

received 8/15/03

CAI
EMMONS - 1

August 12, 2003

Dear David,

I just finished rereading your play and wanted to offer you my reflections/notes. I wish I could just hand over to you my chicken scratch, as it would indicate to you what high enthusiasm and inspiration I experienced as I was reading. Your work poses deep questions always and I find it launches me into sequences of questions and thoughts that make for a very, very rich experience.

First, in answer to the question that you posed when you gave me the play in New York—as I recall (I hope I recall correctly), you were/are interested in how such a play might be rendered theatrically, or rendered at all, “executed,” as it were. I think the play is, at bottom, a dialogue (a conversation?), with an implied listener or recipient of the words offered. To some degree it is even a rant (a protest?) without “responses” (interesting in light of your earlier work), and I like that aspect of it a lot. There are so many warring polarities expressed that I cannot help imagining a raucous stage presentation in which spoken word, acted scene, and projected image tumbled over one another both synchronously and asynchronously. It is, in a way, a “blueprint” for some multi-media presentation. (At least that was the way it presented itself in my mind as I read.)

The play seems to pose the question as to where the true art resides – in the instructions or in the execution of those instructions, in the representation or in the representation of the representation, in blueprint or its enactment, in the engraving plate or the print, in the play or the performance, etc. And in that question is the question of where the artist self resides.

As I read, I made notes of pages where things struck me. They were things that stood out as essential to the play’s themes. I will transcribe what I wrote as I read.

p. 9 the idea of discomfort with “illustration,” with something existing merely to elucidate something else, having nothing of import on its own... essential idea to lay down in this discussion... a translation is so different from a transcription...

p.11 “one sets about to imagine another art and finds oneself merely (merely!) reimagining one’s own”...this lays the groundwork too... it draws in a connection to *all* the arts... but in particular it sets as its task to explore the plight and role of an artist who devises a blueprint or text for subsequent execution: the playwright, the screenwriter, the composer, the choreographer, the architect..

p.23 more *descriptions* than *prescriptions*... in this idea I was thinking about the writing of novels...how much one seeks to describe rather than prescribe (which would indicate a morality tale)

p. 26 difference between *invention* and *performance*... invention as performance... this fascinates me... surely there is invention *in* performance?... and yet, certain kinds of performers (the musician, in many cases) are not credited so much with invention as with rendering... hall of mirrors – how accurately *can* one render anything ... is it desirable...

p.44 “you shall find yourself representing representations” ... speaks to the abstract nature of any art – especially any art which is a blueprint to be executed or mediated by another...

p. 51 challenge of showing a writer writing (Iolaus) “Pray what does one show?”...do you remember, David, when I took a picture of you in your NY apartment pretending to write (or at least leaning over your desk)?... that image came immediately to my mind... how could we tell that you were writing? (which, of course, you were not!)... is any writer a prescriber of actions?

p. 55 Hercules as artist/engraver... I find this fascinating as a choice and am interested in how these two images converged – Hercules and his labors on the one hand, and the artist/engraver on the other...
also I think you are right that the thing which makes a person an artist is a certain kind of self-consciousness... or at least that is the forerunner to an artistic sensibility...

p. 59 though I know you are not an internet aficionado, these categories suggest the internet to me... I like that!

p. 60 bond and commitment from instructor to executor... an absolutely essential part of that transaction...without a mutual sense of honoring the other, the result has no integrity...

p. 64 the matter of selecting which denotes primacy... yes, what a burden, always what a burden!

p. 67 author of myself... yes – to think that one could ever imagine disentangling self from this process and product...

p. 68 I love this suggestion of walking the path of what has gone before as a way to solving the problem of what comes next... this is a perfect description of how novelists (this novelist at least) makes decisions... letting go of control of a moment and trying to reinhabit what has happened hitherto...

p. 69 “Hercules also *draws strength* from what he dismisses. Yes, he crumbles the clay as propounding a merely external solution, but this mere solution-from-without has its part to play in his arriving t a solution-from-within. It is his *firm grasp of the externals* that now enables him to... seize upon his own, go forward on his own – however you like to put it.”

This is absolutely *my life!* ... I am thinking of using part of this as an epigraph for my

CAT
EMMONS -3

new novel, *Pizzazz!*

p. 70 *your* life! (the playwright)

Plate 11

I love tis idea of returning, reenacting... it is reminiscent of T.S.Eliot... returning home and knowing it for the first time...

p. 78 theatrical analogy gaining weight...

p. 84 final labor in the act of self-representation... I think of the work as some sort of blueprint of the self... not that the work would indicate exactly who its creator was, but it would indicate a lot...

p. 85 "stuck is stuck"... and hence we, as readers, are stuck!

p. 89 again, the idea of the artist in the work...

p. 90-91 reversals (not sure exactly what I was thinking about this, but the idea fascinates me)...

