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INFLUENCES OF MORALITY IN THEATRE FOR CHILDREN

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Theatre Arts

by
Ashleigh Merle Lutes

June 2011

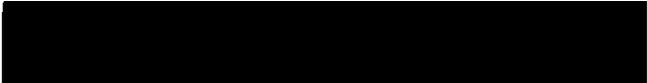
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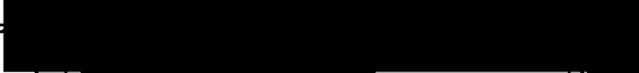
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June 2011

Approved by:


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ABSTRACT

Theatre is a powerful art form that can influence the way the world is viewed as it directly reflects the society around it. As children grow up there are many opportunities for them to make choices that can negatively impact the direction their lives will take. Using theatre as a moral training ground creates opportunities for children to learn to make positive choices throughout their lives.

The theatre has always been able to teach morality to those who participate in shows as well as those who simply go and see them. In Theatre for Youth practitioners are able to bring great works of theatre to younger audiences that can change the way they view the world. Creative Drama puts children into the stage action and encourages them to make decisions and find the best solution for different scenarios that they may encounter on a day to day basis. Both types of theatre have been found useful in teaching morality to children and influencing their choices for obtaining a happy life for themselves and those around them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DEDICATION

To my dad who taught me the importance of receiving an education and my mom who inspires me to be stronger than I think possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Theatre has always been a great influence in my life and I have been interested by the different effects theatre can have on the individuals who participate in the productions as well as its audiences. When I first experienced drama I recognized it at its entertainment value. Then when I got involved in theatre in high school I found the social benefits as I worked and played with others both onstage and within the technical aspects. Later in high school I found the healing power of theatre as I became a part of the high school outreach program Challenge Day. This school workshop used theatre exercises as a tool in bringing together students and helping them work through issues of racism, segregation, body image or dealing with the death of someone close. The death of my father was what brought me to this group that helped me express my feelings in a safe environment. In University I continued to work more with the therapeutic value of theatre. It wasn't until my third year that I truly realized that as all of these powers combine theatre can be used to educate and empower children.

My faculty advisor George Nelson, often shared the following anecdote which for me captures the value of theatre for children. After watching "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" put on at Brigham Young University George Nelson encountered a four year old girl. What she said has stuck with me and is the driving force behind this thesis. My advisor said that she told her guardian, "I don't want to be like Lucy, she's mean." It was such a simple idea. That young girl identified the antagonist of the musical and decided that she was not going to be like Lucy because she recognized the way Lucy treated the other characters onstage was not nice.

I would like to think that childhood is a time when life is perfect and nothing bad affects the life of youth. This is undoubtedly wrong. In my own life I experienced a devastating loss of my father in the Junior year of High School and saw through the Challenge Day experience that so many things are plaguing youth. Whether it was being bullied, experiencing racism, having body image problems or any other types of problems all of the students had something wrong in their lives that they were dealing with. Challenge Day put us into a room and caused us all to talk and experience each other's lives and share in the

problems. What I learned the most was that I did not know what was going on in someone's life and I must treat everyone with respect if I was to expect any amount of respect or caring in return. The United States is facing many problems that affect youth. We could all pretend that it does not exist and ignore the problems or face them and find a way to help children overcome these problems in the search of a healthy and happy life.

None of the problems facing children today have a chance of going away unless more people in positions of responsibility step forth and explain, in moral terms, that some of the things that people do are wrong. As a youth theatre practitioner it is possible to take a stand to support morality within the plays and type of theatre that are produced. The little girl that viewed the production of "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown" was able to obtain a moral point of view recognizing that being mean to other creates a harmful society producing a damaging life for the bully, represented by Lucy, and those affected by their actions. I feel that she was able to understand that if she is nice to people she will have more friends and be able to create a happier life. The view of morality in this thesis is in creating a better quality of life in being a good

person who is nice to those that surround one in order to receive kindness in return.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine current practices and suggest strategies and support for effective ways to teach morality with and through theatre. What theatre for youth is capable of doing is enlisting the ideas and principles that drove Morality Theatres in the medieval ages to provide a fun learning environment for children. Creating opportunities to instill morals early in life is not something that needs to be blatant, but more of an experience that the youth discover in their own ways by experiencing quality theatre. When teaching a moral lesson it is often thought that one is preaching and prescribing religion to the youth. This is not the intent in providing quality theatre, but why must it be thought that theatre be separate from religion? Harold Adam Ehrensperger states that:

There is no separate religious drama, that drama of good quality has religious values, that purposeful, intelligent living is always dramatic, and that episodes from this kind of experience are authentic material for plays. (7)

Following this line of logic presented by Ehrensperger it seems possible that no theatre can be produced without having some type of religious undertone as long as it is "drama of good quality" (7).

The first theatre was religious in nature because it was stories of the Gods and the effects of their influences on the lives of the people. The medieval theatre entertainment known as Morality Plays placed a protagonist on a quest where he encountered moral attributes that prompted him to choose a godly life over an evil one. These plays instilled a quest for a godly lifestyle, but what is most important is that it promoted agency to choose right from wrong. Giving the protagonist the opportunity to decide what type of life they wanted to experience extended to the audience as well. The audience was encouraged to identify the godly attributes in their own life and then pursue these to create fulfillment of a good life rather than a bad one.

