

APOCALYPSIS CUM FIGURIS

This paper contains impressions communicated to me after four viewings of Apocalypsis Cum Figuris. The meanings and feelings were successfully transmitted through the actor, his body and tone of voice, his non-verbal give and take with fellow actors and through the picturization and blocking. The production proves the old adage that a plays essential meaning as a whole can be projected without the aid of a text.

The action of the play is the rejection of Christ by the people of the world. It could also be the desire of Christ to connect with people, that is, his intent on reaching them, touching them with some effectiveness. Or the action can be contained in both rejection and attempted connection.

Since the action of a play dramatizes its theme, the rejection of Christ by the people could only lead to their ultimate destruction- their "apocalypsis". Thus to reject Christ is to cause your apocalypsis. The play can also be showing us the apocalypsis of Christ himself. It could be saying all redeemers, all who have naive childlike faith, all who trust, all who would (out of their love for their fellow man) give their lives for others--all saviors are doomed. For they either fail to see mans ugliness or are ineffective in helping change mans degrading nature. It is an ugly view of an ugly world and reminds me of what one of Tennessee Williams disillusioned heroes says: " I pity the world and the God who made it."

Perhaps the best way to focus on individual scenes would be to set up a number of categories to clarify these scenes. Seven categories will be discussed :

1. Rejection and Ridicule
2. The Church
3. Nature of People
4. The Character of the Dark One
5. Props
6. A Great Myth Destroyed
7. Total Effectiveness

REJECTION AND RIDICULE : Many scenes are devoted to rejection. When " saviors with high ideal" are rejected, ridicule becomes rejection's companion. When Peter assigns the " dark one" to his part (Jesus, who will die on the cross) derisive laughter greets his appointment. A crucified figure is formed by one of those who laugh. The figure is made grotesquely comic by a protruding anus. Songs of the impending crucifixion are sung with mock seriousness. Peter makes the coming anguish of Christ more pronounced by walking with the cross on the way to Calvary. Mock processions are held. When Lazarus " plays dead" and is " ressurected" by the gullible Christ, he is thanked by having bread (which is the staff of life) thrown in his face, in a defiant gesture of hate. The whole tone of the last supper scene has an element of mockery when contrasted to the frightened disillusioned voice of Christ. Judas, on top of Mary Magdeline, performing a lewd act asking Christ if it will be him who betrayed Christ- is a perfect example of the mockery in the scene. Even the preparation for the anointment of Christs body on that Easter Sunday was a mockery- for besides washing of feet and wearing funny shoes- the ointment is forgotten by one of the monks. The ointment! The main reason

for going to the sepulchre. The quality of the movement and the props in the scene were luridly comic. Even in death Christ is rejected by meaningless rituals done in meaningless ways. The final rejection by Peter and the snuffing out of candles, leaves the "dark one" in blackness!

THE CHURCH: The followers of Christ reject him yet carry on with rituals as if they accepted him. They are hypocrites. The church looks very hypocritical in this production. Its hymns are insincere, its frenzied prayers animalistic and between its liturgical chants are moments of vulgar ecstasy. When Peter as the church is comically surprised by the vulgarity around him, and is forced to participate in it, it is Christ who revives him, who carries him on his shoulder like a conquering hero. And for his exhausting rescue Christ is rewarded by apathy.

NATURE OF THE PEOPLE: The people in the play are bloodsuckers who devour the life giving source of their prophets only to reject them in the end. Sensuality is the main source of their enjoyment. They join in rituals in mock seriousness and remain with them only as long as they are getting something out of them. When they pray, their prayer is almost fanatical, bestial, frightening Christ. To punish these people is ineffective. They get a sensual thrill out of the towel whipping scene-- Christ whipping merchants selling in the temple... They are vain and proud; Peter struts like a rooster-- the rooster who crowed thrice when Peter rejected Christ. These people have in them the seeds of their own apocalypse.

THE CHARACTER OF THE DARK ONE. He is billed "the dark one". Ironical. For his naivete and faith is heartwarming in the midst of the world that surrounds him. Does this mean all people of good will are blind? Certainly childlike qualities are demonstrated in the Christ's figure being unable to get the meaning of Peter's cross carrying for he joins him with zestful joy. He later dances like an excited child, listens to the processional hymn as if he were enchanted seeing his guardian angel. Then his rescue of Peter, his exhausted voice, his need of the cane-- his contradiction and growth to manhood with the seduction of Mary Magdalene three times--his frightened litany-- his death...his disillusionment and final Jerusalem lament--all make him the best drawn character in the play. And most pathetic.

PROPS: The good one dressed in black-- all the evil ones in white! Bread staff of life and penis staff of life...Bread on towel-- towel reminiscent of altar cloth....used later as whip in the temple! When the candles are snuffed out real darkness pervades. Half the play is in darkness!

* A GREAT MYTH DESTROYED: Need we say more than that Jesus seduces Mary Magdalene three times during the evening!

TOTAL EFFECTIVENESS: Apocalypse springs from deep personal convictions and is executed with imagination and daring. It somehow in production lacks immediacy. Perhaps some of the processions are too long. There is little dimensionality in the characters except for Christ, who strangely enough does not touch us as deeply as we would like to be touched. The viewer watches objectively-- but is not involved.

* I read and knew of this fifteen years ago. The Essenes.