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Is Only Script Enough? An analysis of Nassim Soleimanpour's 'White Rabbit Red Rabbit'

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Abstract: *The critically acclaimed and very famous play by the Iranian playwright Nassim Soleimanpour, 'White Rabbit Red Rabbit' is different for many reasons. The writer took around six years to pen down a 46 pages' compact yet effective script. When the instructions are read then only the uniqueness of this script is felt. The play denies many traditional structure of the genre. "Life is the most common way to commit suicide. Life means choosing the longest solution for dying. It means a struggle for suicide through the natural decomposition of the body and the gradual exhaustion of the soul" these very poetic and philosophical lines allow an insight into the writer's mind and situation.*

Through writing, the writer to expresses him / her and their words echo their ecosystem and the contemporary world. Nowadays writing is looked as therapeutic as well. Nassim in the following lines express exactly that. "I've always had this dream of writing something which makes me free. I'm 29 as I write this, full of hopes and energy. But I am not free. Not enough to travel."

Keywords: *Drama, Genre, Solo performer, loud reading of the script, Nassim Soleimanpour.*

I. METHODOLOGY- LIBRARY AND CLOSE READING METHOD

In the very beginning, the rubrics read this-

'To the producer/presenter: Give the actor the instructions below 48 hours before their performance.

Do NOT give them a copy of the play. Ask them not to see the play, nor to learn anything about it before hand. Do not include this cover page or the instructions in the package handed to the actor onstage. Do make sure all the pages are present, and in the right order! Ask the actor to stand when they receive the script on stage (if they happen to be sitting at this point). It might be nice to reserve an empty seat in the front row for me.'

History contains various examples where the writer's or poet's were suppressed/ silenced but not for long time. With the pen being mightier, they overthrew the burdens and broke the shackles that deprived them from expressing. It happened in the case of Nassim also. He has used his isolation, distance and far-awayness as an instrument to put forth his script with force. 'It's the rule of the circus' these words highlight his deep felt anguish about the coercive situation and his inability to travel. The title

and the unfolding of the script reminds the reader/ audience about George Orwell's Animal Farm. While watching/ reading the play one also recalls Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller's meticulous stage instructions. London Evening Standard opines -

"As he heightens the audience's sense of complicity in his art, Soleimanpour makes a quietly persuasive case for theatre's special power to foster empathy."

In his further rubrics he involves the audience into the performance

"I kindly want you to start counting in a loud voice, beginning with YOU in the front row, and then going along in this direction. Ready? Ok!"

International Performing Arts Centre of English Theater Berlin commented, 'Each performance is a world's premiere. No rehearsals. No director. No set. A different actor reads the script told for the first time at each performance. A thrilling, informative, highly individual and extremely entertaining encounter with a young writer who has more questions to his (fictional) audience than answers emerge, almost like magic.'

The actor who wishes to perform the play on stage is demanded to be completely aloof from the play, to the extent that he/she is not allowed to even 'Google' the play. The beauty of the script lies in the fact that though apparently it looks like it is about 'Rabbits', but it has wide and universal appeal. The impact and influence of the play is felt by the fact that it has been translated into over 30 languages. His script convinced the reader that in a globalised world though virtually near we are very far from each other as a society. Like islands we have generated the distances. First performed in the year 2011 the play even in 2024 is gaining popularity and has not lost its appeal.

Chris Haydon who has performed the play says, "Having the actor not see the script beforehand gives you a profound sense of the writer's voice in the room.... The spontaneity of an actor reading a script for the first time and discovering it with the audience gives complete authority and power to the writer's voice, and the way that voice control people in an intrinsic theme in the play."

The play also connotes how human's actions are stereotyped in the specific environment, so in a way it talks about the behavior patterns. It sheds light on the fact that many times humans after conditioning of their minds, behave mechanically, get orders and follow orders, clueless they follow the stock.

"My dear red rabbit! Now that you have finally reached the carrot, BITE it with appetite. Because as soon as you come DOWN the ladder, the cold, hungry rabbits WILL BE WAITING. They will say YOU were not a good reader or that THEY would have done it better. If they had WANTED to be on the stage. This is what they usually do. They bite! Whenever you BITE carrot, the hungry rabbit bite YOU in response. That's not their fault that's their nature."

The play also demolishes various identities a human being surrounds himself or herself with. A human being has self image, identity in the family, at a work place, in the society, in a socio-political surrounding where every care is taken to maintain that identity. But Nassim calls the situation of his place to be 'wired' where people put on masks of different types and at the end they get confused as to what actually is their real identity. The following lines make it clear, "*Nobody is who they are supposed to be...Nobody really is anybody.*"

As Nassim was restricted from travelling, for two years he could watch his scripts' performances, so at every performance he asked to keep an empty seat in the front row of the audiences to be reserved for the visual acknowledgement of the 'absent' playwright. The dramatist was online interviewed by the researcher here are some of the questions and his replies to it.

1. Do you feel the creative departments handled by your parents have contributed to your novice writing of this play?

N.S.- My dad taught me a lot about writing while my mum showed me my way of life.

2. You left your engineering degree, but do you feel you are still engineering the formats, structure and the words...?

N.S.- I don't deny that I'm obsessed with designing machines out of words and papers.

3. Would you like to suggest any 'prerequisites' for your readers, or young readers regarding their literary sensitivities?

N.S.- It's mainly about "WHY to read" instead of "WHAT to read". Once you answer this, you'll gradually learn HOW to find and read books. I had read maps for months or studied recipes for weeks only because I needed to. No one would have ever told me to read such books.

4. Whether numbering (of the characters) is done to depict uselessness or fakeness or disapproving of the real identity?

N.S.- Same answer! [You cannot "understand" a cog without understanding its function in the machine it serves.]

This is an example of paradigm shift in the genre, where the dramatist has written the script in such a way that it does not require many characters to rehearse the play beforehand, it does not require particular stage settings or special arrangements. The 46 pages crisp and compact script is not divided into acts or scenes. It is one organic performance and the fabric is very tersely woven.

Nassim's another play 'Blank' and the recent one 'Echo' (Every Cold-Hearted Oxygen) still keep challenging the concept of drama and performance on the proscenium. As every era demands and dominates its own medium and it is embraced by the audience. He relates with the changing nerve of the audience and enables far off audience to connect with the writer.

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