There are many media that are available for children to view problematic material that would influence the child to enact behaviors that are unkind or unjust to themselves or other individuals. I feel that children become unaware of the consequence of such behaviors because of the

desensitization as a third party observer through television or the internet. In an interview in 2003 Peter Brosius, the artistic director of the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis, Minnesota, discussed how:

[Children are] bombarded by the media. We hope that by creating a space where they can sit for an hour or two and watch something. We're giving them some psychic space to focus. To sit where you can't change the channels, you can't surf, you're just going to be in the theater—that's a good thing. (60)

Theatre is unique in that it allows the sharing of experience where youth are able to ask questions and have their questions answered. The fourth wall which separates the action onstage from the audience is blurred and often obliterated as the audience in the theatre has a greater opportunity at becoming a part of the action or at least feeling united with the stage action having greater empathy and connection with the characters onstage. I will explore how through theatre children have the opportunity of experiencing real life situations where they can make choices and discover the consequences that may result. This process described as playmaking by Winifred Ward gives children the ability to work through different scenarios

they may come up against in life and have the tools to choose how they want to respond in order to create the most profitable outcome for their lives (Playmaking with Children 2-3). I will look at how practitioners like Winifred Ward use theatre as a teaching tool through creative drama and how children can be influenced as audience members through theatre for youth. This thesis will show both approaches of introducing theatre to children and how they can both impact the life of a child in a positive way.

The intent of Morality Plays was to show how to achieve a godly lifestyle. I am not advocating that theatre should promote becoming god like, but that it can help students make choices that would provide for a better life. The traditional emphasis on a morality derived from religious faith, but has changed to a new social morality, which aims at the happiness and usefulness of the individual in the context of the interests of the common good (Brown 321). The modern take of "The Golden Rule" being "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" creates the pursuit in happiness in a person creating a pleasant environment for them to live (Flew, 134). "Various expressions of this fundamental moral rule [the Golden

Rule],” as described in A Dictionary of Philosophy by Antony Flew, “are to be found in the tenets of most religions and creeds through the ages, testifying to its universal applicability” (134). It is not just a hope for a better future for the world, but for a better future of the youth that we work with in the theatre.

By applying the golden rule as the moral compass to drive our theatre experiences the performances are able to reach any demographic and apply to any situation that the youth may be facing in their lives. By introducing them to theatre that reflects on the situations they are facing in their lives the theatre practitioner can help provide a safe place for discussion and learning. The theatre can be a place where a search for a better, happier life can actively take place in the performance of actions and consequences to behavior and choice. Larry R. Lawrence said, “Young people understand more than we realize...they are watching our example” (98). By leading youth through good quality theatre where they can learn and grow from their leader, each other and within themselves youth will be better prepared for creating a healthy and happy life.

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY THEATRE

Greek Theatre

In searching for the influence of theatre on the child audience it is natural to look into Greek theatre during the fifth century B.C. "Prior to this time we find that children took part in religious processions which were of a dramatic nature, and there were many children in the audiences" (Ward, *Theatre for Children* 9). Although the plays that were put on in the early Greek theatres were never truly considered as Theatre for Children it is nevertheless assumed that children were definitely in the audiences since the plays were put on during a festival. "It is a public holiday. Work stops, and the narrow streets are full of citizens, rich and poor alike, thronging towards the Theatre of Dionysus on the slope of the Acropolis" (Arnott, 61).

Athens, Greece is the setting of all of this festivity. The "dramatic performance in Athens was part of citywide religious festivals honoring the god Dionysus," where the plays and contests were followed by several days of religious parades and sacrifices (Worthen, 11). Having

the theatre so closely connected to the religious rites and ceremonies of the time is telling and suggests that Greek drama is grounded in religious ritual.

It seems hard to truly separate the workings of the playwrights during these festivals and the religion found in Greece at the time. "Partly because of these religious connections, people of all social classes attended theatrical performances" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 29). The festivals were paying tribute to the Gods and shows often would include visitations from Gods. "In Greek drama it is not so much the intervention of a god or goddess that is important. . . as the way the protagonists respond to it" (Roche, 3). Throughout the Greek plays the Gods or representations of the Gods are there to give guidance or instruction, but whether or not the protagonists respond to these directives showed humanistic nature. "The Greeks did not regard the gods as all-powerful, but they did believe that the gods could protect them and reveal the future" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 29).

Oedipus Tyrannos or *Oedipus the King* shows the clearly the lessons found in Greek Tragedy where the protagonist has a tragic flaw that brings about his demise. "The flaw is the lever for his destruction, but the irony is that it

does its work, trips him up, through his finest qualities: in Oedipus, his honesty and courage" (Roche, 211). Through this play it is seen that Oedipus has unknowingly murdered his father and married his mother. He is not to blame for his actions because they were not intentional, but still he is found standing before the city to be judged of his fate. The gods in this piece reveal the future through a blind prophet, Tiresias, and thus allow Oedipus to make his first mistake, but it is through his subsequent mistakes that lead to the "dismantling of his humanity" (Roche, 211). Through this example of the Greek tragedy the audience finds qualities of themselves in the tragic hero Oedipus—"intelligent, masterful, assertive, impatient, impulsive" (Worthen, 70). "Oedipus' 'mistake' is neither a moral failing nor a deed that he might have avoided" (70) it is in acting like he was prone, or like the audiences of the time, that he produced his own downfall.

