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The Artist's Responsibility

By Claude D. Kezer

THE PERFORMING ARTIST IS IN A POWER POSITION. THE POWER IS SOCIAL INFLUENCE.

WHAT MESSAGE DOES THE ARTIST WISH TO CONVEY THROUGH THE ART HE CREATES?

IN ORDER TO KNOW THE ANSWER TO THE FOREGOING QUESTION, THE ARTIST MUST UNDERSTAND HIMSELF AND HAVE A GRASP OF HIS PURPOSE FOR BEING IN THIS PLANE OF EXISTENCE AT THIS TIME.

THE IDEA HELD BY THIS WRITER IS THAT ALL PEOPLE HAVE THE SAME ORIGINAL GOALS — TO BE HAPPY, TO BE PERSONALLY SUCCESSFUL, AND TO BE CONTRIBUTORS TO ALL THE POSITIVE FORCES IN LIFE. IF ALL SHARED IN THESE SAME GOALS, THERE WOULD BE FEW WORRIES ABOUT NEGATIVE INFLUENCE ON OUR GENERAL PUBLIC AND ESPECIALLY OUR YOUTH. AN ARTIST WOULD NEVER ACCEPT A ROLE THAT MAKES EVIL APPEAR GOOD, WRONG-DOING APPEAR FUN, HARMFUL ACTS APPEAR HARMLESS.

YES, THE ARTIST REFLECTS LIFE, BUT A LESSON SHOULD BE LEARNED IN EACH LIFE EXPERIENCE.

YES, THE ACTOR DIDN'T WRITE THE SCRIPT AND HAS NO RIGHT TO CHANGE THE SCRIPT. HOWEVER, IF THE SHOW OFFERS NO OPPORTUNITY FOR A POSITIVE INFLUENCE TO BE EXPRESSED, THE ACTOR CAN TURN DOWN THE ROLE.

KNOWING THESE TO BE DRASTIC STEPS IN THE COMPETITIVE RAT RACE FOR JOBS IN THEATRE, IF THE ACTORS FOLLOWED THEM, THEN THE WRITERS WOULD PROBABLY BEGIN TO TURN OUT QUALITY SHOWS.

TOO MANY SHOWS TODAY HAVE NO REDEEMING GRACES. WITH "FREEDOM OF SPEECH" ALLOWING TOO MUCH FREEDOM FOR RADICAL AFFRONTERY OF GOOD-TASTE, THERE HAS BEEN LOST ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF THE THEATRE...THE AUDIENCE'S OPPORTUNITY TO THINK AND TO USE ITS IMAGINATION. THE WRITING AND THE ACTING

HAVE DROPPED TO A THIRD-CLASS MENTALITY AND MORALITY.

SHAKESPEARE SAID, "BE THOU FAMILIAR BUT BY NO MEANS VULGAR." THE CONTEMPORARY ACTORS AND AUTHORS SHOULD LEARN FROM THE BARD. JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING IS OLD DOESN'T MEAN IT IS OUT OF STYLE. LIFE, WATER, REPRODUCTION, AND GOOD TASTE ARE ALL OLD, BUT WILL NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE. I DON'T SUGGEST TAKING THE SPICE OUT OF THE MEAL. INNUENDO, INSINUATION, DOUBLE ENTENDE — ALL ARE USUALLY HARMLESS AND REQUIRE MATURITY AND THOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE.

ONLY WHEN WIT AND IMAGINATION ARE FAILING MUST THE DESPERATE ARTIST TURN TO FILTH.

ONLY WHEN THE SOCIETY IS FAILING IS IT ENTERTAINED BY FILTH.

AUTHORS AND ACTORS CAN, NO, MUST TURN THE CURRENT TREND AROUND. AS THE OLD SONG SAYS, ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE AND ELIMINATE THE NEGATIVE.

THIS DOES NOT SUGGEST THAT THE NEGATIVE BE IGNORED AND ONE ONLY LOOK AT LIFE THROUGH ROSE-COLORED GLASSES; RATHER IT SUGGESTS THAT BENEFICIAL AND DETRIMENTAL FORCES BE DEALT WITH HONESTLY, WITH COMMON SENSE, AND GOOD TASTE.

TOO MANY PEOPLE IN POWER POSITIONS — SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE IMPRESSED WITH THEIR POWER — WOULD HAVE THE PUBLIC BELIEVE THAT BLACK IS WHITE AND WHITE IS BLACK.

I BELIEVE THAT A POSITIVE, GOOD, BENEFICIAL DIRECTION SHOULD BE TAKEN THROUGH THE ARTS, AND THAT ANY SUBJECT DEALING WITH THE CRASS, MUNDANE SIDES OF LIFE OFFER SOLUTIONS IN THE DIRECTION OF POSITIVE FULFILLMENT RATHER THAN MAKING THE CRASS AND MUNDANE SEEM DESIRABLE.

IT IS EVIDENT THAT MANY OF OUR WRITERS AND PERFORMERS OF TODAY HAVE EITHER

NEVER READ THE GREAT ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS; OR IF THEY HAVE READ THEM SUFFER FROM THE SAME AFFLICTION SO MANY OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION HAVE — FUNCTIONAL ILLITERACY, READING WITHOUT COMPREHENSION.

IF OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD CANNOT LEARN FROM THE PAST AND APPLY THE BEST OF THE LESSONS TO CONTEMPORARY BEHAVIOR, THEN HUMANITY IS DOOMED TO REPEAT ITS MISTAKES AND FAIL AGAIN.

ALL THE ARTS — POINTED IN THE PROPER DIRECTION OF SELF-DISCIPLINE AND PROGRESS, AS OPPOSED TO A FREE SWINGING FALL TO THE MUNDANE — IN A CONCERTED EFFORT FOR SOCIAL PROGRESSION CAN MOVE THE WORLD TOWARD PEACE, COMPASSION, UNDERSTANDING, FORGIVENESS, TOLERANCE, PATIENCE, ALL OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF LOVE.

THE ARTIST'S OBLIGATION IS TO BE THE BENEFICIENT EXAMPLE, THE LEADER OF THE WORLD TO EXCELLENCE.

WHERE WE HAVE FAILED OR ARE FAILING IN THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF EDUCATION — ESTABLISHING PERSONAL DISCIPLINE, BUILDING PERSONAL CHARACTER, AND TEACHING THE VITAL ART OF THINKING — OUR PERFORMING ARTS, DUE TO THEIR UNIQUE POWER POSITION, CAN SUCCEED IN THIS VITAL AREA OF CONCERN TO OUR NATION AND THE WORLD.

THE ARTIST HAS BEEN GIVEN A MARVELOUS GIFT. HOWEVER, WITH THE GIFT COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY. THE RESPONSIBILITY CAN BE FULFILLED ONLY BY USING THE GIFT POSITIVELY — NOT JUST FOR ITS ENTERTAINMENT VALUE BUT IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT MOVES MANKIND TOWARD BENEFICIAL PROGRESS.

IT'S YOUR ART. USE IT; DON'T ABUSE IT. ■

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