DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 533 CS 201 457

AUTHOR Hardy, Barbara
TITLE The Uses of Festivity and Celebration: Consciousness-Expanding Alternatives to the Classroom for the Teaching of Drama.
PUB DATE May 74
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New York State English Council (24th, Binghamton, New York, May 2-4, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Comedy; *Creative Dramatics; Dramatic Play; Humor; *Play; *Teaching Techniques
IDENTIFIERS *Festivity

ABSTRACT

Experience is a necessary component and complement for the intellectual and academic study of drama, and consciousness-expanding alternatives to the classroom are viable alternatives, representing conceptual organizations positive in value. Festivity and celebration can serve a dual prupose: to expand consciousness of the literary period outside the traditional classroom and to sensitize students in their growing awareness of that period; and to aid the student in understanding the creative processes of play and festivity. Festivity as a communal celebration can expand awareness of an historical period beyond the academic or new critical classroom by allowing the class to engage collectively in a group experience. Students may experience "play" in an individual way by focusing on "playing with words," and by producing a play in class emphasizing characterization and interpretation. (SW)

ERIC

ED 095533

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Dr. Barbara Hardy
Department of English
State University of New York
Oswego, New York - 13126

The Uses of Festivity and Celebration: Consciousness-Expanding Alternatives to the Classroom for the Teaching of Drama

In the opening of his work on comedy, C. L. Barber states: "Much comedy is festive . . . . But much of Shakespeare's comedy is festive in a quite special way which distinguishes it from the art of most of his contemporaries and successors. . . . I shall be trying to describe structure to get at the way this comedy organizes experience. The saturnalian pattern appears in many variations, all of which involve inversion, statement and counterstatement, and a basic movement which can be summarized in the formula, through release to clarification."[1] In the remainder of the work, he explores the way in which "the social form of Elizabethan holidays contributed to the dramatic form of festive comedy. . . . And this historical interplay between social and artistic form has an interest of its own: we can see here. . . how art develops underlying configurations in the social life of a culture"[2] and goes on to apply his thesis with particular emphasis upon saturnalism patterns to several of Shakespeare's plays, including _Love's Labour's Lost_, _A Midsummer Night's Dream_, and _Twelfth Night_ as well as the Henry plays and _As You Like It_.

There is an extension implicit here in C. L. Barber's thesis and a concentration upon the emotional transactions involved in festivity which might be made more explicit through the critics of the archetypal school. But even more relevant to our present concerns is the application of these theoretical ideas to the classroom, in particular to the context of teaching not only Shakespeare but, in a more general framework, mediaeval and Renaissance drama--from the early dramatic comic insets and interludes in the Mystery cycles through the Tudor Interludes as written by Heywood and Gascoigne

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Barbara Hardy
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

CS 201 457

ERIC

to the full flowering of the Elizabethan drama. From the romantic comedies of Peele and Greene to Shakespeare's plays, from Dekker's bourgeois comedies through Beaumont and Fletcher's brilliant satires--almost parodies of themselves--from Shirley's early and the Restoration's later comedies of manners, as practiced by Congreve, Etherege, and Wycherley, to the sentimental eighteenth-century comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith, we discover the common ground of the saturnalian pattern embedded in all of comedy _per se_.

The extension which Barber's thesis offers the classroom is the uses of festivity and celebration for a dual purpose: 1) to expand consciousness of the period outside the traditional classroom and to sensitize students in their growing awareness of the period, and; 2) to aid the student in understanding the creative processes of play and festivity--"through release to clarification"--and allow him to undergo the release essential to the cathartic effect of all works of art, especially those of the comic variety. Particularly in drama, this might be considered one of the major non-verbal thrusts of the dramatic experience: to understand emotionally its ritual in order to dramatically re-enact its emotional dynamics of play, of festivity, of celebration, of holiday--of contraction and release, expansion and diminuition.

It is possible to extend classroom activities in such a way as to recapitulate these primary emotional processes, thereby having not only an alternative activity to but also a sound primary emotional experience of play: the students may recapitulate their readings in their experiences. Festivity may be experienced in two connected but distinctive modes: first, festivity as communal celebration (emphasizing perhaps groups mores, the social and common bond held among members of earlier English-speaking societies and the communal meanings attached to that grouping) and, second, festivity as individual play, that creative, ritual transformation of the imagination by which everyday reality is translated into dramatic form and projected onto stage; the dreams of Shakespeare's characters, especially Bottom's dream "that hath no bottom," are there-

by artistically transmuted from the dramatic experience to the stuff of emotional life.

