

Drama: A Narrative Medial and the Workshop of the Artist

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ABSTRACT

Of all the literary genres, dramatic art has the advantage of having dual ways to reach the public; that is, it can be read as well as be watched. The wider acknowledgement given to dramatic form is that it is meant to be staged, but at the same time, it cannot be ascribed entirely to the stage alone because, the reading communities around the world accommodate reading of dramas that have universal appeal. It is often said about Shakespeare's plays that they are more read than staged. This confirms the place attributed to drama in human life. Yet, the performance of it gives life to the text and, in that sense while staging a drama, to sustain and emphasize the theme the dramatist has to adopt several techniques even while writing the play. The dramatist has to foresee the play in action which leads to the openness of the content as the public interpretations differ especially, if it is an open-ended drama, and this becomes the unique characteristic of drama.

Key Words: Narrative Medial, Dramatic Types, Stage Techniques, weapon of Emancipation, Effects on the Spectators

Introduction

Drama is a narrative medial through which a story can be conveyed in its full effect which can produce pleasure in the spectators. J. A. Cuddon in his *Literary Terms Literary Theory* defines drama as, "in general any work meant to be performed on a stage by actors" (216). Since it has been flourishing as an art form of the theater, the playwright too is aware of the specific theater, its advantages and its limitations, and thus he strives to excel the performance with the dramatic tools that would be suitable for the plays and for the theater as well. Like a powerful magician who can conjure up a new world of magic, the dramatist throws a dramatic spell over his audiences who are taken into the plot and believe that the story is actually happening there on the stage. So, the intensity of the actions are well calculated by the dramatist as the pace of the events and the increasing tension in the actions of the characters are all projected well, and they move towards the close of the curtain. The perspective of Aristotle regarding the elements of the play is the combination of action, character, thought, language, music, and spectacle. Hence, a play can be regarded as an art form which involves many artistic forms and resources to achieve the desired effect.

Materials and Methods

Even though the playwright intends to write and produce a play for a specific audience and theatre, the greatest plays with universal appeal will reach wider reading audience from faraway places contributing to the permanence of the play. Modern dramatists are well aware of this feature, and thus they add insightful information regarding time, place, setting and characters of their plays. They also leave clues for the readers which, if they follow, will guide them towards the meaning the dramatists wish to convey. So, every part in a play is rendered with lot of meanings. For instance, the title itself is very suggestive in a drama. The stage directions by the dramatist provide to the mood and to the tone of the play, and the characters' descriptions add to the comprehension of the plot. The playwright facilitates the reader to perform his artistic production on the stage, in his imagination of course, though originally he has composed it for the actual, concrete stage. The plot will render further effect of relating the drama to life reality. And, in that sense, it has become a powerful commentator on human beings and their life situations. Augusto Boal in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* opines, "...all theater is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theater is one of them." (Foreword)

Augusto Boal conceives theater as a proficient weapon, and so one has to fight for the weapon. He adds that this is the reason why the ruling class in any society endeavors to take hold of the theater with an intention of displaying their domination. According to him, if one set of a society dominates the theater, then the concept of the term will be completely lost. He remarks that theater can be used as a weapon of emancipation too from which certain theatrical structures must be created. Above all, Boal is of the opinion that the theater will be flourished and sustained if it undertakes the necessary changes that evolve according to the changing times. Thus, the growth and the change of the theater are the reflections of the growth and the change of the human life. It is beneficial to mankind when an assumed cast of actors/characters participate in a complex plot and react to pressures created as the plot moves towards the climax in so much so that the truth in human nature will be revealed which will be a real source of learning for the human beings to decipher the growing complex nature of the human psyche.

Results and Discussion

The ancient dramatists, Greeks and English, employed an alternative method for the tragic hero which inaugurated the introduction of the supernatural power in tragedy. The presence of such a force would produce a feeling of reverence mixed with fear which is a compulsive streak of tragedy. Lynn Altenbernd and Leslie L. Lewis in their book *A Handbook for the Study of Drama* views, "Tragedy represents characters whose will are set on courses necessary to their own moral natures, and who are overpowered by the forces against them" (70). It is understood that in a tragedy the characters are overpowered by the presence of supernatural elements, sometimes a ghastly presence, and at times a dark shadow of ill-omen, or which the clues are thrown in by the dramatist.

