

The Classical Principle: LaRouche Remembers Odets

From a cadre school discussion, Nov. 26, 2003: I haven't seen it, but a professional actor and friend of ours in California, Robert Beltran, has produced a play from the 1940s by Clifford Odets. Clifford Odets is a writer of plays, dramas, which are well known to people of my generation, from the 1930s and 1940s. He went on to Hollywood, and he had a tragic life, in the sense that he allowed himself—in the play, which is autobiographical—he allowed himself to be corrupted by adapting to Hollywood, and then realized he'd adapted to evil; and then committed suicide as a result of seeing his life as futile, and the outcome hopeless, that he'd gone too far. That was wrong. But nonetheless, it gets the point across.

So therefore, in this case of Odets and his drama, which is produced by professional actors—and is rather moving, as I understand—you have a case of the Classical principle of drama being used in a modern setting. Because the reality was, that from the period from the end of the war, World War II—from the Summer of 1944, where a decent vice-president, Henry Wallace, was replaced by the Democratic Party, through the nomination of a bad, very bad, vice-president, Harry Truman—and thus, the sickness and death of Roosevelt led to the evil which took over the United States in the post-war period. Roosevelt was no longer there, and Truman went over to the other, Utopian side.

During this period of evil, I saw a transformation of my fellow soldiers and similar people, who in the main had been fairly good in their attitude about the post-war world, when I knew them during times of military service. But immediately at the end of the war, the United States made a right-wing turn; and what we called McCarthyism later on, was actually Trumanism, which began in 1945-46. It began essentially with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Iron Curtain speech by Churchill and Truman's endorsement of it. We had a right-wing terror, police-state terror, in the United States. This produced a transformation in the U.S. population. It turned people

who had been my friends, into pigs, who adapted to the terror, out of what they perceived to be their self-interest. They turned against each other like animals. So, what Odets presents in this drama, as presented by these actors, is that situation.

So here we have a truly Classical tradition in drama, by a person who might be figured a minor dramatist in the Classical tradition, but a skilled one, who presents a very anguished picture of the horror, the corruption which seized so many people in the United States in the immediate post-war period. We look back at early history, and we see that. And that kind of understanding into ourselves, is the understanding of what we need to know to determine how we're going to respond, in terms of the effect of our decision on not only the society around us now, but on honoring the past who made us possible, and providing a basis for the hope of the future for those who come after us. That is what is essentially necessary. There's no other drama that's worth doing, and there's no other way to perform Shakespeare, or to perform Schiller.

From a pamphlet prologue written Nov. 30, 2003:

All which deserves the name of Classical drama is a reflection of an impassioned reach toward a certain specific time and place in real history, and to be a special way of reviving a notable experience of that culture at that time, especially an experience which has radiated its effects across the intervening processes of human development, to the present time of that playwright, those actors, and that audience. It must, so to speak, bring a Socrates truly to life on the present living stage of the imagination of an audience. It must bring Julius Caesar to life, in the actual time and circumstances, which that audience must experience within its own mind and passions—the acts of his assassination and death-agony, in that actual time and place in which those events occurred.

The principle which governs, absolutely, the requirements for the composition, performance, and witnessing of Classical drama, is what theologians have sometimes identified as “the simultaneity of eternity.”

Take the case of a certain play by Clifford Odets. I have not witnessed the . . . performance of that play, but I have enjoyed a meaningful discussion of the problem the play represents, and the authentically Classical intention of the director of the performance.

I reference this case, in large part, because of the appropriateness of my recollection of the relevance for the effect on today's Baby Boomers and also their offspring, of the real history which Odets' drama brings back to life. I recall Odets from radio productions of his [plays], performed during the 1930s and later, and because I have relived the times, the experience, and the historically specific relevance of that drama's subject for today's living population, and also generations which followed, and will follow yet.

The essence of that drama could not be grasped, or performed, unless the performance transported the audience into the period from the 1932 election of Franklin Roosevelt, through the growing optimism of the late 1930s and June 1944, and the subsequent moral decline of the U.S. and its people from Summer 1944 to the present. There is no audience today, which, wittingly or not, does not have what Odets' play represents, embedded within them. The moral degeneration of the American people in general, can not be understood without taking into account what the particularity of the drama epitomizes about the American experience of nearly a century, to present date.

We lived through the Depression, the rise to optimism under Franklin Roosevelt, and the great betrayal known variously as the despicable Roy M. Cohn's “McCarthyism,” and, more accurately, as “Trumanism.” To understand the American today, one must be able to recognize those experiences, and the transmission of the effects of those experiences, across more than three living generations, to the present moment.

Such a case as that of Odets and his relevant tragic play, exemplifies the essential meaning of both history and dramatic Classical artistic composition, both wrapped in one for their functional importance for what people do and feel today.

I have adopted that as an illustration here, because it is a bridging of the principal events of world history during my actual lifetime to date. People who do not know that set of connections, that process of unfolding development over this period as I do, really know almost nothing about themselves today. For that reason, any Classical drama whose chosen subject is specific to the period of Odets' play, must not attempt to move the significance of the events portrayed from the immediate time-frame in which the drama is situated. To move it to the 1960s, or the 1970s, or today, would be a damnable lie.