The audiences were often shown flaws of characters that related to themselves as a people. It was through looking at these pieces that they were challenged to take a different path than the characters. To not learn from seeing Oedipus' mistakes would create a tragic downfall for the audience at the time. Boys and girls were probably

taken to the Greek festivals to see these plays. "But these were adult plays, all of them, and children took only what they were able to understand and let the rest go" (Ward, *Theatre for Children* 9). The morals found in each of these shows were seen by the children at the time and though they were never intended for children it is easy for them to identify with a protagonist and learn from their mistakes. In the case of Oedipus it is easy for them identify a quality that relates to their life at the time, such as listening to those in charge, and remember this story as they grow and capture different lessons that apply to different stages of their lives. Harold Adam Ehrensperger wrote that "Greek dramas were both theatre and worship experiences. Many came into close contact with the gods, discovered his own limitations while at the same time he discovered his own potentialities" (33). As children grow they are able to take from these experiences and find their own ways of becoming better individuals.

Roman Theatre

The Romans borrowed much from the traditions of Greek theatre during religious and civic festivals., but altered them so that they were uniquely Roman (Wilson and Goldfarb,

82). During the festivals the Romans included much more entertainment than just plays. The varied entertainment included "acrobatics, juggling, athletic events, gladiatorial combats, and skits" (Worthen, 18). With all of this added experience Winifred Ward writes that, "the Roman theatre held still less for child audiences that did the Greek, unless the lavish spectacles which were characteristic of the roman stage can be considered childlike" (*Theatre for Children* 9). The whole population still participated in the festivals that were created, but as Ward said about the Greek plays children probably only took "what they were able to understand and let the rest go" (9).

The Romans were less concerned with the tragic flaw of the protagonist; instead their characters became consumed or obsessed with an overwhelming emotion. "In *Thyestes*. . . .Atreus is obsessed with revenge" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 74). While still backing Winifred Ward's inclination that children could only understand so much and dismissed the rest it is still possible that the stories these children watched would be retained for the rest of their lives. Although they may only have understood one concept that was applicable to them at the time the story and other

conceptual ideas would stay with them during their lifetimes. Being able to recall the stories they could find different parts or characters that would mean more to them later in life that they would be able to take and learn from for their daily relationships and activities.

Despite Roman scripts including "characters frequently spout[ing] moralistic axioms" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 74) that could produce great fodder for a child's conduct the plays "degenerated into sensuous displays which were elaborate beyond all reason, and though children and even babies were taken to them, nothing could have been more unsuitable for them to see" (Ward, *Theatre for Children* 9). The Romans began to be more interested in spectacle than staging naumachiae, "sea battles staged on lakes, on artificial bodies of water, or in flooded arenas," and sexually suggestive skits and provocative dramatic material (Wilson and Goldfarb, 80-81). The fall of the Roman theatre coincided with the fall of Rome itself, but that was not the only explanation for the decline in its theatre—"theatre itself had become less of an art form and more of an entertainment" (81). It became hard to distinguish the art that contained quality moralistic values.

The Christian church was highly opposed to the theatre and "saw a connection between theatre and pagan religions, and the church fathers argued that the evil characters portrayed onstage taught immorality" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 82). Theatre has a power that can teach and uplift those that experience it. Harold Adam Ehrensperger wrote:

Any device that leads to beauty and to aesthetic enjoyment may lift a congregation to higher thinking, but no permanent good nor any legitimate religious development results unless every word and action comes from inner conviction and expresses deep experience.

(48)

The Romans lost the aspect of their theatre that made it good and lasting as they stopped finding moral guidance. This is why "the early Christian church opposed theatre" and "why theatre as an organized institution disappeared for the time being" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 82).

Medieval Theatre in Europe

While the church was what took down the theatre in Rome because it was seen as "a diabolical threat to Christianity" (Wise and Walker, 184) the Roman Catholic

Church was what also contributed to theatres rebirth in the middle ages:

Faced with the task of explaining the new religion to illiterate slaves and then illiterate barbarians, clerics came to depend on illustrative playlets, costumes, and special effects, eventually writing full-scale plays for performance both inside and outside the church. (185)

Because of illiteracy the church resorted to performance techniques to teach religious principles to those that would be unable to read about them.

"Much of the drama of this period was actually presented in the sanctuaries of churches and cathedrals" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 124). The most distinct dramatic forms found during this period—liturgical drama, cycle plays and morality drama—were directly "connected with the church, its rituals, and its calendar of religious observances" (Worthen, 207). Just like Greece and Rome a lot of festivities surrounded major religious events, like Easter service. "The Earliest known plays of Christian Europe were written in monasteries" (Wise and Walker, 185). Liturgical dramas "had been incorporated into the services of churches in England" and as their name suggest were a

part of the liturgy of the Catholic Mass enacting biblical events such as the visit to the tomb (Wilson and Goldfarb, 127).

The Cycle Drama or Mystery Cycles were taken outside the church and were outdoor enactments "meant to appeal to large audiences and to popular tastes" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 131). "The term *mystery* comes from *ministerium*, meaning a religious service or office" (131). They were taken to the people and although they were staged histories of the bible stories they were often made more comedic playing to the nature of the audiences piquing interest through humor (132). Connecting to the audience and teaching the religious history was important and so the cycle plays used a "displacement in time called an *anachronism*" where it was characters and events were taken outside of their proper historical sequence making "the biblical characters more identifiable to audiences" (131).

Morality Plays

"Like the cycle plays, morality plays dramatized elements of Christian life" (Worthen, 210). Rather than staging events of the past morality plays staged "a symbolic allegory of the Christian's spiritual journey through life" (210). This genre of theatre showed right

versus wrong and then let the audiences contemplate what they could do in order to make their lives better. They were "meant to teach clear moral lessons" and in this journey through life protagonists met "abstract spiritual qualities" represented by characters they would encounter throughout the play (Wise and Walker, 186). In the play *Everyman* the title character is introduced by Death to characters such as Good-Deeds, Knowledge, Beauty, and Strength as a reminder of the importance of upholding values. In *Hickscorner* the title character encounters Pity, Perseverance, Imagination, Contemplation and Goodwill that blatantly represent moral ideas.

