

Actors who cannot make a living at their profession live in a perpetual manic conflict. A few infiltrate the community at large for economic reasons. They use their acting skills to survive by persuading gullible employers that they can perform the functions for which they receive payment. An examination of their motives leads to a better understanding of their scruples or lack of them. Especially, it explains the art of thespian lying.

Astute reporters maintain a balance between reason and good sense. Consequently, they seldom treat actors with respect or believe what they say. If they did then it would affect their objectivity. Believing actors at face value would cause them to write fiction instead of reporting facts.

Like the mythical German prankster Eulenspiegel, actors behave like mischievous, loveable spirits. They move between child and adult mentalities. However, the term Eulenspiegelei has sinister significance. Translated literally, it means “a mirror held in front of an owl.” When owls, blind in daylight, cannot see their reflection they behave irrationally and sometimes dangerously. This exemplifies the movement between person and persona - the role that an actor assumes or displays in public or society as distinguished from the inner self.

Like owls, desperate actors blindly reinvent themselves. They ignore reality. They reflect nothing except what they pretend to represent. Unable to earn a living in the theater they use their thespian skills to accept employment for which they have no qualifications or skills. They rely entirely upon lies to improve their economic condition. They strive to deceive those whom they manage and their supervisors. They become dangerous because all their actions relate to an egotistical self-interest and not the public good.

This vignette explores **A**'s behavior using a Stanislavskian approach. Konstantin Stanislavsky, the Russian actor and director, developed an innovative method of acting that emphasized thespian psychological motivation. He systematized the actor's vagrant search for authenticity to portray a character different from his own.

**A**, a professional actor, poses as a social worker and building manager. He uses a Kafkaesque management style. Sated by uninformed reviews by his employers, he believes his show will run for ever. He constantly reinvents himself to give the impression of a self-possessed character projecting dignity, morality, and courage. One may classify him by facial expression and clothing but never know the devious and ruthless plans in his head. Any difference between him and his thespian persona emerges by accident and when exposed, hysteria.

**A** does not threaten his audience with too much passion, instead, he reassures them that his dysfunction really translates as tranquility and safety. No inner reality, no genuineness, no glimpse into the soul exists. This clown needs power and considers his employment his stage and those whom he controls as his audience. He has eliminated the fine line between fantasy and reality by feigning relaxed sincerity: not for theatrical portrayal but for economic self-interest.

The term "histrionics" means theatrical arts. The same term applies to more sinister behavior by mentally disturbed people in everyday life. Then, an admirable art form becomes a dangerous means of controlling people either through gullibility or through economically instilled fear using irrational precepts.

Theatrical performances often provide entertainment and pleasure, however, creative attributes can become pernicious tools. **A** has taught his management staff to imitate his mastery of improvisation and deft use of misrepresentation to instill fear in those whom he controls. His mode epitomizes the art of pathological lying. He believes his own lies.

Ronald Reagan, a consummate actor, saluted a cemetery of Nazi dead with heartfelt solemnity and did not mention the tens of millions of victims of their vile regime. Mel Brooks extends that thinking into palatable shticks for both the masses and intellectuals. Like Reagan, **A** acts with seeming sincerity using a confusion of movie events and reality to further a secret political agenda. Reagan's behavior appeared as intellectual weakness but really classified as Stanislavskian mastery.

Gullible audiences cannot bear very much reality. They rely on charismatic leaders to provide a fantastic alternative that can transform them. They need prominent and consistent exposure to that charisma. A single rubric that expresses business or theatrical success rests in a statement by Barnum: "I don't care what they say about me as long as they mention my name." However, **A** does not only want his audience to mention his name he obsesses over them believing and admiring him. He also yearns for their unconditional love.

**A** has no destiny for stardom as a character actor. He has exceeded his capacity for the role that he has tried to play. His whole enterprise has turned into a cultic illusion, an incoherent dream like the plot of a surrealistic movie or play. He has failed to understand that scripting has very little to do with charismatic leadership.

Moreover, **A** has neglected to understand that dysfunctional actors leave inquiring minds confused, resentful, or blank. They destroy ethical and political significance. Then empathic association has no virtue and no value for rational people trying to uplift society through reasoned argument.

If they accept indoctrination then normally rational people give up their power. They irrationally empower their "star" to rule. The leader occupies a heroic thespian role. However, absolute power corrupts absolutely, both personally and symbolically. It relies upon a false credibility conceived in pathological lying - persistent lying that continues until lies become the liar's reality. Then the audience subserves the charismatic actor/leader in a magical, extraterrestrial, theatrical aura. This disguises his need to destroy others and to benefit followers exclusively as privileged cult members.

Dysfunctional actors turn lying into a universal principle, a Kafkaesque fantasy, to attain economic and political self-interest. **A** has feigned management skills. As a pathological liar, he

now believes every word that he utters and does not show the inner conflict that he has with truth. Cynically, he manipulates both his employers and his constituency - the former by false sincerity and the latter by fear and abuse.

Sincerity implies honesty and an absence of moral conflict. It can also harbor insensitivity or stupidity. **A** has now reached the limits of his imagination and can only revert to playing himself. When a lead performer changes from lies to truth in mid-performance it utterly destroys the illusion. For the illusion to continue then the lying must also continue.

No longer relaxed, a requirement for thespian art, **A** has destroyed the receptivity of his audience and personal paranoia has replaced it. Truth has taken away his power. An absolutist cannot survive without applying the pathology of lying.

Legitimate theater exemplifies truth and explains reality. Ethical actors perform without destroying their audience. They illuminate reality through deliberate lying to explain the underlying morality of the plot. All actors must lie to tell the story but most of them only lie in the persona. Through a severe psychological dysfunction some of them carry that lying into their everyday lives.

Good actors can pursue normal lives without using the negative traits of their role. Most theater lies. It fabricates everything from calculated laughter to a flood of tears. The actor lies with all the spontaneity that careful calculation lends. Visionary fabrication of an important truth sometimes gives an audience a new understanding of itself.

Artists do not rank highly for their steady habits or opinions and most do not conform to social mores. Conversely, they provide a positive record without which their art would disappear forever. However dull or morally delinquent an artist may be, in his moment of creation, when his work pierces to the truth, he cannot dissimulate, he cannot fake it. When he acts otherwise, he becomes a dangerous person.

Tolstoy wrote that the essence of art rests in the revelation of the artist's soul - a glimpse of a god. However, actors who try to emulate god doom themselves to self-destruction. Moreover, they have no place in public or private employment. The unfettered vigilance of the fourth estate then comes into play.

*Nmesis.*

1. *Inspired by* On Politics and the Art of Acting by Arthur Miller. Delivered by Miller as the 30<sup>th</sup> Jefferson Lecturer in the Humanities at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 26 Mar 01.

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Edition: #801-10-01-0919-1542

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