

Why Go To Poor Performances Of Bad Plays?

Anyone who has ever seen a great play, well performed, knows that nothing compares to live theatre. The presence of real human actors performing in real time creates a sense of connection between the audience and what is being represented. We feel connected with the mind of the playwright in an intensely intimate way. We leave the theatre after such a performance feeling more connected with one another too, and therefore more alive. But what about those occasions when either performance or play are poor?

A poor performance of a good play affords us the opportunity to exercise our critical faculties upon the acting and production in the knowledge that the *prima materia*, the text itself, was good. By contrast, a good performance of a bad play helps us to appreciate how it is possible to make a lot out of very little. If it takes great skill to produce a good performance even from a good text, how much more skilful the actors have had to be if they produce something inspiring from a poor text!

A poor performance of a bad play seems to be the worst of all possible worlds especially if the tickets were expensive! However, even in these dire circumstances there is the opportunity to witness the immediacy of real performance. There is the chance to hone our critical skills in the bar afterwards: to dissect and analyse just what it was that made it all so horribly wrong. Even when everything is wrong, the harshness of our judgement is perhaps mitigated by an awareness that the writer and players were doing their best.

A fellow psychotherapist used to say that her therapy always worked but sometimes her clients let her down. So it is with theatre. The playwright may have produced a masterpiece; the actors might produce a performance worthy of Garrick, but if the first ten rows of the stalls have been block purchased by corporate sponsors for bored business people away from home, or inattentive "A" level students, the enterprise is doomed! All must play their part in making the evening a success, even the audience.

The enactment of a drama is but one example of the flow of energy from conception to realisation. We are both the Playwright and the Actor of our own life. Good or bad, the performance is one we must attend. Happily, we are the Audience and Critic too. Our conception may be poor, our enactment poorer still, but we can at least pay ourselves the courtesy of attending in an engaged, honest and generous way.

Are you sitting in the front row of the play that is your life, or are you skulking in the back awaiting the final curtain?

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Comments and feedback on this article are warmly welcomed.