

Research paper on the group theatre and history of method acting in the usa

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The Group Theatre can be considered as the most important and momentous experiment in the American theater's history. It produced plays that were directly influenced by the relevant issues of that time and gave a creative opportunity to performers, directors, and dramatists/writers who were either dejected with or excluded from the commercial theater. It is important to mention here that although the Group Theatre only had a brief life of ten years; it is still continuing to have an everlasting and undeviating effect on the drama in the United States of America. It was introduced at a time when the audiences were fed up of the traditional Broadway shows. The introduction of the method acting, political language, and indigenous realism by the Group Theatre made it an immediate success as such tryouts were applauded by the audience. The Group Theater was founded by Harold Clurman in early 1930s who was helped by Clifford Odets, Elia Kazan, Lee Strasberg, Cheryl Crawford, Irwin Shaw, William Saroyan, and Morris Carnovsky (Clurman).

The Group Theatre enjoyed a prominent position as the most excellent performing group in the 1930s. Its self-defined mission helped the contributors in reconnecting theater to a broad range of ideas and actions. For this reason, it gained full recognition for the staged plays that dealt with the prevalent social and ethical issues. Although the group members lived hand to mouth, their creative minds and performances won the hearts of theatre and art lovers. It can be said that the Groups' quest for touching and excruciating realities made revolutions in the craft of acting. It is also

important to mention here that the Group had different meanings for every member. Stella Adler had worked in Yiddish theater. The audience had little attraction in her role as a dull Southern belle. Odets was responsible for the playwriting and were dependent on the Group for imaginative and divine salvation. Clurman had a colorful personality, but people found him as an arrogant person sometimes. Regardless of this characteristic, it was easy to approach him and depend on him to keep others united as a unit (Clurman). The Group Theatre was originally a company that was founded on the basis of a group approach to the theater and performing arts. The first presentation of the Group was seen in the Moscow Art Theater. It is important to mention that the ensemble approach anticipated an extremely personal and two-way technique. The Group did not focus on individual actors playing different roles. Instead, it focused on a cast that was well-known, plausible and realistic as a group. It highlighted the importance of off-stage relationships among group members for more realistic relationships and performances on-stage. This is the reason the audience could feel the credibility and authenticity of the ensemble as their work on the stage reflected it successfully (Smith).

As mentioned, it consisted of some great actors in American history who worked day and night for changing the theater quality in the country. This was done by their relentless efforts. As a consequence, realistic ensemble acting in the United States reached a higher level and the theater was made strong enough to respond to the political realities in a straight manner (Clurman). The Group Theatre's intention was clear, and they fulfilled the passionate dream to transform the theatre in America. The ensemble of

actors in the Group dedicated their precious time for the dramatization of the stage life in their era. Thus, they left behind the traditional light

entertainment of the 1920s and introduced innovative concepts in order to revolutionize the old-fashioned plays and repetitive issues in the plays.

During the ten years of the Group's survival, it produced only twenty productions. However, they met the stated goals with these productions and changed the track of American theater everlastingly.

One of the most innovative techniques known as 'method acting' was also introduced by Lee Strasberg as a member of the Group Theatre. He got his inspiration from Constantin Stanislavsky, the Russian Master. The method acting consisted of a succession of bodily and mental movements. For instance, if the actor was required to play a part that needed frightful emotions, he/she was to bring the honest emotion during his performance by remembering fear. The purpose of this method was to connect the on-stage and off-stage life of the actors and to promote authenticity in acting. The introduction of the stated method was a success as the first production of the Group Theatre, called "The House of Connelly," was enthusiastically applauded by the audience (Chinoy 261). However, the public did not only appreciate the different methods of the Group Theatre, but also acknowledged that the American Theater was going in a different direction with the emergence of the Group Theatre (Smith 70).

The Group Theatre held the firm belief that their work had great importance for the political situation in the country. Their cooperation disregarded the prevailing desires for personal fame. Clifford Odets had a great contribution in giving a voice to the Group's aims. He wrote extremely emotional and

exciting plays that directly expressed the language and position of characters from the lower-class of the society. In this way, the Group Theatre was able to mirror its intentions and goals. Their efforts were acknowledged in a passionate way by both critics and theatre-lovers. Productions such as “Waiting for Lefty,” “Awake and Sing!” and “Paradise Lost” turned out as the most commendable and popular works by the Group in their decade life (Smith 268).

Unfortunately, the Group began to collapse by the late 1930s due to the persistent financial tribulations and long-simmering heated discussions over “the method.” As a consequence, the cohesiveness and solidarity among the members began chipping away (Smith). The Group was founded in the years of the Depression and collapsed after Europe was occupied by armies of Hitler. However, the ten years of the Group were remarkable, impressive, and motivating as it illuminated the endeavors of the involved actors in making art a compelling force for change, for integrating personal and professional lives. The most inspirational thing regarding the Group Theatre is that despite the feuds, jealousies, inconsistencies, and disagreements between the members, it faced the turbulent times together and worked for the enhancement and advancement of the art (Clurman 296).

Works Cited

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