"Frequently, the basis of these dramas is a struggle between two forces, one good and the other evil, for the soul of the main character" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 142). If children are introduced to characters, as was done in the Morality Plays, they will be able to distinguish the attributes of each character and make choices similar to the character they found most appealing. In the story of *Everyman* the title character is told that his life on earth is over. Everyman, representing humanity, struggles with death and looks for a companion to accompany him on this journey to the next world. The characters he looks to

represent abstract ideas, such as Beauty, Worldly Goods, and Knowledge, but none of them will go with him to the afterlife except Good Deeds. "The lesson that Everyman, and the audience, learns is that only Good Deeds can be of any assistance when one is summoned by Death" (143). This story shows great insight into the idea of the golden rule. Doing good to others will not only have others do good to you, but your life will go on to being something greater as you travel to subsequent worlds after death.

Shakespearean Drama

William Shakespeare found both cycle plays and morality drama useful. "The cycles provided a pattern for staging the epic sweep of secular English history, and morality drama provided a supple device for representing psychological and moral conflict" (Worthen, 210). Taking the ideals and moralistic structures from these type of dramas created a universal way of speaking to audiences. "As a boy Shakespeare certainly saw the last mysteries performed. . .and refers in his plays to their tradesmen-actors, their ranting Herods, their old Vice figures, their swarms of devils emerging from the ubiquitous Hell-Mouth" (Wise and Walker, 189). In Shakespeare's text much is shown of the early influence of the cycle plays and morality

theatre and he shows great skill in pulling together different elements to create a whole picture. "One unifying element is thematic; another is tone and texture" (Wilson and Goldfarb, 195). Shakespeare was able to develop the morality play's idea of a "struggle between two forces, one good and the other evil. . .a battle between two sides for a person's souls" (142).

Throughout William Shakespeare's work there are many instances of good versus evil. It is easy to see a positive influence of morality choices in both the tragic works as well as the comedic. Many adaptations for children of Shakespeare's works include a sort of "dumbing down" of the language. The strongest adaptations I have found for children have not changed Shakespeare's language at all, but merely shortened the dramatic play cutting out excess dialogue. I was able to assist in the directing of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to a group of fifth and sixth graders at an elementary school in Utah. Reading through the script with them was fun as they discovered the meaning behind the words and learned how to shape the sentences as they spoke them. Their performance was for their parents and lasted less than an hour, but they were able to

understand and relay all of the meaning found within the play without having to change or "dumb" down the language.

In 2008 I was able to be a member of Brigham Young Universities Young Company Shakespeare Troupe that toured the Shakespeare show *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* to elementary and middle schools. I found myself go through the same process of learning to read Shakespeare that the fifth and sixth graders I had worked with two years earlier had gone through. As our group performed and shared this Shakespeare play with schools through Utah I found the most fun in talking with the children pre- and post-performance.

The main character I portrayed during *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* was Dionyza. She and her husband, Cleon, take over the care of Pericles' daughter, Marina, and because of jealousy that her own daughter is not as beautiful as Marina plots to have Marina killed. In the production Dionyza is the only true villain as she pursues the death of the innocent Marina. Before the performance the actors were able to talk to the children and they could ask questions about the show. The children were always very engaging and enjoyable to talk with as they seemed interested in the costumes the cast were wearing and the experience that was about to take place. After the

performance the children were even more excited and clearly revealed their enjoyment of the show. The most interesting thing was their reaction to me as an actor pre- versus post-performance.

Before the performance the children interacted with me as they did with the other actors, but after the show they would often create a distance with me. They were able to identify myself as the villain of the performance and it is telling that they did not engage with me. These children saw something in the show that they did not like, something that was bad in my character's personality. In thus identifying this they chose to stay away from the individual that embodied something they did not like. This experience exemplifies the learning experience theatre can have for children. "Rather than listen to a lecture on what is right and what is wrong, the participants can find answers that are right for them at their particular stage of development" (Sternberg and Garcia, 132). Whether the children were in the show or an active audience member they are able to obtain the moralistic ideals found in theatre, such as works by William Shakespeare, and utilize them in how they went forth in their lives.

CHAPTER THREE

LES JEUX DE LA PETITE THALIE

France can be attributed as being the birthplace of children's theatre. "The most versatile, prolific, and influential writer of books for young readers as well as books on education in the late eighteenth century and at the start of the next was undoubtedly Mme de Genlis" (Brown, *A Critical History* 129). Madame de Genlis was seen as a leader in progressive education and was put into a position as governor to the Duke of Chartres' three sons. In this position she taught the boys languages through conversation and history by having them act out the parts in parks on the estate (Ward, *Theatre for Children* 5-6). "Madame de Genlis, unlike most educators of her day, believed that children would learn more readily if they enjoyed what they were doing" (6). The idea that things learned with difficulty were better known was something she dismissed. She found that the times when the children were enjoying themselves it was the most advantageous for learning, which caused her to have a portable stage erected in the dining-room. The children would have the opportunity to perform skits and those that were not participating

would be able to guess at what was being represented onstage (6-7). "She saw to it that the children's recreation was never mere amusement!" (7). Everything that the children she was governing participated in was for their profit in learning and growth.

