in your journal:

Describe both sides of the debate concerning Brook's decision to stage the *Mahabharata*. Is it possible to tell (as in stage or perform) universal stories about all human beings? If yes, how? If no, why? You must write at least 350 words.

It is possible but only with the right mindset and guidance. The arguments presented against Brook are very compelling and after viewing the introduction to his rendition of the Mahabharata, it seems clear that he does not care one bit or even have any passion for the story that goes behind it. It seems as though he could use with a little bit of guidance or personal experience from those in India whose job is to perform this play.

To bring up more specific examples, in the Mahabharata, Lord VedaVyas (the sage) meets Ganesha to dictate this epic. He is supposed to look spiritual and radiant with energy. He is instead portrayed and defamed in the play to what seems to look like a homeless man. This is rather unacceptable. If you are going to try and portray characters specifically, look not at just the context of the play but at the background of the person that you're supposed to be portraying.

Let's also look at the random boy in the beginning. The boy who comes to the sage (aka. the man portrayed to be homeless) is not in any way accurate in terms of the context. The play should have started out exactly as the history of the epic does; the sage asks the Creator, Brahma, to help him find someone to write down this piece of history that has come to his mind.

Peter Brook has made it not only harder on himself by fabricating parts of this epic but has also destroyed the validity of his attempt to make a good/accurate rendition of the Mahabharata.

This brings me back to the idea of why my answer is rather not clear-cut. I don't think this is a yes or no but rather a per-case basis for whether or not a story shared by an alien culture can be represented to any and all people of the unknown culture. This is to say that my criticism of Brook is almost like a case-study that is being used to make a decision of yes or no based on the end-product.

If however one is more willing and open to seek and consult primary resources, such as people, and allow their thoughts to be challenged, there is a better chance of them creating a representation that even people of the native culture as well as those that are unbeknownst to it can enjoy.

January 22nd, 2017

Dramaturgy Research

I am very interested and excited about an epic that I have learned about ever since my childhood. It is the one and only Mahabharata. I looked through the book filled with every so many interesting tales that I would love to share. Yet I spent a large majority of my time conflicted in trying to choose the right scene.

One of the most important and dramatic portions of the epic occurs when the character who takes on the name “Bhishma” by his actions decides to take an eternal vow. A young prince at the time, he decides for the sake of his father’s happiness as well as the woman that Bhishma’s father is interested in (who is a fisherman’s daughter) that he will take a vow of celibacy and will make sure that the heir born from this fisherman’s daughter shall become the next King. It is a very important story with huge ramifications on the entirety of the epic. It is dramatic, captivating, and melancholy. With all this said, I am very excited to present this.

February 8th, 2017

For your journal prompt, focus on Pericles' Funeral Oration: What do you learn about the values and customs of Athenian society from this speech? Do you think some of his points continue to inform ideas about government today? Explain why or why not. You must write at least 350 words.

From the beginning of this oration, there are many things that strike me as interesting. As Pericles is introducing his oration he says, “However, since our ancestors have stamped this custom with their approval, it becomes my duty to obey the law and to try and satisfy your several wishes and opinions as best I may.” In this quote, he seems to highlight two important ideas that blend into one. We find out that he is here by law to make this speech. More likely

than not, this law was put into place due to an older lineage who deemed it appropriate. This speech is a custom and considered to be the morally and lawfully correct thing to execute.

He continues on saying, “I shall begin with our ancestors: it is both just and proper that they should have the honor of the first mention on an occasion like the present.” It is important to show the extent of influence of the past is what Pericles would like to imply. They not only deem what is right and what should be lawful for future generations but once again, this invocation of the ancestors serves to underlie what is reckoned as moral.

A part of his speech touches on the governance and society in which Pericles lives in. He says, “It’s administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it’s called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if to social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends to our ordinary life.” There’s much to dissect here. This seems to model the ideal blueprint and architecture of American government envisioned by our forefathers. It is important to note though that an argument can be made to say that the idealistic rhetoric of Pericles is not one that is found to be true within their own society. Not all were treated fairly and equally while the poor were not always given a fair chance to prove their worth as Pericles would have us think. To contrast it with the ideas that inform our government, in his last phrase he celebrates the impact and oneness that was rulers and society. Unlike our system of a constitutional republic with those that may represent us well, this is the pure and original Greek image of democracy.

February 13, 2017

What was the role and function of the Greek chorus in 5th century Athens? You can approach this question from numerous perspectives (logistically in production, philosophically, socio-politically, dramaturgically, etc.) and that is precisely the point. Write one full paragraph (at least 350 words) that responds to the prompt. You must offer textual evidence to support your point of view (at least two resources) and list your sources below the paragraph as if you were compiling an MLA bibliography.

