



Kaspar and Other Plays

Peter Handke , Michael E. Roloff (Translator)

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Kaspar, Peter Handke's first full-length drama - hailed in Europe as "the play of the decade" and compared in importance to *Waiting for Godot* is the story of an autistic adolescent who finds himself at a complete existential loss on the stage, with but a single sentence to call his own. Drilled by prompters who use terrifyingly funny logical and alogical language-sequences, Kaspar learns to speak "normally" and eventually becomes creative "doing his own thing" with words; for this he is destroyed.

In *Offending the Audience* and *Self-Accusation*, one-character "speak-ins," Handke further explores the relationship between public performance and personal identity, forcing us to reconsider our sense of who we are and what we know.

Kaspar and Other Plays Details

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From Reader Review Kaspar and Other Plays for online ebook

Stian Larsen says

I feel shamed. Raped, in a good way, dirty, offended, facefucked with words, sentences and words, ramming nonsense down my throat, exhausting body, mind, eyes, mind, through constant repetition making words meaningless and meaningful at the same time. Everything is nonsense and at the same time nothing. Some say Handkes plays are like Becketts but without the humour. I say they are darker, yes, actually. Here are no hope, but that might not even be important to Handke. This is a dissertation of words and voice through the instrument of theatre. I cant really say anything else than read it, watch it, enjoy it, hate it.

Damien Leri says

"Kaspar" was too experimental for my mood. But I really like "Self accusation"

Bryan says

Handke's is a name that I had heard of but knew next to nothing about when I picked up this short book of plays at some library sale or another. After finishing, I did some cursory research on his career (i.e. looked him up on Wikipedia), and was surprised at all the controversy surrounding him now. None of that has much to do with this earlier work, I suppose, done in the mid 60s--but it seems that the controversy has almost completely obscured his literary work. There was nothing on the Wikipedia page about these three plays at all.

And that might also be because of their relative merit in the overall body of his work--since these three early plays (*Offending the Audience*, *Self-Accusation*, and *Kaspar*), he's had a long career, and these might be considered an acquired taste now, especially the last. They are plays in the sense that they are performed in a theatrical setting, but Handke is intent on obliterating all dramatic conventions as a kind of meta-commentary to go along with the text of the play itself. It seems very sixty-ish to me--a kind of shout at the audience to wake-up, that these plays are about no longer acting as if conventions are truth, about not accepting conventions as necessary, about getting down to *the Real*.

I like this paragraph from the book's back matter, in the introduction to Handke and *Kaspar*:

"As completely unrealistic as *Kaspar* is, the plays substance--the programming of a theater creature by entirely theatrical means, and his eventual discovery of the artificiality of who he is and what he has been taught--could hardly be a more pertinent metaphor for our time, particularly for the young."

Far out, man. That last line is really something--I keep seeing the Freedom School from *Billy Jack* in my mind when I read that.

I don't know a lot about theater--My suspicion is that this kind of experimental theater had its day and dramatists are on to other subjects now. Maybe not--there's a YouTube video of an adaptation of *Offending the Audience* that looks fairly recent. I haven't watched it all, but it seems to conform to the general idea of Handke's piece.

Anyway--about the plays themselves: I enjoyed the first two, which are actually labeled as 'Speak-ins', where the actors directly address the audience (though I thought *Offending the Audience* made its point fairly quickly and then went on and on about it). *Kaspar* did not make a lot of sense to me, even with the gloss of that paragraph I quoted above. Sometimes I thought I caught a glimpse of what Handke was trying to say, but I was never sure--perhaps something along the lines of how the social goal is to bring us out of ignorance into conformity, but not to proceed past that point. Just a guess.

I've been trying to read a lot more drama lately--Pirandello, Ionesco, Stoppard--and some of it seems effective and some not. I haven't read enough to make any conclusive judgments, but Handke was interesting enough (if dated, here) to read more of his when I come across it.

InternetRex says

I really only read *Offending the Audience*

Kimley says

Incredible examination of language, sounds and the way we communicate. Having only read *Kaspar*, I would love to actually see it performed!

Matthieu says

Speech torture.