Not only did Madame de Genlis have her students participate in theatre, but "believing that the drama offered great opportunity for moral training, she wrote a whole series of plays for her children" (Ward, *Theatre for Children* 4). As Mme de Genlis moved forward with new pupils she decided to create her own little school so that she could have a constant influence on the shaping of the students:

The children were subjected to a varied, Spartan, and rigorously structured regime in which every moment of the day was occupied to good effect and every activity, outing, meal, or leisure pursuit was dedicated to the training of the mind, body, and the character. (Brown, *A Critical History* 130)

Mme de Genlis acknowledged that all influences in a child's life connect and shape the child's growth in the future. In support of this cohesive home and school life S. R. Slavson writes:

In the process of the child's or youth's development it is necessary that there be consistency in the influences that mold his character, his personality, his attitudes, and his values. It is not sufficient, and may even be harmful to the child, to have an excellent home and good club experiences, on the one hand, and a trying school career, on the other. Conversely, the best of schools cannot produce desirable results unless home conditions and leisure-time occupations are equally constructive. (iii)

Mme de Genlis endorsed "constant supervision, the power of example, the importance of understanding the temperament of the individual child, and the importance of physical as well as intellectual and moral training" (Brown, *A Critical History* 133).

Madame de Genlis did not believe that through a child's experiences they would be able to acquire a sense of morality, but rather it should be taught to them with appropriate examples. "Her argument that it is more appropriate for a young child to learn to obey parental commands unquestioningly is based on the unshakeable tenet of the authority of God, the omnipotent and omniscient fount of all morality." This concept she believed that even

the youngest child could understand (Brown, *A Critical History* 133). The teacher should be mindful of the child's capabilities at an early age and deliver individual instruction for their profit in learning. The student enjoying themselves during their studies was key to instilling a lifelong love of learning (133).

Through this type of study and education it is found through the molding of the individual there would be betterment in the group or society. "Group education now seeks to advance and guide the development of the individual so that he can resist the evils of his environment and reconstruct that environment in the interest of human happiness" (Slavson, 4). Mme de Genlis rejected the idea that humankind was naturally inclined to goodness and that society corrupts, "arguing that instead society, like the individual, can be improved through education" (Brown, *A Critical History* 133). To create a better society the teacher needs to "encourage altruism and social responsibility in the child, attitudes that should be translated into action through charitable deeds from an early age" (134). Developing the conviction of doing good turns and being kind to others creates the changes for a better life in the future that the children go forth to

produce. "We should not forget that it is from [these children] that there must come the leaders of a decade or two hence. The real saviours of mankind are those who feel that value of the individual human being" (Willcox, 153-154). To create a better tomorrow educators need to focus on instilling good morals into their students today.

Mauree Applegate describes how instructing children to create a better future lies with educators:

If we want the years ahead to be better than the present years, we must educate our children to know what is good, better than we have known it; to think more clearly than we have thought; and to act better than we, up to now, have acted. (1)

We learn through history the mistakes others have made and in our lives attempt to not make these same mistakes, but to live better lives than those that have gone before us. If we are not a community of growth and progression then we are remaining idle or going backward continuously dwelling on the old bad lives that have been before. To find growth in society we must not harbor on the past, but learn from it and move on in a positive manner.

In *Playmaking for Children* Winifred Ward says:

It is a grave responsibility, yet a thrilling opportunity for the teacher. Whether she is a specialist or a classroom teacher she needs to believe in her calling, have faith in its value. She must have a strong sense of the direction in which she is guiding children, and know why she is guiding them that way. One small classroom can influence the world.

(286)

There is no doubt that Madame de Genlis acknowledged this as she worked with her students and influenced the choices they could make in their lives. "Louis-Phillipe is alleged to have told Victor Hugo that although he was afraid of her as a small child, her educational methods helped him develop many manual skills and made him the man he was" (Brown, *A Critical History* 131). Mme de Genlis was able to create an environment included in her plays where children learned and grew into successful lives. Making sure children like you is not looking to an ideal society. What is innate is to want to give the best opportunities to children so that they can grow up and be better than their predecessors. Knowing this educators must provide the best care, spiritually, physically and emotionally that is possible. "The moral tales. . .portray graver offences and

character flaws, offering examples to avoid as well as models to emulate" (140). She did not expect the children would know right from wrong immediately, but believed that they would be able to learn from the stories and plays that they participated in as they went forward in making moralistic choices.

In the second half of the eighteenth century France saw a great interest in the educational potential in playacting for the young as a means of moral instruction (Brown, *A Critical History* 173). "Théâtre de société consisted of variations on the concept of dramatic performance, including masques, tableaux, proverbs, and comedies, performed by hosts and their guests for the entertainment of a private audience" (173). The writers of these performances recognized the importance of the pastime and the capabilities it had in influencing the audiences as well as the performers. "They focused on situations and dilemmas relating to everyday life but had a broader agenda, aiming to instill in both girls and boys the moral values deemed essential for individual growth and future social responsibility" (173). They were creating instructive lessons on moral and social responsibilities

and the children participants would look toward the adults during these performances as models of maturation.

By having the children participate and become guided as the characters chose between good and bad they were being instilled with a higher knowledge, whether conscious of it or not, of the acceptable ways to act in situations they would meet as they grew up. This approach based on example and experience is dependent upon the theory of natural goodness in a child and assumes "that the child is bound to respond in the right way and be willing to accept correction and conform" (Brown, *A Critical History* 174). Throughout these activities children were given the opportunity to act out the good as well as the bad choices and thus proposed an inherent danger that the children would tend to accept the negative behaviors and perpetuate those, rather than the good, into their lives. Any bad behavior in the pieces were ultimately constrained within the script, "which firmly endorsed a moral line by inflicting discomfort or humiliation on the perpetrators" (174). To stop the identifying of bad behavior as something to be glorified or indulged in children were shown that the behaviors brought ultimate embarrassment and unease in life.

