

International Theatre Institute ITI

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It was during my early school days that I became fascinated by the theatre, that magical world which has captivated me ever since.

The beginnings were humble, a casual encounter which I only saw as an extracurricular activity to enrich the mind and spirit. But it was to be more than that when I became seriously involved as a writer, actor and director of a theatrical production. I remember it was a political play that angered the authorities at the time. Everything was confiscated, and the theatre was closed before my very eyes. But the spirit of the theatre could not be crushed by the heavy boots of the armed soldiers. That spirit sought refuge and settled deep in my inner being, making me fully aware of the vast power of the theatre. It was then that the true essence of the theatre impinged on me in a most profound way, I became absolutely convinced of what the theatre can do in the lives of nations, particularly in the face of those who cannot tolerate opposition or differences of opinion.

The power and spirit of the theatre took root and deepened in my conscience through my university years in Cairo. I avidly read almost everything written about the theatre, and saw the diverse range of what was being performed on the stage. This awareness has deepened even further in subsequent years as I have tried to follow the latest developments in the world of theatre.

In my reading about the theatre since the times of ancient Greeks up to the present, I have become acutely conscious of the inner magic which the many worlds of the theatre have the power to exercise. It is in this way that the theatre reaches the hidden depths of the human soul, and unlocks the hidden treasures that lie deep within the human spirit. This has strengthened my already unshakable faith in the power of the theatre, in the theatre as an instrument of unification through which man can spread love and peace. Theatre power also allows new channels of dialogue to open up between different races, different ethnicities, different colors and different creeds. This has personally taught me to accept others as they are and instilled in me the belief that in goodness humanity can stand united, and in evil humanity can only be divided.

True, the struggle between good and evil is intrinsic to the code of the theatre. Ultimately, however, common sense prevails and human nature will by and large align itself with all that is good, pure and virtuous.

The wars with which humanity has been afflicted ever since ancient times have always been motivated by evil instincts which simply do not recognize beauty. The theatre does appreciate beauty, and one could even argue that no art form is capable of capturing beauty more faithfully than the theatre. Theatre is an all-encompassing receptacle for all forms of beauty, and those who do not value beauty cannot value life.

Theatre is life. There has never been a time as now when it is incumbent on all of us to denounce futile

wars and doctrinal differences which often raise their ugly heads undeterred by the conscience that is vibrant with responsibility.

We need to put an end to scenes of violence and random killings. These scenes have become common occurrences in today's world, only to be aggravated by abysmal differences between wicked affluence and abject poverty, and by diseases like AIDS which have bedevilled many parts of the globe and defeated the best of efforts to eradicate them. These ills are alongside other forms of suffering from desertification and drought, calamities fanned by the absence of any genuine dialogue which is the sure way of turning our world into a better and happier place.

Oh Theatre People, it is almost as if we have been struck by a storm, and overwhelmed by the dust of doubt and suspicion which is approaching us.

Visibility has become almost totally eclipsed, and our voices shrill and barely audible in the clamor and division intent on keeping us far apart from one another. In fact, were it not for our deep-rooted belief in dialogue so uniquely manifested by such art forms as the theatre, we would have been swept away by the storm which leaves no stone unturned to divide us. We must, therefore, face up to and challenge those who never tire of agitating the storm. We must face up to them, not to destroy them, but to rise above the contaminated atmosphere left in the wake of their storms. We need to rally our efforts and to devote them to communicating our message and establishing bonds of friendship with those calling for brotherhood among nations and peoples.

We are mere mortals, but the theatre is as eternal as life itself.