

# Aphorisms For The Young (And Not So Young) Actor

Charles Marowitz (August 11, 2009)

A bad actor is someone who believes that speaking verse means no longer speaking English.

Perversity is the name we give to objectionable originality.

Creating a role before rehearsals commence is like preparing a meal in June which you intend to eat in December.

If the opening-night is the birth of the performance, doesn't it stand to reason that by the closing-night it should have grown into something else?

An actor who is himself lacking in character will always diminish the characters he is playing. An interesting actor is a gas-pump; a dull actor, a siphon.

Inspiration is what happens when you temporarily loosen the grip on all your most firmly-held convictions.

The most infectious disease in the theatre is boredom. No sooner does the actor feel it than it spreads to everyone else.

If Shakespeare were alive today, he'd probably make a bee-line to the female mud-wrestling.

In rehearsals, the discovery of a contradiction in one's role is like realizing that you've boarded the wrong plane.

Actors spend a good part of their lives analyzing the greatest works of dramatic literature. They probe the deepest motives of their characters and try to correlate them to the themes of the plays they are performing. In researching their work, they study different periods of history, manners, customs and philosophies. They delve into psychology and search for motivation. They dissect language and discriminate between what ancient words used to mean and what they mean today. They probe text, challenge directors, are avid readers of criticism but, as a group, are invariably considered to be non-intellectual. - Compared to most brokers, salesmen, attorneys, accountants, journalists, publicists, tradesmen, soldiers, politicians, or clerics, they are mental giants.

Assigning an actor to a vocal coach in the middle of a production is like applying a band-aid to a broken leg.

An actor who burrows so deeply into his role that he severs contact with his fellow-players is like a man digging his own grave in the mistaken belief that he is prospecting for gold.

The worst insult to an actor is being left to his own devices after a director has tried and failed to achieve a desired result.

If, while the actors are performing, the public hears only the playwright's voice, the theatre is being abused. If, after the performance, the public recalls only the actor's voice and not the playwright's, a like offense has been committed.

The actor who prides himself on being instinctive rather than intellectual is like a man who claims that since he has eyes he doesn't need ears.

The most bloodcurdling moment in the theatre is produced when an actor looks into another actor's eyes and sees there only the terror of forgetfulness.

Historically speaking, the avant-garde was a turn of the century phenomenon. To be labelled 'avant garde' today usually means the work in question is about a hundred years out of date.

The mark of a strong actor is his desire to be surrounded by people better than himself. The mark of a weak actor, the paranoia occasioned by precisely the same thing.

The actor who leaves rehearsals without at least one idea more than when he arrived ought to volunteer to have his salary docked.

I've got a System said the Russian . I've got Theory said the German. I've got a Method said the American. I've got a distinct pain in the butt, says the public.

An insatiable desire for stardom is often the creative artist's most effective fuel. Desperately wanting to be famous often unlocks creative reserves that are shut tight to people who are indifferent to career.

The actor wants love. The director wants power. The playwright wants fame. The public wants twenty minutes off the second act. Nobody gets what they want.

A director returning to a play after it has opened and launched its run is like a man trying to revive a love affair with a mistress who has since married and had twelve children.

Nothing is but interpretation makes it so.

I rethink therefore I am.

For a director, relinquishing a fallacious idea is like losing a limb. For an actor, it's like sprouting wings.

The best way to escape the tyranny of the clock is to fill up the minutes and ignore the hours.

There are three people who should be summarily executed in the theatre: 1) the stage-manager who, slave to the clock, ends a rehearsal when an actor is in the full flush of creativity, 2) the actor who, in order to 'save himself' for the performance, plays run-throughs at half-cock and 3) the director who believes that the best way to deal with a bad actor is to fill him with false confidence.

An actor who cannot bear the sting of a director's criticisms will have to bear the bludgeon of an audience's rejection.

A bad costume-designer uses an actor as a mannequin; a good one, as a canvas.

Sometimes there is more animosity in a dressing-room than is to be found in the collected works of Marlowe, Strindberg, Mamet or John Osborne. A warm-up in hell never leads to a performance in heaven.

The face of the actor who vigorously nods his agreement to a director's criticism but tacitly rejects it, never throws back a reflection in a dressing-room mirror.

A rehearsal that doesn't begin in the boiler-room will never make it to the penthouse.

The hardest thing for a director ever to get out of an actor is the right inflection. An inflection is the expression of a subtlety-of-thought and an actor incapable of having that thought can never articulate it convincingly. That is why explaining the meaning of a line is always preferable to demonstrating how it should be read.

It's a trade-off. If the actor releases an emotion, the audience may register it, but may not feel it in their gut. If the actor subdues an emotion merely implying its existence, the drama is taking place in the appropriate arena: the public imagination.

A set design that looks complete without a single actor in front of it is usually flawed in some subtle but fundamental way.

In life, we never dissociate feeling from language. We feel, we speak. Only in the theatre, do we first learn the words, and then add the feelings. - Like Hebrews, reading from right to left.

Often, the only consolation of an actor who is thoroughly disliked by all his fellow-actors is that he is beloved by the public.

Just as the child is totally oblivious of the doctor who has delivered him, the actor after an opening-night cannot believe he didn't emerge into the world entirely on his own volition.

A dramaturg is a pimp who takes a fee from both the whore and the john.

A photo-call attended by members of the press represents an incursion of ends into means. It brings hard, cold, careerist thoughts into a realm which, for weeks, has been carefully sealed off from such considerations. It remind actors that there will be a public reckoning to all the private work in which they have been engaged. The best way to handle a photo-call is not to have one.

The actor who gets buoyed up by the enthusiasm of a moronic audience is like an addict getting his kicks from placebos.

The last refuge of an actor imprisoned in a hopeless turkey which has been demolished by all the critics, is always: "The audience enjoyed it."

The actor's unshakeable conviction that he is embroiled in the worst piece of crap ever assembled on any stage can be instantaneously banished by one insincere compliment.

The successful actor of contemporary plays who is afraid to tackle Shakespeare is the equivalent of the dieter who claims to have lost twenty pounds but refuses to step on a scale to prove it.

The best way to gauge the effect of a play is the morning after. If its memory hasn't made it through the night, it's probably nothing to write home about.

The best way to exacerbate an acting-problem is for a director who cannot put his finger on its cause, to bring it to the actor's attention.

Art which isn't fun isn't art.