Alexandre-Guillaume Mouslier de Moissy utilized *proverbe dramatique*, theatre proverb, as a type of educational experience with children.

In 1769 he embarked upon an ambitious project of didactic theatrical pieces based on proverbs that were to encompass the whole of human experience. In the three volumes, *Les Jeux de la petite Thalie, ou Petits Drames, dialogués sur des proverbes (Propres à former les moeurs des Enfants et des jeunes Personnes, depuis l'âge de cinq ans jusqu'à vingt; 1796); L'Ecole dramatique de l' home, suite des Jeux de la petite Thalie, âge viril, depuis vingt ans jusqu'à cinquante ans (1770); and L'Ecole dramatique de l'homme, suite des Jeux de la petite Thalie, dernier âge (1770)* he attempts to explore exhaustively the moral pitfalls of life from the cradle to the grave. (Brown, *A Critical History* 175)

How he chose to stage his productions was influenced by the parlor theatres of *théâtre de société* where there were intimate settings including participation from guests as well as the members of the household (173).

Moissy intended that the moral lessons would be performed or read in the home and the "'actors'" should be

of the relevant age" to those they were portraying "so that the moral of the pieces might be both acted out and internalized by those taking part" (Brown, *A Critical History* 175). In each of the volumes "the central characters in each group of plays represent the relevant stage in life and the plots exemplify dilemmas and conflicts" Moissy found common to that age (Brown, *Improvising Virtue* 324). Not only would Moissy recommend that roles should be distributed according to age, but that children should be cast in roles that closely resembled them and the struggles they had in life so that in playing out these scenarios they would ultimately recognize their faults. As these children moved on with their real lives and were presented with scenarios they would have the ability to improvise these situations with a basic moral script.

Moissy set up the volumes in a way in which they were also able to serve as manuals that parents or tutors could follow. The plays were not given for the children to act out alone, but adults were put into key parts where they would "perform a model, or sometimes, imperfect role along with their children and thus are instructed on how to handle or avoid an undesirable situation" (Brown,

Improvising Virtue 324). Throughout the dramatic experiences adolescents were offered opportunities to improvise during 'Impromptu' passages in the text, a strategy not used by other writers of théâtre d'éducation. During these sections they would be faced with trying to make a correct choice and handling difficult situations. To identify these passages "Moissy marked certain speeches with the word *Impromptu* and indicated in italics the line to which the speaker must return at the end in order to continue the dialogue" (Brown, *A Critical History* 176). During these passages the adults were present so they could guide the children and help as was needed to get them to the correct decision and direct the performance back to the outlined script.

Moissy's work was eclipsed by his more famous contemporaries such as Madame de Genlis. There is much similarity in the work both did in educational theatre, but Mme de Genlis explored the dramatized proverb in more developed and dramatic pieces (Brown, *Improvising Virtue* 334). Penny Brown believes that Moissy showed "an originality not hitherto seen in children's literature and his contribution to the development of didactic drama deserves to be better known (334). Moissy can be looked to

as a leader in changing the participation children had with morality drama.

His dramatized proverbs can be seen as 'rehearsals' for social existence, offering models of behavior for real-life scenarios in which self-regulation, the fulfillment of one's role and, given the vicissitudes of fortune, the ability to improvise in word and deed would be essential skills, but for which the basic 'script' would already have been learnt by heart.

(334)

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EVERYMAN PLAYERS

Participation of children as actors contributes easily with them identifying a character and learning from choices and the experiences they are able to partake in as that character. Creating theatre that children become actively involved as an audience and letting them experience and grow through identification with characters is harder because it requires earning the trust of the child to listen and go on a journey that leads them to lessons in morality. The Everyman players established a repertoire that did not categorize them as they could be seen as an ecclesiastical troupe, a literary theatre, or a group that spoke of fables and children (Corey, 2). It was in this diversity that they were able to speak to and relate with audiences of all types.

The first performance of *Job* by the Everyman Players was in 1957. The Everyman Players were not considered a children's theatre group, nor was *Job* considered a piece of children's theatre. The acting version of the play was published the summer of 1958 by the Children's Theatre Press - a decision by editor Sara Spencer that held

repercussions (15). One was a letter to the press from Norris Houghton which quoted says, "I did not know that *Job* is regarded as a play for children. Your publication has truly educated me" (16). This published piece created a chain of thought leading to the change of the press' name to Anchorage Press. This name change denotes a universality of a theatre piece reaching both to children and adults. The previous Children's Theatre Press assumed to cater towards children, but Anchorage Press releases the stigma that their published pieces are only for children and not adults. Anchorage Press still runs the same type of material, but now the material within is seen through a broader lens of availability. This change clearly aligned with the mission of Everyman Players, which is to "make [the] theatre of universals, endow[ed] with theatrical passion" (176).

The Everyman Players later combined the production of *Reynard the Fox* with the traveling performances of *Job*. Each performance showed the versatility and variety that the troupe provided for audiences. An excerpt from the Durbain Daily News exhibits the reach the shows had in moving their audiences: "Children will leap for joy from their seats at the antics of *Reynard*. . .Adults should

shift uneasily in theirs. . . This is a fine family show if ever there was one" (Corey, 65). The universality of the tones in their shows is exhibited in an account of Orlin Corey when *Reynard the Fox* was presented in the Alexandra Township of Johannesburg, South Africa. The students had immediate reactions to the characters as they entered the space and their attention was quite good for about 30 minutes (70). During the performance the children would talk amongst themselves and it was not until intermission that the actors learned why—"none of the children understood English". They talked amongst themselves to relate what they perceived to be happening on the stage and share their insights into the characters.