In my opinion, the chorus should not be thought of as a piece of the performance that is separate from others but rather enhances and is required for the proper experience of good theater. To look deeper into this I would like to raise the excerpt that Kris Hammer provided in saying, “Aside from the practical the chorus would have had numerous functions in providing a comprehensive and continuous artistic unit. Firstly, according to a view accepted by many scholars, the chorus would provide commentary on actions and events that were taking place before the audience. By doing this the chorus would create a deeper and more meaningful connection between the characters and the audience.” This helps to illustrate my idea that the chorus is not something to be spectacted and viewed at by itself but works well with the chorus itself. There is much to be seen on stage when the characters are moving about and performing physical movements. It can be hard for the audience to keep up and know the setting of the events taking place. This is where the chorus may come in. For example, it is possible that as the actors start acting out a fight scene that the audience may not know between who, where and why this is taking place. The chorus almost can be compared to a modern-day narrator except there are multiple narrators in a chorus that work in tandem. To further the ideas here and add new one, I would like to look deeper at the following, “The chorus itself is not an individual, rather a general, conception; but this conception represents itself in a sensuous, powerful mass, which impresses the senses with its opulent presence. The chorus leaves the narrow arena of the action, in order to make statements about the past and future, about distant times and peoples, about what is human in general, to draw the grand results of life and to express the teachings of wisdom. But it does this with the full power of fantasy, with a bold lyrical freedom, which coincides, at the high summit of things human, as though with the stride of the gods—and it does this accompanied by the full sensuous power of rhythm and music, in sound and movement. The chorus thus purifies the tragic poem by segregating reflection from the action, and equips itself with poetic power by means of this segregation, just as the plastic artist transforms the common requirement of clothing into charm and beauty with rich draperies.” This brings about my personal conclusion and it revolves around the following: enhancement. The chorus is a major part of theatre and does the most to enhance the experience and escape from reality that theater can provide.

Bibliography

1. Haamer, Kris. "The Function of Chorus in Greek Drama." *The Narrative by Kris Haamer*. Kris Haamer, 05 Mar. 2015. Web. 12 Feb. 2017.
2. Schiller, Friedrich. "On the Employment of The Chorus in Tragedy." *Schiller Institute—On the Employment of The Chorus in Tragedy, by Friedrich Schiller*. Schiller Institute, n.d. Web. 12 Feb. 2017.

February 17, 2017

For your journal, compare the attached excerpts from the Natyasastra to parts I-VI of Aristotle's *Poetics* (from your journal work during week 2). What are some of the kinds of plays (20.) discussed by Bharata? How are they dramaturgically structured and what must be included or not included? What are the elements of tragedy listed in Part VI of the *Poetics*? What do you think are the primary ambitions of these two theorists? You must write at least 300 words

In the Natyasastra, many different types of plays are illustrated. One of these includes a Nataka which is a classic play discussing love, sorrow, and a multitude of mortal emotions. It is made up of kings and queens. There needs to also be ministers, plebeians, as well as religious leaders.

The main hero must undergo some form of a journey to solve a certain problem. You must have around 5-10 acts involved and interestingly enough, if you have to depict an entire regiment of soldiers you should only bring a handful of dressed warriors onto the stage. You should cover around one day in every single act while making sure that at no point should any hero be killed during the play. Mountains as well as vehicles for soldiers have multiple ways in

which to be displayed. You should not actually try and replicate and bring warriors with their animals onstage or a piece of a mountain but rather either use costumes and gestures or use narration along with some form of visual to display this.

Aristotle claims though that tragedy specifically should be based on language embellished by actors. He talks more of the emotional side by saying that catharsis is necessary for it to be a good drama. Aristotle also thinks it is necessary for there to be a chorus whose song aids in the experience of the tragedy for the viewers. He lays out the idea that tragedy is a form of imitation and even goes on to clearly lay out the different aspects of tragedy in a clear sentence. He says all tragedies are made up of plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. One of the most important points he makes is that the plot is the soul of the entire tragedy.

The theorists seem to have different ambitions altogether. Bharata seems to want to lay out a systematic way of how plays should be done and followed by setting out all types of specific rules that he expects all future plays to follow. Aristotle's was more analytical. Aristotle was very clear and better at explaining to the audience what really makes up a tragedy. Overall, both were interesting reads even though the ambitions were entirely different from the two theorists.

March 1st, 2017

For your journal - what do you learn about Roman humor from reading this play? What strategies and techniques does the translator employ to make Roman theater and its history accessible to a contemporary readership? Do you find these strategies to be effective - why /why not? You must write at least 350 words.

This play is very comical and weird at the same time. It is however, useful to derive some generalizations from it. The humor of the Romans was strong in wit and also rather caustic. Their plays are generally known for this, which is a sense I found as I read this translation. The plot is overall relatively confusing with multiple characters being thrust into the mix. The obvious

usage of slaves and sex with slaves is also particular to Roman theatre as a theme. Other than that, the translator tries in a very awkward manner to make this play relatable to the audience. That is... his assumed audience. He writes this for an ignorant high school/college-aged student. I don't think he takes into account that people of this age group and above could possibly have enough critical thinking skills to understand a play talking about specific jargon related to Roman society. It is very weird and tries to employ words such as 'frat brother' and 'pimp' to explain a story that really doesn't require those terms. It seems more and more like a distraction. It doesn't actually seem like this makes it all that more understandable for a contemporary audience. The names for characters could have been better. I was still confused as to why the Turk wasn't given a Turkish name instead of just being identified by his nationality. I have also never seen anyone try to mix old English with contemporary American slang. I mean what the heck is this guy thinking? Going back to the idea of being distracting, Roman plays, I personally find, to be relatively hard to follow. On top of all this, we have these weird phrases taking away from the plot. By the time you get to the end, you almost wonder whether this play makes sense and whether the author has embarrassed the original work by Plautus. So overall, I would say that this play is ineffective and just very awkward. It makes the original play by Plautus look bad and doesn't take into consideration the entirety of the audience and their backgrounds.