Life is Not a Dream When There is No Freedom of Speech

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After reading and then seeing the production of *Life is a Dream*, it became clear why the Gala Theater decided to put on the play. After witnessing the play live, a central theme noticed was the concept of the first amendment. In modern times, the rights of the First Amendment (freedom of speech, press, and religion) are being directly threatened by the President of the United States. President Trump is trying to control the media and what people say to him and about him. With this in mind, a similar control over the right of freedom of speech is seen throughout *Life is a Dream* in terms of Clotaldo, Segismund, and Clarion.

Relating Clotaldo and Segismund to modern characters in our political arena, Clotaldo represents President Trump while Segismund and Clarion represent the various media outlets as a whole. Additionally, the decision of this play to be performed in a theater that produces plays performed in spanish, was intentional because it speaks as a direct response to Trump’s attacks specifically of Latinos, but more broadly of other minorities or younger generations that have been attacked by the President’s comments. The choice to perform this production in a historically latino theater in the nation's capital is a strategic way to direct a message at President Trump, in saying that no matter what language you speak, where you come from or how old you are, your words and what you have to say matter. After watching this play live on stage it is clear that although this play was written hundreds of years ago, the main issues being argued are very relevant today: the power of one’s words and voice, as well as the freedom to say what you want and not have public information hidden from the public.

We are living in a time where our first amendment rights are being threatened to be taken from us. The President is ruling the country in a controlling, manipulative, and dangerous way. As found in the United States Constitution, the First Amendment states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” This amendment is speaking directly to the United States citizens rights of religion, speech, and press. As seen during numerous occasions in history, ones freedom of speech has always been the target of constant attacks as well as debate. Now more than ever, this Constitutional right is again being threatened to be taken from the people. Not until after witnessing the interaction between Clotaldo and Segismund on stage, is one able to fully see and connect the idea of the freedom of speech trying to be taken from Segismund. On stage during act one, Clotaldo constantly restricts Segismund’s attempts to speak and express what he wants to say or how he feels. After witnessing this, it became clear that how Segismund is at the hands of Clotaldo, mirroring how the media is at the hands of President Trump.

This restriction of the freedom of speech is most evident in act one of *Life is a Dream*. When Clotaldo first enters, he speaks to Clarion and Rosaura saying, “against the king’s decree which has forbidden that any should find out the prodigy hidden in these ravines- yield up your weapons or else this pistol, like a snake of metal, will split the piercing venom of two shots with scandalous assault upon the air.” (Cálderon 227) These lines present Clotaldo trying to contain the king’s secret about his son from outsiders as well as his own subjects and is forcing them to stay silent on the scene of an imprisoned Segismund that they see. His threat of physical violence against Clarion and Rosaura due to their meeting of Segismund can be equivalent to Trump’s verbal threats to the media when “false” information regarding his administration and him are published. This can also be seen in terms of the Trump administration hiding or keeping information from the American public in an effort to keep the public in the dark so that Trump may have total reign over the citizens. This effort to contain a secret is a clear hint of Clotaldo’s intent of limiting Clarion and Rosaura’s speech and knowledge of what they just saw: Clotlado locked up in a cell.

This correlation between Clotaldo and Trump continues to be portrayed in act two. Clotaldo emulates similar aspects of Trump’s controlling means when he imprisons Clarion. His reasons for imprisoning Clarion were, “Because a Clarion who knows too many secrets must be kept in gaol- a place where even clarions are silent.” (265) This imprisonment is Clotaldo’s way of limiting the public’s (Clarion’s) knowledge and learning of “insider” information that should in fact rightfully and lawfully be disclosed to the public. A modern translation of this scene can be witnessed in the current political climate with Trump and his administration hiding key information and documents (tax returns and phone call transcripts to name a few) from the American public, forcing us to be in the dark on issues that have direct effects on us. In any type of government the public has a right to know issues and information that the government and their leaders know have direct impacts to the public. Continuing into act three, when Rosaura questions as to where Clarion has been and why he has been locked in the tower, he answers saying, “Because I know the secret who you are” (286). This confession from Clarion as to the reason of his punishment proves how he was imprisoned due to his knowledge of public knowledge which was being kept from the public. This act of imprisonment in modern times can be seen as unconstitutional due to the fact that the basis of the imprisonment was in limiting Clarion’s first amendment right, freedom of speech.

Another reason why it can be believed that *Life is a Dream* is specifically being put on at the Gala Theater (which famously has put on plays performed in spanish for decades) in Washington D.C. is because of the message it is sending to the audience in hopes of them spreading to their friends and others they pass during their day to day lives. The fact that the play is being produced in a theater that has historically put on plays performed in spanish is significant due to the fact that there is a wide variety of theaters in D.C. and *Life is a Dream* is being hosted by the Gala Theater out of all of them. The theater and director, Hugo Medrano, may be doing this to prove to audience members that even if words are spoken in another language other than english or by someone who is a child, their words and what they have to say matter. This location of the play at the Gala Theater can also be a direct response to how Trump has devalued Latin Americans in his stereotypical war against them and in categorizing them to be bad people who are toxic to our country. From the start of his campaign up to today, Trump has continued attacking Latinos in his speeches. He started out his campaign referring to them as “rapists” and claiming that, “When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best," and continued further by saying, "They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists.” These attacks and false claims on Latinos continue to this day. This can be seen as Trump’s effort to silence the minority in America and in his mind “reclaiming” the dominance of the white man, in hopes of returning to a time when white men ruled the world.

Trump’s devaluing of one’s words can be seen most recently directed at young climate change activist, Greta Thunberg. Greta is a 16 year old fighting on the global stage to bring awareness to the crisis that our planet is going through, yet world leaders refuse to make vast actions to try and combat it as soon as possible. Recently after both speaking at the UN, Trump tweeted a response at a video of her speaking there saying, “She seems like a very happy young girl looking forward to a bright and wonderful future. So nice to see!” This tweet seemingly disregarded everything she was arguing for her in speech and minimizing her to a child who did not know what they were talking about. It was Trump asserting his age, as “wisdom” over her and putting himself in a position of advantage and higher ground than her. By performing this play in another language, Medrano is seeking to argue that no matter what language you speak, where you come from or how old you are, your voice matters and no one should have the power to silence you. Everyone has the freedom of speech no matter what language your speech is in.

This play is one in which contains many issues that have continued into the 21st century and are more important now than ever before. The concept of freedom of speech as well as the value of one’s words are issues that mattered back then, and matter now. Reading this play and then watching it performed during this time in America’s history, it is clear that the political issues that were apparent in the 1600s are still apparent now. This play acts as a reminder to the public, that we have rights and we cannot be silenced. It instills in readers and audience members the importance of rising up and fighting against when they see wrong among our society. Clarion and Segismund serving as direct comparisons to the US media and Clotaldo being a mirror image of President Trump proves that the injustice and corruption against society in our political climate has been a theme for a long time.

Works Cited

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