Next to other-worldly interference in a tragedy comes, the significant role played by fate in the protagonist's life. Allardyce Nicoll in his book *An Introduction to Dramatic Theory* says about the role of fate: "Fate appears above the stage like a fourth actor, playing a principal part, cheating, deceiving, betraying, watching with a grim smile, the blundering actions of the miserable king (60). A plot which ends with a grave note is the design of tragedy which aims at invoking the feeling of pity and fear in the spectators. These two emotions are aroused by the mistakes of the hero who has to obey the powers beyond him that control his life course. Thus, the tragic form has profound effect on the spectators with its power of elevating the human emotion.

Comedy can be said as the fine-tuned form of farce because the farcical elements like display of exaggerated emotions, clowning, word play, or extreme absurd behaviours of the characters which add to the comic amusement. The difference between farce and comedy lie in the plot construction in which comedy presents a more feasible situation than farce does. It presents a more solemn plot lines but, not too grave though. Even in characterization, farce portrays stereotypes whereas comedy employs individuals who are identified by the spectators who express their concern for the impediments in the characters' lives. Unlike tragedies that demand the audience's attention of feeling on with the principal characters, comedies explore the human complexities in a light fashion. M. H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* observes:

A comedy is a work in which the material are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our delighted attention rather than our profound concern, we feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief characters. (25)

M. H. Abrams lists the different types of comedies such as the Romantic Comedy, Satiric Comedy, Comedy of Manners, Comedy of Humours, Farce, High comedy and Low Comedy. The comic effect precipitates many varieties as per the changing times because, it can be regarded as "a distinctly social mirror" (Altenbernd and Lewis 69). The kinds of comic forms are always related in one aspect – the positive comic vision that renders a healthy, powerful force to face the predicaments in life. The next dramatic form is melodrama which centralizes displaying strong plot lines and heavy emotions but, not with fatal endings as seen in tragedies. Insisting on identification with the principal characters irrespective of their good/bad nature, this type of drama violates the principles of poetic justice by demanding concern for the protagonist and hatred for the villain. Farce and melodrama are often referred to as inferior forms of comedy and tragedy.

The objective of Farce is laughter which is aroused through slapstick behaviour, absurdities found in characters and situations, gags and exaggerated expressions, etc which are presented in a fast-pace that evokes uproarious laughter. It presents insensible or ridiculous plot lines. It pictures the possibility of the absurd and uncontrolled human behaviour. Farce also employs violence to some extent to elicit laughter on stage. The form is applauded in one sense that it succeeds in producing 'thoughtless laughter' which the world of drama is in need of, and seeks for it endlessly. Comedy, Tragedy, Melodrama, and Farce form the major types of dramatic form, as stated already. The dramatic modes and values, which have always influenced the effect of drama, consist of the popular 'isms' as follows: Classicism, Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism.

A drama becomes vibrant only when it elicits moral values which are ultimately emanated from theme and technique. Some dramas are notable in their usage of techniques. They may even be celebrated for the innovative use of the craftsmanship. But, to achieve greatness and the timeless fame, in the dramatic world, certain modes and values must be adopted. Techniques contribute to the aesthetic appeal, whereas modes contribute to the moral appeal, which are essential for retaining interest in the drama.

Conclusion

The quality of a good play is not only decided by the plotline but, also by the characterization. The feelings conveyed by the characters add life to the story of a drama. The greatness of a drama depends on the dramatist's ability to synthesize plot and character. The dramatist chooses the number of characters he needs for the play. The main character in the play is known as the 'protagonist'. The opponent of the principal character is known as the 'antagonist'. The dramatist characterizes the appearance of the character, by costumes. Then the way the characters talk and act, especially, using asides, soliloquies in which the role of language plays a mammoth task. Dialogue is another element of importance in drama as it helps achieve the action of the plot, and so it can be regarded as a form of action. Dramatic dialogue is the artist's forte` of dexterity because it must be focused, choosy, intensified and economical. In a sense, speech too can be called a character in a drama as it accelerates the action in the play. It contributes to the movement of the plot towards denouement. Finally, setting of the play which is needed to execute, or fix the plot. Most dramatists fix their setting depending upon the theatres available during their time and in their locale. These dramatic techniques are the hand tool of the playwrights who use them for the purpose of transferring their message to the audience.

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