

In the process of rehearsing 'Cosi Fan Tutte' Lewis learns as much from the patients as they learn from him. Discuss.

In Louis Nowra's 1971 play, 'Cosi', protagonist Lewis Riley is encouraged to 'bring the patients out of their shells' by directing them in a play but although Lewis is the one instructing and guiding them, the asylum patients end up altering Lewis's understandings about love and the mentally ill, as well as shaping his character, confirming that they evidently educate Lewis more than he teaches them.

Lewis, being an 'outsider' ultimately has the ability to influence the inmates of the asylum. Nowra first indicates this idea by setting the first scene of the play in a 'brunt out theatre', representing the gloom that the setting originally holds but when Lewis enters the room, so does a 'chink of light', highlighting the possibility that Lewis may have a positive impact on the wellbeing of the patients. Aside from the symbolism, it is also clear that when Lewis interacts with the patients as a director, they look to him for authority and assurance, despite Roy's bossiness; when Ruth asks **her** questions such as 'will we have cappuccinos?' and 'the audience thinks it's real coffee?' she directs them at Lewis and he answers them, suggesting on a basic level, Lewis teaches them the things he has learnt from university. On a deeper level, Lewis unintentionally teaches the patients about the 'outside' world that they have been excluded from. Doug doesn't understand 'social mores' but through Lewis, he realises that the mantra for youth in the 1970's society is 'make love, not war, eh?' and through Doug's expressive personality, some of the other patients begin to learn about the world Lewis lives in, one example of this newfound knowledge can be seen through Julie, when she questions Lewis about being 'into free love?', explaining that Doug 'spread it all over the asylum'. As well as informing the patients about society's values, Lewis also brings attention to the political state the country is in and some of the patients do indeed learn from this. Cherry, for example, had no understanding of the current situation, shown through her confusion – 'what's this about Vietnam?' and the statement 'you're always the last to know things in an asylum' pinpoints that fact that the separation from society results in ignorance and through association with Lewis, characters like Cherry are able to gain the knowledge that they lack. Furthermore, the rehearsals of 'Cosi Fan Tutte' undeniably influence some of the inmates positively. Henry is submissive and shy but through the respect that Lewis gives and the themes in the opera, Henry is able to 'come out of his shell' and gain more confidence, transforming from someone with a stutter to someone who ends up singing loudly on stage. Julie as well, finds being a part of the opera therapeutic as she is no longer sitting in a ward doing nothing with her time and she is 'happy coming to this burnt out theatre' because of it. Conclusively, as Lewis is the director, the patients will learn some theatre related advice but more importantly, through Lewis, the patients are also able to gain an insight to life outside the asylum and be shaped by the experience.

On the other hand, the mental patients help outline Lewis's values beliefs through the creation of 'Cosi Fan Tutte', altering his original views. When Lewis is introduced, his views on love are very similar to that of Nick and Lucy. He doesn't hold much value on fidelity due to the importance of the Vietnam war in his life. This is ironically expressed when Lewis claims that 'love is not so important nowadays', which elicits shock response from Roy – 'what planet are you from?' but Lewis is forced to question his own opinion on this matter through the individual interpretations of love that 'Cosi Fan Tutte' allows them to draw upon and discuss. Doug claims that women 'pretend they don't play around' which differs from Lewis 'faithful' view of Lucy. Julie also approaches this topic when she states that 'women are flesh and blood too', allowing Lewis to question how he really feels about women. Roy's choice of play, 'Cosi Fan Tutte' also questions women's fidelity, claiming that 'women's faithfulness is like the Arabian Phoenix, everyone swears it exists but no one has ever seen it'. Through these examples, and many stories from other patients, Lewis is able to form a more traditional view on romance and is able to differentiate between love and lust, understanding that love and acceptance are important in relations, which is what Nowra is trying express throughout the play. This change in Lewis is apparent when Lewis describes the opera as being about 'important things, like love and fidelity' and when he reacts with genuine hurt at the fact that Lucy is 'sleeping' with him but 'having sex' with Nick. This transformation highlights one example of a lesson that Lewis learnt while rehearsing a play with the asylum patients.

In addition, the patients inadvertently help Lewis develop in character because through his partnership with the mentally ill, he is able to understand what so-called 'insane' people are really like, thus helping him to grow. Formerly, Lewis held very stereotypical views of the ill, he feared that one of them might 'forget to take their medication and go berserk' and through the stage instruction, he was very careful and delicate with them, he 'weakly gripped' Cherry's hand when he met her, receiving a response of 'I'm not fragile'. His further words are spoken with 'hesitation', showing his clear lack of confidence and certainty but through the rehearsals of 'Cosi Fan Tutte' Lewis forms bonds and even romance with the patients. He begins to realize that they aren't so 'mad' and aside from their quirks, most of them are quite 'normal' – they are able to learn lines and perform in a play and some have respectable views on fidelity. Through this realization, Lewis gains more confidence and authority when he realises how 'ordinary' many of the patients are and when becomes a part of the cast in the opera, he shows his ability to emphasise and communicate with people who were once seen as 'insane' due to the separation from the rest of the world. Lewis's alteration does not only apply to his situations with the 'mentally ill', the changes that they shaped helped Lewis to stand up to his university friends because at the beginning of the play, Lewis was very submissive in his relationship with Nick and Lucy, he was meekly following their lead and agreeing with them but by the end of the play, Lewis is able to stand up to Nick, forcibly saying 'I said, don't sing that song', followed by a punch. Through Lewis's alliance with the patients, his character expands, helping him to

become not just a man with true understanding of the mentally ill in 1971, but a man with the newfound courage to stand up for what he believes is right.

Overall, during the formation of 'Cosi Fan Tutte' Lewis educates the patients on some aspects of life that they are ignorant in, as well as helping them to benefit from being a part of the play but it is the inmates of the asylum who ultimately teach Lewis the most, showing that being involved in the opera was a learning experience of many of characters involved.

Really good essay. Good structure. Good use of evidence. Well done!!