

The Habit of Art Makes the Aging Body Shine Brightly

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"The Habit of Art" is a play within a play. The "play within" is about composer Britten visiting the poet Auden in his later years, seeking inspiration for his opera "Death in Venice." However, the two friends ultimately part ways after a conversation full of mutual criticism. The "play" refers to the rehearsal process of the theater company reenacting this visit.

In the rehearsal of the play, while the director "go to Leeds" and is absent from the scene, the playwright is ignored. As a result, the improvising actors and the stage manager who has to constantly take control work together to complete this immensely entertaining production.

Auden's "The Habit of Art"

"The Habit of Art" is not only the title of the play, but also a phrase spoken by one of the main characters, the poet W.H. Auden. When Carpenter asks him if he is still writing, Auden responds, "Am I dead? I work. I have the habit of art." For Auden, art has become a habit.

How art influences reality is a complex topic. Those engaged in the field of "art," whether they are poets, musicians, actors, or other professionals in the theater industry, are perhaps the ones most deeply affected by it.

We are easily moved by art precisely because it allows us to project ourselves, whether it's the poet's self-reflection, the rejection of hypocrisy, the shedding of masks, or the musician's embellishment of tranquility, exaltation of the divine and the morning light. Even when "truth" and "falsehood" collide, any sincere passion invested in it can be moving, and that is good art. And when that passion persists throughout one's life, perhaps it becomes "the habit of art" for those artists.

In the play, both the poet Auden and the musician Britten strive for Art in a society that despises homosexuality. They internalize their efforts and make it a habit for themselves. The most moving aspect of this is Auden, who is old, sick, physically unattractive, and lives in squalor. Despite his lonely and unremarkable old age, he maintains a vibrant and talkative soul because of his "habit of art".

Indeed, Auden in the play is sexy. This sexiness does not come from his unimpressive appearance or lifestyle, but from the male prostitutes who repeatedly

and excitedly knock on his lonely and neglected door, acknowledging him as someone they know.

This is the charm of art, the sensuality of art. Art inspires people to follow and even when someone has lost everything in life, art still makes old friends nostalgic and new friends savor the experience. Art allows a person to possess an everlasting soul that is constantly polished by later generations in the river of time. It is precisely "the habit of art" that keeps the poet eternally sexy, and this habit of art also drives the musician Britten to always strive to be a "pioneer".

Britten's "The Habit of Art"

In "The Habit of Art," Britten is portrayed as a character who may be "uninteresting." It is precisely because of his "uninteresting" nature that the author gives the actor multiple roles: a former male escort turned theater manager, a part-time caretaker for Auden, and eventually the composer Britten himself. As a composer, Britten has an incredibly sincere pursuit of art, but he hides his sexual orientation in his personal life.

For the sake of art, he is willing to reconnect with an old lover whom he hasn't contacted for over thirty years, just to revisit the sense of unity and warmth in their creative collaboration. For the sake of art, he hesitates and wavers in terms of his identity, attempting to approach "Tadzio" from "Death in Venice." Despite his fame and success, his visit to Auden is driven by the desire to find someone "who doesn't defer," when in reality, his anxiety stems from the fear of exposing his sexual orientation.

Should artists sincerely confront themselves and the world? Does an artist's sincerity or lack thereof impact their art? Perhaps it is precisely the panic regarding the "truth" that drives Britten to create diverse movements. It is within the confines of being "restrained" and maintaining a certain level of "respectability" that his shackled dance becomes alluring.

Similarly, Auden's art cannot "save Jews from fire and water or even shorten a war by just five seconds." However, even artists with different perspectives can encourage each other at certain moments, and these moments of encouragement can leave a lifelong impact on each other.

As for us, the nameless individuals, the rent boys in the play, the feeders of the artists, perhaps at some point, we also need the attention of art. This need for attention is the budding of the artistic spirit.

Plays's "The Habit of Art"

Apart from the "habit of art" of poets and musicians, the author of this play has also infused his own habits into the process of staging. Allowing inanimate objects such as mirrors, shadows, sheets of paper, beds, and alarm clocks to speak is an unreasonable act, a sort of showing off, showcasing those naturally resonant beautiful sentences and the undeniable literary flair. Having the journalist in the play also serve as the "storyteller", pouring out strings of Shakespearean-style philosophical and poetic language, is even more of a display and a provocation, showcasing the author's linguistic heights and artistic depths while challenging the audience's cultural level and receptiveness.

Besides, the author also employs "disintegration". Through the mouths of the actors, the author constantly has the director propose eliminating lines written by the playwright, with the latter weakly defending his work, which only deepens the sense of disintegration.

At the beginning of the play, after the narrator delivers a seamless series of parallel structures and convoluted arguments, the art director suddenly asks, "I thought Stephen had cut all of it." "He has." It is precisely this kind of "cut off," the deletion within the play and the display outside the play, that reveals the author's contradictions and the irresistible chattiness induced by artistic habits. Just like Auden's chattiness, the playwright cannot resist delving into the depths of life.

Perhaps, this is where the impotence of art lies. "The Habit of Art" do not always emanate charm. Esteemed actors just want to take shortcuts, while rising talents only seek to increase their exposure. No one cares about the author's intentions. However, through the day-to-day subtle influence, the allure and enchantment of art and theater continue to sow seeds of exploration. The author will also encounter individuals who are passionate about discussing poetry.

Ultimately, even those who perpetually seek laziness and the stage manager—who is always in charge on stage—are captivated by the charm of theatrical art. Deep down, they hold a profound love for plays.