Unable to change the language of the show the actors carried on, but made "to enhance and enlarge everything with larger, bolder movement, more facial expression, and animal sounds" (Corey, 71). This change worked as the children showed their enthusiasm for the performance as they applauded the hero, became stilled when Reynard fell at the lions feet and cheered with mirth "as the fox and lion jumped rope together at the close." As the actors went back to the buses the children followed them shouting, laughing, making animal noises and waving as the troupe

left. One member recalled it as the "Greatest ovation I ever had and from an audience that didn't understand a word I said!" (71). Orlin Corey wrote, "Everyman presented no subject too abstract, no theme too fearful for children to follow" (239), "we rarely encountered a child of five or more years of age who was not fascinated by any play we produced" (238). The Everyman Players created worlds for children, pulled them in, and instigated participation. Children did not go away from their performances without having learned a lesson of right versus wrong.

"Children are small, and the world impresses them large-scale. . .they may see deeply into theatrical visions, to the reality of evil, the necessity for courage" (Corey, 239). The Everyman Players had many encounters with children during their productions where the children were stirred so greatly by the piece that they could not remain quiet during the production.

Once, in a performance of *Reynard*, after a scene in which the fox acquired half of the demerits allowed by the king for an entire year, a boy commented aloud, "You blew it, fox." . . .

In another theatre on a different continent, after the guns blazed and the fox crumpled, silence was broken by a child's tearful whisper—"Oh. . .Reynard!"

A little girl, watching the *Butterfly*, involuntarily spoke for everyone when she said as the creature returned to the spider, "You're too good to die."

(137)

During a performance of *Tortoise and Hare* the child audience was so stirred after a particularly irritating boast from the Hare that they followed the Hare's exit through the audience and out a side door.

Threats poured through: 'We know you out there, hare!' 'You come back in here and I'll cut your ears off!' A small knife blade was thrust between the center of the doors and vigorously moved up and down. 'If you got any smarts, big rabbit, you won't show your ugly tail in her again.' (140)

The actor was only able to make an entrance because as the doors were released the boys tumbled to the floor and he leaped over them back toward the stage. "The show ended with a primal roar of approval" as the Tortoise triumphed over the Hare (140).

The ability of the Everyman Players to connect so thoroughly with their audience as to spur them to action exhibits the ability in their pieces to incite change in the child as they go forth from the performance space.

The theatre had the power to make controversy exciting, to give body and soul to ideas, and to make character come alive at crisis moments so that it galvanized groups into an emotional unity and held interest when other techniques had failed. This is still the genius of the dramatic, and it is still the noblest characteristic of the finest theatre.

(Ehrensperger, 34)

The Everyman Players sought to create the finest theatre and make it available to children as well as adults. Wade Hollingshaus said of Children's Theatre that it "should be the best, most challenging and most difficult in order to raise children to ask hard questions, apply and make changes". Children's Theatre should not be marginalized because there should not be a difference between children's theatre and other theatre.

It cannot be a matter of children being inferior in intelligence and attention (though this is sometimes implied), when every producer knows that most of the

greatest stage successes belong to the world audience of adults and children. . . We of Everyman learned to trust and respect THE CHILD. He is intelligent, intensely alive, forgiving and trusting. He has the dignity of self-possession, the strength of his opinions. He is hungry for experience, swift to discern the scent of homily, disdainful of lectures. He responds to the authentic. He wants to learn, to grow up, to master his own life. *The best the theatre can do for him is the best of theatre.* (Corey, 242)

CHAPTER FIVE

PLAYMAKING

To ensure the welfare and protection of children President Hoover called a White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. The first part of The Children's Charter states, "For every child spiritual and moral training to help him to stand firm under the pressure of life" (Glover and Dewey, 20).

We are conscious that children must be prepared to take their places in a world increasing in complexity day to day; they must be equipped to battle with intensifying competition, to be subjected to an almost infinite array of choices, to hold their own against tides of impressions flowing through widening and increasing channels of communication. And they must be ready for new breeds of the egg of science which may hatch almost any conceivable change in our world. (26)

Important issues directly affect children on a day to day basis and if educators pretend to shelter them and keep them from experiencing the world around them it could be causing more harm than if they are thrust into the world

after they have grown up unprepared for experiences that await them.

In a religious address Larry R. Lawrence encourages parents to take action in preventing immorality before destruction of the child occurs (99). This can be taken as a call to any teacher or theatre director to take action early in a child's life to instill moral lessons that will prove profitable as they grow and mature. In discussing dramatic expression in *Playmaking with Children* Winifred Ward quotes Carleton Washburne as saying:

[Dramatic Expression] lets one step out of one's own personality into that of another. It lets one transcend one's own limitations and frees one from many of the taboos and inhibitions that circumscribe daily life. (248)

Dramatic Expression is part of improvised drama that comprises Playmaking:

Playmaking, the term used interchangeably with creative dramatics is the activity in which informal drama is created by the players themselves. Such drama may be original as to idea, plot, and character, or it may be based on a story written by someone else.

