

On Taking Liberty:

The Role of Emotion in Creating a Mimetic Illusion

Ingle Knight BA (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
Murdoch University

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree that any territory education institution.

Abstract

Stories need to be told in such a way that they build and sustain a narrative momentum. We tend to think of the story as the art, and the telling of it as the craft of storytelling. The Russian formalists referred to them as the *fabula*, the stuff of the story, and *szujet*, the composition of the plot. This thesis is mainly concerned with the *szujet*, the praxis of telling a story, in the medium of drama.

The dramatic performance of a story elicits from an audience a response that has much in common with the way we normally relate with other people. The principle difference between these two situations is with their motivation. We deal with other people for reasons and with motives of our own whereas we deal with dramatic performances for reasons and motives modulated and framed by someone else. These ulterior motives and reasons are usually masked from the audience by the conflict presented to them at the outset of the performance. The conflict evokes an emotional response from the audience and in this way engages them with the unfolding of the performed narrative. The emotional experience of an audience watching a dramatic performance is designed by the dramatist through a complex variety of dramaturgical techniques and devices employed in the narration. As long as this emotional engagement is sustained the audience responds to it as if the reasons and motives of the engagement are their own, thus giving rise to a mimetic illusion of verisimilitude that defines the medium of dramatic performance. To understand the medium it is important to understand how the emotional response in the audience is established and maintained.

This two-part thesis considers this question by presenting a specific example of how it was done by the play *Taking Liberty*. The first part of the thesis is the script for *Taking Liberty* which serves to demonstrate some of these dramaturgical techniques. The contextual component of the thesis

seeks to illuminate how the complex emotional response in audiences is established and maintained. This contextual component has three chapters.

Chapter 1 describes some of the dramaturgical techniques used in *Taking Liberty*. Chapter 2 deals with the receptive activities triggered in an audience by the sort of dramaturgical devices described in Chapter 1 and the way that normal day to day methods of processing sensory data into information and "understanding" are recruited into narrative reception.

Narrative reception requires psychic effort by an audience. The motivation for this effort is emotional. Chapter 3 examines contemporary approaches to the emotions and their relation to narrative. Each of drama's great variety of dramatic situations is invented to evoke particular emotional responses. The design of emotional experience, its changes of valence and intensity, is a vital aspect of composing dramatic texts and creating a mimetic illusion.

Contents

Abstract 3

Part one:

Taking Liberty

Act One 8

Act Two 57

Part two:

Composing Taking Liberty

Introduction 110

1 A Dramaturgical Methodology

1) *Plotting the material* 126

2) *Expositions* 133

3) *Time, predictability and the expectation horizon.* 136

4) *Aspects of character 1: dispositions.* 146

5) *Aspects of character 2: status and self-esteem* 151

2 Cognition and Mimesis

1) *Catharsis and its critics* 157

2) *The Storytelling Animal* 166

3) *Schemata, gaps and frames.* 175

4) *Mimesis* 183

3 The Emotional Audience

1) *"He's behind you!" - Fiction and empathy* 197

2) *Emotion as the feeling of a readiness to act* 207

3) *Desire, intention and the as-if-body-loop* 211

4) *Gestic music* 218

5) *Three kinds of emotional action* 222

6) *Mechanisms of self-deception* 234

Conclusion 242

Bibliography 246

Acknowledgements:

Many people have helped me along the way. My particular thanks for their assistance in writing this thesis go to my generous, diligent and long-suffering supervisors:

Dr Josko Petkovic,

Dr Jennifer De Reuck

and my old friend, adviser and one-man cheer squad:

Dr Garry Gillard