I don't know if these notes will offer you much in terms of anything "usable," but I suppose they do provide you with one readers responses and reflections. I would absolutely love to see someone bring this set of instructions to life on the stage. I have no doubt that it would be an extremely stimulating event for both prescriber, executor, and audience... and whoever else might be about!

On another note altogether. Paul and Benny and I are going to France on Thursday for 2 weeks. We were offered a house in the south of France (just north of Provence) and we decided to go for it. When I return I will be writing frantically for a few weeks until school begins (Benny begins right away upon our return -middle school!). By the way, do you mind if I put your name down on a Guggenheim application? It is a long shot, but I am applying for a grant. They want you to be "mid career" which I most definitely am by some definitions (the broadest definition of writer), but of course not at all by others. Anyway, nothing ventured...

I hope you and Susan are both well.

Much love,

Cai

CAI EMMONS
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Sept. 23, 2003

CAI
EMMONS - 4

Dear Cai,

Thank you so much for your wonderful pages of reflections and notes.

You help me to a clearer understanding both of the piece itself and of my own impulses in writing it. I got especially excited by your "log" of page-by-page responses. To watch you feeling out the implications of what you were reading and linking these up with your own preoccupations fulfilled what I guess is for me (how about you?) ^{some} primal writer's fantasy of being a spectator in the reader's mind as he or she reads. Plus, the specific connections you made brought home to me, if it needed bringing home, the affinities of mind and spirit and process you and I share, despite our writing such different kinds of things.

I found exhilarating your proposal that Hercules Belabored might be the "blueprint" for "a raucous stage presentation in which spoken word, acted scene and projected image tumbled over one another." And yet, the more I think about it, the less certain I feel that I have produced a work for the theatre or what I have produced. Yes, it is script-like in the sense of containing instructions in one medium for producing images in another--a "blueprint," as you say. But for all that, it is scarcely a play. It contains a story--two stories, actually--but it is not a story. It offers many sentences of what, out of context, would sound like criticism; but I don't think anyone would mistake it for a critical essay. The descriptions you offer of it as "a rant (a protest?) without 'responses'" or "a dialogue (a conversation?) with an implied listener" seem like they could not possibly both be true of the same work; but, in fact, they are both true of this work; so what does that tell us?

The comments of others I have shown the manuscript to only compound my uncertainty about it. The poet John Hollander sees it as a Hamlet-like "address to the players--or to an ideal director." Another poet friend assures me that it is a poem. A professor of dramatic theory at the Drama School pronounces it an experiential novel. I am intrigued by all these suggestions but can neither choose among them nor synthesize them.

I should like to try to publish this strange beast ("Tex, the Mystery Text," Susan and I have taken to calling it). But with whom--and as what? Where in the bookstore would it go? These are, I guess, rhetorical questions, but if any actual answers present themselves to you, I'd certainly like to hear them.

CAL
EMMONS - 5

2

Meantime, I want to say again how touched I was by the intensity and specificity of your comments. Especially it moves me that you would want to use the p. 69 quote about solutions from without and within as a possible epigraph for Pizzazz! (great title). Please feel free!

Of course you can put my name on your Guggenheim application. I'd guess your chances for a Guggenheim are excellent.

How is Benny? How was France? I'd love to hear.

May I send regards to Paul, whom I somehow can't help feeling I already know.

With love,

received 7/5/03

CAI
EMMONS -6

July 1, 2003

Dear David,

I finally got free of my teaching responsibilities a week and a half ago and I have been completely reveling in the arrival of summer. And I have finally gotten to read your play! I apologize that it has taken so long – this past quarter I was inundated with students needing my to read their theses (both graduate and undergraduate) and, though I thought the spring quarter would be easier since the book tour was over, it turned out to be the most demanding one yet. (I hope this is not any indication of what is to come, but I fear it is the nature of academia?)

So, about your 'play.' First, I should say that I was MOST impressed with it. As usual, I am so struck by the dual nature of your thinking – on the one hand it is very theatrical, on the other hand you write like a philosopher. And I think there is great strength in that combination, as I have always seen the theater as a place where philosophical dialogue is well played out. The other thing that strikes me about this piece is that it is, like some of your other work, an extended analogy, or a proposition to consider the validity of an extended analogy, in this case playwright as engraver, and play as a set of instructions, and the underlying question: What is authentic? What is the real?

There is so much more to say, but I am sending this letter to tell you that I am going to read the play again and respond more fully when I have done so. I will be going to see my mother in two days (July 3rd) for a week, and when I return I will be rereading your "play?" and getting back to you with more fully formulated responses and ideas about what it suggests to me in terms of presentation. But meanwhile I wanted you to know how much I savored reading the work and how hugely rich I feel it to be.

I hope this finds you well and thriving.

Much love (and admiration),

CAI