Indeed, in dramatic play it is often as simple as one

child's reliving of a situation from past experience or a fragment from a current event, motion picture, or television program. (2-3)

"In dramatizations children identify themselves with many characters and, according to their degree of maturity, they understand different points of view" (248). It is through this identification that children are able to experience life with a detached yet very active role. This role creates an omniscient viewpoint for the world that they have created and the world that they are a participant in. Being able to see so much they will be able to learn how other people's behaviors affect them and, more importantly, how their behavior affects other people. In doing dramatic expression children will be able to identify the most beneficial behaviors for a productive and happy life.

As was seen during Alexandre-Guillaume Mouslier de Moissy's productions of the *proverbe dramatique* children are put into roles that can directly change and affect their role in life. In playmaking it is seen that moral growth can happen whether the child plays the hero or the villain. "The playing of such a part [of a corrupt or evil character] strengthens a boy's dislike for that kind of person" (Ward, *Playmaking with Children* 249). A disruptive

child or bully would gain just as much from playing the loyal, good hero as he would in playing the corrupt, evil villain. In both cases the boy would find or see attributes of them onstage and qualities that they would seek to adopt into their own life.

Being able to create a stage persona, whether one that shares a student's imperfections or not, will lead to creating a second set of eyes that a child will be able to see what choices would lead to a happier, more fulfilled life and what choices lead to one that would bring pain, suffering or ill-will. Through these projects the teacher has to remain impartial and let the student discover the material and lessons themselves or they are more apt to resist the change the teacher is trying to inspire. It is the hope that they will be able to take the good ideals that are being portrayed and apply them to their life in order to inspire a happy and productive future.

Under the cover of dramatic play social adjustments of the highest importance are going on all the time.

Children are interested in the experiences they have known. If they can act them out, no amount of repetition bores them. Through rehearsing, through imitating, they experience and—in a way—they look on

at these events, size them up objectively to some extent. (Dixon, 21)

In Psychodrama, like Playmaking, the child is in charge of creating the choices they make during the dramatizations. Nahum E. Shoobs writes:

The crux of Psychodramatics lies not in the presentation of a situation or a play only, but in the role as a means of mental sandpapering, self-expression, and as a guide in character development. At first sight, it may look as if we were putting on plays with a moral in which a selfish boy plays a generous role, a cowardly child, a heroic role, and so on. This kind of work has value, but we are not doing just that. In the first place we have no set play. Instead we present a situation in the child's life which troubles him and to which he responds inadequately. In the second place, in this extemporaneous play, each one improvises, and usually acts as he would do in real life. Each presents his own self and his own answers, to his specific problem. If he becomes objective, he frequently offers a more courageous solution. (5)

This type of work offers the child to create his own outcome and allows for change during play. Students have the opportunity to play scenarios over and over again until they find a satisfactory response or solution to the scenarios they have been faced with or will encounter later in their life.

Mauree Applegate gives a list of six points of what is known about children and how these facts predetermine how they are taught:

1. Children learn best what they experience, not what they memorize from a printed page.
2. Children learn better if they are interested in what they are learning.
3. Other factors besides interest affect the learning of children, e.g., emotion, health, intelligence, past experience, environment, and mental age.
4. To teach any child, we must begin where he is and gradually take him as far as he can comfortable go.
5. Children work better when they are allowed to help in planning their own work.
6. Children learn by imitation. (54)

In this simple list children will be well taught as long as their instructors believe completely in these six points.

Teachers can use these guidelines to better understand their students enabling them to find methods of instruction that would lead to the ideal learning environment.

Whether a child participates as an actor or audience member moral instructions will be acquired. "A leader, understanding the value of having a child reach for experiences which lead him onward and upward in his thinking, provides episodes from literature and experiences from life which broaden horizons and open gateways to beauty" (Lease and Siks, 131). It is the responsibility of the leader to recognize the needs of the student and deliver a way for them to experience fulfillment or express a way to fulfill the needs. "We have unusual opportunity in drama to help boys and girls in the building of a worthy life philosophy" (Ward, *Playmaking with Children*, 282).

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Every person who works with children is in a position of power to affect their lives. Throughout my childhood I had people of importance to me that I looked up to and tried to emulate the way they lived their lives. I had close relationships with teachers, leaders and directors that played very significant roles in the shaping of my life. What I loved to do most was theatre and during the years since high school I've realized what a strong impact the stories that I read and performed had on me.

Through the use of theatre I like to feel that I have become a strong individual who is able to find solutions to problems that I face in my life. I have been able to find ways of working with every type of person I encounter because either I've been in an ensemble with them or they have been represented by a character in a show. After playing Nurse Preen in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* I realized that if I do not like the way someone is treating me I need to speak my mind and get out of the situation or I could end up stuck in relationships that do not benefit me. I have been empowered by watching strong female

characters, such as Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*, assert strength in male dominated situations. I have also been saddened as Shylock leaves the stage shamed after Portia triumphs over him. Being able to identify with these characters has made it so I am able to go after what I desire like Portia and have compassion for those who have lost something very important. Finding the strengths and weaknesses in these characters has helped me identify my own strengths and weaknesses and develop traits that I find admirable while dismissing those that garner pain.

The influence of theatre is so great that it can and should be shared with every child. Any classroom is able to utilize the practices and techniques in theatre in expanding the childhood experience and instilling life lessons that will affect a lifetime. We must use the knowledge that has been given to us and act now to be able to inspire the rising generations.

Our children cannot put off living until we finally make up our minds how best to train them. The old ways are gone and the new ways are not yet come. As a consequence, too many of the children of today wander in a no man's land without guidance or restraint, and very much in need of both. (Applegate, 5)

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