Within the bounds of these theoretical extensions, it is possible to design vehicles for the approximation of these experiences and transactions. Festivity as communal celebration may be translated to a class experience as it recently has been as "An Elizabethan Eveni..g," or as it will be later this year both live and on video-tape as a Renaissance Fair, or with any group of high school students who are emotionally accessible and interested to participate in communal celebration. Festivity as individual play may be accomplished in a controlled drama classroom situation through the production of scenes from interpretive viewpoints or through an investigation of wordplay in Shakespeare's plays, in particular the comedies. When done properly, both kinds of festival experiences allow for the cathartic effect implicit in the concepts of play and "playing," in drama and in theatre.

Festivity as communal celebration represents an attempt to expand awareness of an historical period beyond the academic or New Critical classroom, in which the text holds the proverbial day. This may be accomplished communally by a class while engaging collectively in a group experience. To backtrack a moment, however, in order to understand the theoretical underpinnings for this idea, let us return to Barber's work once more. In exploring holiday custom and entertainment in Shakespeare's time, the critic explains that "Shakespeare's theater was taking over on a professional and everyday basis functions which until his time had largely been performed by amateurs on holiday . . . . His drama . . . provided a 'theater' where the failures of ceremony could be looked at in a place apart and understood as history; it provided new ways of representing relations between language and action. . . . In making drama out of rituals of state, Shakespeare makes clear their meaning as social and psychological conflict, as history. So too with the rituals of pleasure, of misrule, as against rule. . . . At high moments it brings into focus, as part of the play, the significance of the

saturnalian form itself as a paradoxical human need, problem and resource."[3] By implication, Barber here argues for Elizabethan comedy to _be_ a saturnalia rather than merely representing the saturnalian experience.

In order to make classroom application of the dynamics which Barber sees to be operative in the saturnalian framework of Shakespeare's plays, this concept of festival or festivity as communal celebration was implemented in a class project done in the Fall of 1973 at the State University College at Oswego entitled, "An Elizabethan Evening: A Night at the Boar's Head Tavern." As a group, one hundred and fifty students participated in what Barber speaks of in his book, as noted above, "an exploration of the way the social form of an Elizabethan holiday contributed to the dramatic form of festive comedy." The classes had studied the histories and comedies of Shakespeare, and the temporal setting for the Evening--the Beginning of the Reign of Misrule in England--seemed an appropriate one. They had experienced Falstaff and _Twelfth Night_ and _As You Like It_ and _A Midsummer Night's Dream_; they had seen the Lord of Misrule in operation in the plays. They now saw him projected into real life as the initiator of the festivities of that holiday season--he and the Lady of Misrule. The reconstitution of the Boar's Head Tavern seemed the perfect background for the saturnalian experience, allowing for music and dance, drinking and games and plays--their individual "playing" leading to the outward projection of "playing," the drama itself. Scenes from Shakespeare's plays were performed on a backdrop approximating the Globe Theatre. All student participants were in costume, some faithfully reconstructed from sixteenth-century patterns, others merely suggestive of the historical period; a banquet was prepared from sixteenth-century recipes. The symbol of the Evening, the boar's head, served as the most appropriate emblem for the saturnalian event: from the sign at the tavern door to the half-man, half-beast allusion of Renaissance literature, the boar's head implies the precise moment of celebration--of excess, passion, and emotion. The major thrust of the Evening was not historicity, therefore, but play, release, and clarification.

A similar motif will be carried through in a Fall project, although more archetypally, as a Renaissance Fair is created and celebrated. There, Maying will be a central outdoor motif, incorporating the defiance and mockery as symbolized by the Lord of Misrule and a pagan Feast of Fools. The picaresque element of the Everyman-type of wanderer, on the road in Tudor England and embroiled in misadventures, will equally reinforce this thrust of fantasy and pleasure. For if nothing else, we must rely upon the pleasure of play to convey the saturnalian release and to appeal to the pleasure rather than pain principles. Art indeed develops underlying configurations in the social life of a culture; it especially conveys underlying configurations in the psychological life of a culture. Drama--or festivity as communal celebration--merges both. And the non-verbal, the celebrative, conveys this fusion and gives it non-verbal structure and organization. Given the emphasis on play rather than history, the members of a class are infused with the realization of the transaction and dynamic of comedy, thereby allowing for the internalization of Shakespeare's and other contemporary playwrights' purposes even more than do single words on the printed page. In this way, the classroom is extended in an emotionally efficient way. The practicalities of implementation are many; the philosophical method and psychological impact, however, is what's at stake and should be implemented for the sake of the experience of comedy at both the high school and undergraduate college levels.

In the implementation of the second principle of festivity as individual play, we must here, too, focus on the experiential, what is felt and emotionally perceived by the undergraduate student of Shakespeare. It is difficult for him to reconstruct the period, to find direct application to his own life without structure, persuasion, and emotional suggestion. But by no means is the experience lacking in relevance for him. Therefore, we must become sensitized to the approaches necessary for seduction. And hyperawareness of both the linguistic and the theatrical methods stands at the forefront of our concerns with festivity as individual play.

