

Dance 2367H

December 2, 2019

Paper 5

The Puppets of War

Kurt Jooss' "The Green Table" is a piece that came about between the two World Wars. It reflects the idea that regular everyday people only suffer from war and the ones who profit and make decisions are not negatively affected. Marcia Siegel, a renowned dance critic, views "The Green Table" as "a document that insists on telling us about its time, even as it reflects into our own". I agree with Siegel's statement, however I believe "The Green Table" does not reflect our own time as strongly as she thought it did. While the general theme that the higher ups profit from other suffering is true today, it comes in a different form than war. The characters are very relevant to the 1930s but not as much to the present time.

The beginning scene depicts the gentlemen in black making decisions around a green table. The gentlemen in black represent the rich people who profit from the war. Their white gloves represent that their hands are kept clean from the fighting. The unsettling masks that they wear contrast with the upbeat tango music creating a feeling of comedy. This scene is the only time in the dance that the mood is not dark and sad. Their swooping theatrical arms and bouncing knees also add to the irony of the scene. The gentlemen repeat through a phrase of movement, creating a sort of narrative where it seems as if decisions are being debated and then resolved. The two sides of the table dance in a call and response type pattern with movements into and away from the table which makes it seem as if they are debating. Then a decision is reached when the two sides dance in front of the table, each man with a partner

from the other side, bowing to each other. The gentlemen in black are a timeless archetype in this dance, and with a change in costume and music would be applicable to contemporary audiences. I found this scene to be the most entertaining because it pokes fun at people in power in a lighthearted mood.

The brothel scene is the one I find to be most dated. The archetype of the young girl does not really fit the gender norms of the 21st century. The young girl is depicted as graceful and weak. Her steps are small and her arms and upper body flow gently with her movement. This contrasts with the drunk soldier who raises his bent flexed legs brazenly in the air. She is easily manipulated by the profiteer or the soldiers as she dances with their hand on her hips. She does not make any effort to run away or choose her own movement. Because she does not choose any of her own movements her personality is lost, and she becomes a shell of a character. This scene clearly shows its time through the gender roles. I do not see myself as the young girl, and I think this is true for many women who would watch this piece. In fact, I do not even believe that women in the 1930's would let themselves be so helpless.

The profiteer is the most believable civilian character. He actually has a personality because he is not just acted upon but makes his own decisions. Also, his dance with death clearly illustrates the human trait of struggling to stay alive. Instead of just succumbing to death like the young girl who hugs death as if he is her beloved father, the profiteer tries to escape death. First, he bends side to side with his arms above his head in an effort to trick death about where he is. Then he runs away from death but keeps getting pulled back. The dancer puts a lot of resistive effort into his movement, so it is clear that death is forcing the profiteer

to come to him. It is human nature to resist death thus the profiteer displays behavior that is still prevalent today.

“The Green Table” is a story of war where death and the rich are the only ones who profit. Some of the general themes it displays are still true today, however the archetypes represented by each character as well as the costumes point to its age. The young girl and the soldiers belong to the first half of the 20th century, while with a change of costume, the profiteer and the gentlemen in black are still current. The choreography clearly conveys the message of the dance, and the sharpness of death’s dance is very enjoyable. “The Green Table”, because of its political message, is a refreshing piece compared to classical stories with their fictional characters.

Work Cited

Siegel, Marcia B. “The Green Table: Sources of a Classic.” *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1989, pp. 15–21. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1478610.