Literature

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**How Theater Teaches Empathy and Provided Catharsis**

Empathy and catharsis are used interchangeably in theater to express emotion and drive actions of characters for development of various themes. Empathy is a sensation that shows one’s ability to recognize other people’s emotions in the present time when witnessing the enactment of such emotions on stage (Petruch, 2017). In other terms, it is a feeling that enables one to ‘put themselves in others shoes’ when watching a movie, reading a work of literature or watching a live drama. Catharsis is the emotional outpouring of a character that brings the unconsciousness to conscious when one witnesses the playing of the emotions and the ideas on stage (Powell, 2007). Both empathy and catharsis are used in literature to generate various effects to the audience and bring out the realism of literature in the everyday life. This essay provides an exclusive analysis of how theater makes people to learn about empathy and provides grounds for the growth of catharsis to the audience.

Empathizing is one of the most attractive things in the theater. The daily life experiences do not provide a change for exercising empathy but paying attention to the works of literature brings us to the realization of how empathy plays a significant role people’s actions. The fun act of dramatization stands out to be one of the ways to understand people and their motives. For instance, empathizing with characters such as Romeo or Hamlet enables a person to perceive people in real context from a different angle. When one is watching their actions on stage, they have no option but to empathize with them because of the feeling being inflicted through associating oneself with the characters (Allan, 2018).

It is through theater that people tend to understand actions of other people. One gets to understand why people like to see the downfall of others through the story line and the monologues expressed by various character after causing trouble of when planning to cause trouble to others in the play. A good evidence of this scenario of empathy is illustrated in the play, *The Exonerated*, by Eric Jenson and Jessica Blank which is compendium of interviews with six criminals on murder charges who were later released after proving themselves innocent. Before the play begins, the author engages the audience before the play begins and notes that they were relaxed and not emotional about what they were going to watch (Petruch, 2017). However, after the watching the pay, most people empathized with the characters in the stories much more than when they had just heard a brief description of their convictions. This illustrates how a theater presentation can change the hearts and minds of people who don’t initially show a sense of emotion in after hearing a particular case.

It is through the theater that people get to realize the real picture of empathy in our daily social structures. Empathy created in theater generated the power of self-reflection for people. Self-reflection itself is the way to empathy. This is especially true when empathy is gained to the characters in the play. It should be remembered that the act of empathy does not only affect the audience but also the characters in the play. When a character dramatizes a part, there are things that stick in him/her. The character tend to witness the qualities in him/ herself by repeatedly enacting the story. The characters begins recognizing the power of perspectives in the real world (Allan, 2018). Most interestingly, when a single character dramatizes distinct parts bearing diverse themes and ideologies, they start to realize that people in the real world possess different beliefs and opinions and are always willing to defend their opinions. Empathizing with other’s feelings and actions is the key thing to respecting other’s opinion in the real life scenario.

Through the act of empathy as expressed in the theater, individuals begin to understand personal situations much better and how they influence how people make choices under various circumstances. The element of fate as expressed in a character on sage can reflect the real scenario of fate as expressed in the everyday life. Theater tends to justify doubts in the real life because people think that some things which happen in reality are isolated. However, when one watched the events of a real life in a dramatization, they understand that certain problems are universal and anybody can undergo such experience (Powell, 2007). The audience, while watching the play on stage, they also see the traits, habits and behaviors in the real life. They absorb the themes and translate them to real life while appreciating the authors and directors of the plays.

Catharsis has a much deeper meaning in the theater where the author might decide to use it to bring the idea of guilt or political drive. The fact that catharsis itself is about purification, the aspects may incite the audience’s feelings to start action against the events of the play in the real life scenario. In the ‘Oedipus Rex’ a Catharsis is staged at the end when the king blinds himself after being overwhelmed by his acts of guilt (Powell, 2007). Catharsis, in this particular case, can be viewed as a tool for social change. The evil acts in the play can be translated to the real life and the actual culprits forced or voluntarily take correctional action (Blasco et al., 2012).

Relieving one’s pain is usually symbolically revealed in most people. As such, being in a position to relieve one’s painful experiences and achieving a resolution is emphasized in the theater dramas using the ideology of the catharsis. For instance, the crying witnessed in the Romeo and Juliet play is a move to reawaken the feeling of dismay in the lives of the audience and animating the unfinished personal experiences. When the implications in the play remind people of their negative experiences in the real life, it may not reawaken their negative emotions in the real life because they empathize with the characters but not themselves (Powell, 2007).

Empathy and catharsis are used collectively to create and develop themes in a play for the purpose of educating the society and bring change. In this sense, where a catharsis is applied, empathy must be present because the act of catharsis is founded on empathy about a particular action in the play. The combination of the two factors are important in understanding that theater is exclusively and empathetic platform. Humans not only empathize with people they are in relationship with but also those who are next to them (Blasco et al., 2012). The psychological exchanges between characters on stage has a much bearing on the audience and is the cause for viewers’ education about the play.

It should however be noted that there are instances when empathy and catharsis become too much to bear for the audience. In such instances, there is the need for psychological assistance because the tress within the person can affect their daily life or implementation of some action. There is, however, leeway for things that prompt grief for a person as far as any literature material is concerned. For instance, it is advisable for one to walk out of a theater room, close a newspaper or switch off a movies that appear to be distressful. Watching another scene or a different movie can restore a previously grief emotion. This procedure can serve as an effective psychotherapy for a person previously overwhelmed by watching a play, reading or going through a sickening story.

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