ERIC

It would be helpful here, in examining our second type of classroom dynamic and application, to turn to the work of the cultural anthropologist and historian, Johan Huizinga, whose study of the play element in culture, Homo Ludens, contributes to our understanding of festivity as play, both in the classroom and outside of it. Let us understand first, as Huizinga and others have pointed out in a variety of ways, the idea of play: "Play is older than culture. . . . The great archetypal activities of human society are all permeated with play from the start. Take language, for instance--the first and supreme instrument which man shapes in order to communicate, to teach, to command. Language allows him to distinguish, to establish, to state things. . . . Behind every abstract expression there lie the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words. Thus in giving expression to life man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature."[4]

Certainly, if we go back into Freudian literature, we see the organic connection between play and the pleasure principle--that indeed play is pleasure. Huizinga makes his reader acutely aware of this connection through his discussions of archetypal and mythic levels of play and turns finally to the idea of drama--art in general--as play. In the seventeenth century, he points out, "drama ... dominated the literature of the West. It was the fashion to liken the world to a stage on which every man plays his part. Does this mean that the play-element in civilization was openly acknowledged? Not at all. On closer examination this fashionable comparison of life to a stage proves to be little more than an echo of the Neo-platonism that was then in vogue, with a markedly moralistic accent. It was a variation on the ancient theme of the vanity of all things. The fact that play and culture are actually interwoven with one another was neither observed nor expressed, whereas for us the whole point is to show that genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilization."[5]

Festivity as play may be experienced by the student in an individual way through a focus upon "playing with words"--the playwright's art and craft. Even a focus on wordplay in Shakespeare's comedies calls our attention, sensitizes us to the emotional and psychological transactions of the comedies and histories themselves in a generalized manner. Puns and malapropisms in particular appear to be linguistic devices through which Shakespeare communicates psychological depth of character to his audience. A malapropism, for example, exhibits psychological texture in its revelation of character. The malapropism "plays" on several levels, revealing the moral corruption of the many worlds of the play. A verbal fault, this wordplay device is a linguistic abnormality which represents an upward verbal thrust of the unconscious to the conscious level of awareness and indicates psychic conflict--usually between sensual and spiritual polarities. Thus, one kind of psycholinguistic expression and Janus rhetoric configuration helps the reader to examine the choice between pleasure and pain, passion and reason, work and play. Shakespeare used this linguistic device earlier than Sheridan when he created the great malapropists of the early English stage--Bottom of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Dogberry of Much Ado About Nothing, Mistress Quickly of the Henry plays. Even a discussion of word"play" in the classroom would highlight the concept of wit and play in the drama and bridge the verbal and physical possibilities for release.

More important, however, is the production work which may be done in class through an emphasis upon characterization and interpretation; certainly this may be accomplished in the classroom in a straightforward way. Divide the class into production groups, carefully controlling the composition of the group, and assign each "troupe" a scene or a few hundred lines on which they must work from the vantage point of interpretation. Each troupe must perform the same scenes in two or more different interpretive ways. They may have free reign to direct themselves but they must arrive at two distinctly

different interpretations. Through this apparently easy task and format, the troupe learns to "play" with the play itself: it learns to modify and to multiply perceptions, to build a sensitivity to language, to engage in the festivity and release of the work of art, the play spirit--the figurative and cathartic experience. As they work through each interpretation intellectually and rationally, they discover the emotional underscoring of the experiential element of saturnalian release, to clarification. To elucidate once more from Huizinga: "The formal elements of poetry are manifold: metrical and strophical patterns, rhyme, rhythm, assonance, alliteration, stress, etc., and forms like the lyric, the drama, the epic. . . . These patterns, forms and motifs are so familiar to us that we take their existence for granted and seldom pause to ask what the common denominator is that makes them so and not otherwise. This denominator, which makes for the astonishing uniformity and limitation of the poetic mode in all periods of human society, might perhaps be found in the fact that the creative function we call poetry is rooted in a function even more primordial than culture, namely play."[6]

I have tried here to establish in very broad outline the emotional dynamics of the cathartic experience through utilizing the concepts of festivity, festival, celebration, and play. There are many other applications which might be implemented along these lines. At the core of this paper has been an assumption that the experiential is a necessary component and complement for the intellectual and the academic, that consciousness-expanding alternatives to the classroom are viable alternatives and represent conceptual organizations positive in value. All art, as Huizinga's work implies, is constructive, fanciful, and, paradoxically, ultimately work-oriented. From this standpoint, then, it seems we may have before us the possibility for the best of all possible.

Endnotes

[1]C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 3-4.

[2]Barber, pp. 4-5.

[3]Barber, p. 15.

[4]Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 1, 4.

[5]Huizinga, p. 5.

[6]Huizinga, pp. 132-33.

ERIC