

Drama As A Text Or Performance

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Abstract

A drama is a specific kind of art that helps the performers to act accordingly in their specific roles. The dramatist has dexterously penned the lines and simultaneously the dramatic text gets its birth. However, at times the text remains analogous with another medium of instructions and sometimes it takes its new shape to different horizons of reality. A text is performed in front of the audience so as to bring a new extension and growth. The immediate difference between text and performance is quintessentially visible towards the naked eye. Whenever the play is read through the text, the readers may find an immense pleasure on scanning each and every line of the speeches of the perspective characters and scenes. When it is performed on stage, the readers become spectators in the drama and automatically reach in the state of sublimity. So the question arises whether drama should be read only as a text or only as performance? A text without performing art is quite impossible. Similarly, a performing art without text is next to impossible. The quintessential beauty or appeal cannot be at all fulfilled only through reading text. So, we can say one is complementary to the other.

Keywords: Drama, text, performance, audience and dramatist

The word “drama” according to M.H. Abrams is “The form of composition designed for performance in the theater, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated action, and utter the written dialogue.” The term “drama” is originated from the Greek term which meant “action”. In English, the term was quite popular during the time of William Shakespeare’s plays.

We need to remember that when we talk about drama, we come across two masks – the comedy masks and the tragedy mask. The comedy mask or the happy mask is named after Muse Thalia whose name meant by “flourishing”. The tragedy mask is named after Muse Melpomene. She held a knife in a hand along with the tragic mask on the other hand.

The enactment of drama is performed in front of the audience where characters of the drama, stage crafts, literary texts, costumes and lighting provides a major role. The “play within the play” episode in William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is enacted to provide an entertainment purpose and also described a light-hearted comedy for the wedding of the three couples. Similarly, plays can also help us to unravel the mystery of the plot as for example “The Mousetrap” episode in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

In England, drama developed during the Middle Age. The first stage in the development of drama was the mysteries and miracle plays. The second stage in the development of drama was those plays that emerged from the Church into the traditional market place. England was divided into four church cycles. These cycles are named as York Coventry Wakefield and Chester. Each cycle has the different number of plays. The York Cycle consists of 48 plays, Coventry as 42 plays, Wakefield as 30 plays and Chester as 25 plays. The third stage in the development of drama was the morality plays and Interlude. The mystery and miracle play gave rise to morality plays and interlude. The fourth stage in the development of drama was the first comedy and first tragedy namely *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall and *The Tragedie of Gorboduc*, also titled *Ferrex and Porrex* by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville.

In Elizabethan age, Globe theatre was built and William Shakespeare and his train of artists used to perform their dramas. William Shakespeare has approximately written 39 plays. In the Globe Theatre,

Theatres of the time were three story buildings with open roofs and uncurtained platform stages that thrust forward into the auditorium. Performances were given during daylight hours. At the back of the stage were doors from which the actors entered, and behind them the tiring house, or dressing room. There was an upper acting level that could represent a balcony or the walls of the city.

The Shakespeare Book (15)

Theatres reemerged in England under the hands of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson and people have an automatic interest on drama. The Restoration theatre was an upper-class theatre and the restoration dramatists satirized the upper-class aristocratic society. William Congreve’s comedy of manners *The Way of the World* (1700)

started during this age. It talked about the elaborative style of high class people society. Unfortunately, no moral messages have been shared during this time. It was only written for the sake of entertainment. The modern theatre talked about common man and that theme is portrayed in some of the works of T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge. In *The Theatre of the Absurd*, we find that there is no meaning in human existence and the world is void and null. Everything is shattered in front of the others. Some typical absurd dramatists are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Tom Stoppard and many other dramatists.

The individual researcher in his Masters of Arts Course has written a parody of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* Act I, Scene I in which he described the characteristics of the three strict teachers instead of three witches.

Scene I. A staffroom

Examination question papers and syllabus. Enter three English teachers

Accent lighting and horror music

First Teacher : When shall we three torture students again
 In semesters, weekly or in mains.

Second Teacher: When the Fresher's Day is done,
 When the students have had all there fun.

Third Teacher: That will be ere the summer vacation.

First Teacher: Where's the place?

Second Teacher: Upon the examination hall.

Third Teacher: There to meet with the students.

First Teacher: I come, Literary Theory!

Second Teacher: Americanism calls.

Third Teacher: Anon.

ALL

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:

Nobody will pass cause no end in the syllabus is there.

Evil laughter

Exeunt

By this short skit, the individual researcher has studied rigorously the text that described the witches scene of William Shakespeare's Macbeth of Act I, Scene I. Thus, it helped him to write a parody from each and every line of that particular scene. In this way, he had performed this art in front of the audience. It helped him to learn about stage crafts, the different costumes of different characters in that play. Moreover, he knew about lighting effects and music too.

The immediate difference between text and performance is quintessentially visible towards the naked eye. Whenever the play is read through the text, the readers may find an immense pleasure on scanning each and every line of the speeches. When it is performed on stage, the readers become spectators in the drama and automatically reach in the state of sublimity. The mental faculty of the brain gets automatically coherent with the visible reality and thus the minds of the spectators work crystal clearly when the action is performed visually.

In a traditional classroom, a drama can be taught to the students by the teacher acting as a role model in front of the audience. The teacher can sometimes act in front of the audience and ask the students to respond accordingly. Sometimes the teacher may point out different roles of the characters to different students and ask them to rehearse the respective roles. He or she may provide a particular situation and also the acting situation of the perspective character and ask them to play accordingly.

In a smart classroom, the teacher may play the audio-visual part of the drama and ask the students to watch them and also imitate them in front of the other fellow students. It is also a two-dimensional stage of acting. The students must sometimes use the LSRW technique and act accordingly. This helps the students to learn a new technique of communication with his or her peers. Oftentimes the other students may break the fourth wall in the case of Augusto Boal's Theatre of Oppressed and audience may become performers and act appropriately.

In addition to the theatre, the movies provide an added source of interest in projecting the realities to the people. It must be acknowledged that watching something live of a particular situation has a far greater impact and appeal on the minds of the people than at times reading.

Sometimes people try to imitate them and unconsciously it provides a big influence on their life. Some of the few movies that led to a positive social environment are “Taare Zaamen Par”, “3 Idiots”, “Mother India” and “Swadesh”. Some of the elegant movies like “A Thousand Acres”, “Fire”, “Split Wide Open” and “A Monsoon Wedding” project the kinds of immoral and evil in the society.

Mahesh Dattani is not only an Indian playwright but also a theatre practitioner like Badal Sircar. His meticulous direction also wonders to his written texts as Mahesh Dattani believes that his work is complete only when it has been performed in front of the audience. While writing plays, he explores both the masculine and the feminine self within him. This is why Dattani is placed as “a playwright of world stature.”

The relation between text and performance is central to William Hazlitt's dramatic criticism. For the typical Regency theatergoer, the text was almost negligible, merely a series of hooks for stage action and spectacle—a "vehicle," in Hazlitt's words, "for connecting scenery, pantomime, and song.”

William Hazlitt on Dramatic Text and Performance by James Mulvihill
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A text without performing art is surely impossible. Similarly, a performing art without text is not possible too. The quintessential beauty or appeal cannot be at all fulfilled only through reading text. So, we can say one is complementary to the other. There is nothing greater or weaker between text and performance. Therefore we can say, a drama is always a successful drama when it is penned by a successful dramatist and it is performed with dexterity and meticulousness in the stage. Thus, the drama is known as an applied art in all frontiers of literature.

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