

Letters from our readers

22 June 2010

On *"The Nation, Jonathan Israel and the Enlightenment"*

Thank you for the article on Jonathan Israel's work. While I have not read any of his books or know little about Spinoza, or the Enlightenment for that matter, after reading the article in the *Nation* I decided that I would very much like to read his books, I guess that was probably unintentional on their part. I can't say anything for the factuality of the article, but I can say that a lot of the attacks seemed unwarranted and unprovoked. It started off seemingly innocent enough then all of the sudden was an all-out attack on the man and his body of work. I would like to thank them for making me want to read something I might only have had a passing interest in to begin with.

Anthony V

17 June 2010

On *"French government witch-hunts partner of niqab-wearing woman"*

If this incident were not true, it would be hilarious. After all President Sarkozy was involved in a "polygamous" situation with journalist Anne Fulda in 2005 - 2006 while married to his first wife Cecilia. Is the law regarding polygamy retrospective? Can Sarkozy be deprived of his citizenship and sent back to Hungary or wherever his family came from?

Jennifer H

Sydney, Australia

18 June 2010

On *"Billionaires and crackpots: US primaries select right-wing candidates for November election"*

I just don't understand why so many people seem to think their economic and other social problems are caused by immigrants rather than by the billionaires who exploit both them and the immigrants.

Of course, the declining turnout at the elections may indicate both a disbelief in the right wing, ruling elite propaganda and in the usefulness of voting for any of the candidates

BW

12 June 2010

On *"Date Night and City Island: One comedy that knows where it's going, another that can't seem to decide"*

I cannot, do not understand WWS's fawning over the corporate film industry as if the capitalist monied interests rooted within the making of films like *Date Night* do not exist and influence their content. These are actors, actresses and

directors who are making obscene amounts of money in light of the minuscule work load (compared to their fees) undertaken per each project. Although within the industry there are unions who ostensibly protect the rights of these "workers" it is laughable to align their conditions with other workers struggles, both within and without the film industry. I realize that WWS writers are deciphering story content in attempt to ferret out anything deeply meaningful and conducive to a socialist perspective, success unsurprisingly being limited. Personally I would find it much more useful if WWS writers/critics would spend their time looking at independent film documentaries and providing new/old book reviews. Regardless any arts review on the WWS site should not bow down to the elite Wall St. class that is behind the making and funding of these projects and should expose this relationship more fully within every review. Much complicity in criminal politics, environmental damage, propaganda and congressional lobbying would surely emerge.

James B

12 June 2010

Dear Charles, Thank you for your review of the two films *Date Night* and *City Island*. On your recommendation I recently saw both of them. I also found them both a refreshing shift away from the lowest common denominators of violence and sex, to films that show us something about ourselves.

In *Date Night* the hero of the moment was not some superman or spiderman, a strange demi-god to save us, it was us. Ordinary people were able to find the resources within themselves to conquer overwhelming odds, fight corruption and save themselves and their children: A cheerful morality tale in this age when ordinary people are going to be required to do extraordinary things.

I did think *City Island* was better than you allowed. Once again we are watching ordinary people struggling to get by in difficult circumstances. In *City Island* the difficult circumstances are the ordinary demands of modern society, not a bizarre twist of fate. Like the characters in *Date Night*, those in *City Island* are doing okay—on the outside, every one has a job, a home; but they are all struggling to find, to retain, to express that which is human and poetic in each of them in conditions that require relentless work to keep from sinking.

Both Vince and Joyce gave up opportunities of higher education, they lowered their sights to get what jobs they could to support their kids. The price they pay is in their inability to

relate to each other. A disturbing condition they gave to their children. The tragedy of that dinner table scene is played out in homes across the world as people under stress attack those they love the most.

Mollie was never a competing love interest. She was a muse—not a whole woman, but the inner feminine. She helped Vince understand the whole acting scene and to make that fateful crossing, to accept nothing less than the truth for himself and others. This turn to the truth resolves the conflict between Vince and Joyce, and their children.

I thought it knew just where it was going.

Toni C

14 June 2010

On “*Letters from our readers*”

I’d just like to comment on a letter that came in from Carolyn.

You take issues with Charles Bogle’s comment on acting in his review of *City Island*, which states, “When Vince finally gets up the courage to try out for a movie (a Martin Scorsese film starring Robert DeNiro) and discovers that acting is about arriving at the truth by “lying”—i.e., reinventing a real person’s voice or story (a discovery for which Vince is rewarded with his first acting job)—the movie turns serious and appears to be standing on its own two legs.”

In response you state, “Acting is NOT about ‘reinventing a real person’s voice or story’. Acting is about CREATING a completely original character (unless you are actually cast as a specific person in a biographical play or film).” You go on to say, “Reinventing another person’s voice and/or manner or personality is IMPERSONATION, which is completely different from acting.”

I have not seen *City Island* but I do not think your assessment of acting and impersonation is entirely true. I do not think the two are as distinct a discipline, or requiring as divergent a methodology as you state. In fact, I regard them as inseparable.

Acting, in my view, is to coalesce qualities from real or fictional people, general moods and one’s own personal feelings to give corporeal expression to a concrete character that reveals something about the world or the people living in it. It is a creative, artistic process that requires excluding and highlighting aspects of the existence of real people.

However, what comes through from your comments is that while “impersonation” requires a person to “reinvent” a real person, “acting” must create a “completely original character”, “unless you are actually cast as a specific person in a biographical play or film”. Why when acting as an historical rather than fictitious figure do you make the distinction that the former does not involve the creation of an original character? Why leave out that when creating a fictitious character actors do in fact draw from real people from life and history whether consciously or unconsciously? And what about actors reflecting

a general mood by giving it expression in a character, is this not within an actors range of abilities?

You state, “The old ‘acting is lying’ refrain is a slur upon performers that dates back to the times when pretending to be a person other than oneself was considered a sin by the church, because it was ‘lying’. (Or worse, playing ‘God’ by daring to ‘create’ a ‘living being’.)” Yes, perhaps, but although it doesn’t stop there, acting is still a form of lying and actors are able to create characters so truthful that they become “living beings” in the consciousness of the population.

Your statement is suggestive of the idea adopted by some theatrical and cinematic traditions, such as Dogma films that truth on stage or screen must be created by “truth” in the production process. However I’m not at all implying that this is in any way your intended position! Yet all art is a concentrated “lie” of real life. Artists must select from the enormity of human experience only that which is required to draw out an essential truth about reality. This product must be an inexact representation of life, i.e. a lie; otherwise it becomes merely a bland recreation of it.

To put it more precisely: an actor cannot reveal all aspects of an historical figure and cannot accommodate every aspect of life into a fictitious character, nor should they. Instead, they must follow the same artistic process as mentioned above by doing away with the trivial to reveal the essential. In so doing the actor has essentially created a lie about life but they have done so in such a way that represents life or the historical figure more truthfully than either the figure or life first appears.

Actors do not recreate either themselves or real people on stage. They are not personality doubles. They must and can only create original characters, original from both fictional characters and real people. The point is not to resurrect every aspect of Napoleon on stage but to reveal something essential about him in a performance.

In turn, when artists create a film or a play they are not recreating life but pretending in order to create an aspect of it, and in so doing the artists reveal something essential about that aspect of life they are mimicking.

The “lie” in acting is bound up with the artistic process of coming closer to the truth; it is not a common fib. As for the church, well, we can leave them to their philistine confusions.

Zac H

Australia

14 June 2010



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