

Theatre plays / preliminary reflections

(preliminary: *einleitend, vorbereitend*)

Let's suppose you have an interesting subject to talk about, a story to tell and a message to convey. Think of some unusual event from your own experience.

(If you cannot think of anything the following situation may serve as an example:

a friend of yours takes drugs, starts stealing, is sent to prison, finds out she is pregnant, wonders whether or not to give up her baby for adoption, meets persons who make life miserable for her and other persons who offer to help her. She arrives at a conclusion which may or may not be successfully put into practice.)

You now have to decide which text form is best suited to your purposes: a newspaper report (in case it is a true story), or a prose narrative (novel, short story, fable), or a theatre play.

Try to weigh the arguments for and against each sort of text, concentrating especially on the two literary genres.

Consider the following points please:

advantages to be found exclusively in one of these three forms but not in the other two; effectiveness
technical difficulties (which would be the easiest, which the most difficult way of presentation?);
disadvantages, problems that may prevent effective presentation, things that cannot be done,
methods that cannot be used

target group; how many people can be reached, how effectively can they be reached?

take a story you know, eg "Bliss". If you want to put it on the stage or make a movie script out of it,
which changes with regard to the presentation of the subject-matter will you have to make?

Theatre plays / Drama

— Introduction, technical terms —

Drama, like the novel, is a literary genre.

Drama is intended to be performed and it is complete only in performance, traditionally before an audience by actors on a stage. The printed text of a play needs performance to come to life and to take a definite shape.

The basic element of drama is **conflict** between opposing persons, or contrasting attitudes, ideas and interests. Conflict creates tension and when acted out, this produces the **dramatic action**.

Dramatic action is immediately present in **dialogue**, in which the characters reveal themselves through what they say and how they say it. Good dialogue must capture the personalities, social positions, attitudes and emotions of the characters.

Although action unfolds exclusively in dialogue, **stage directions** are usually included to give directors and actors some indication to stage performance. These notes may be short and scarce, as in Shakespearean plays ("Another room in the castle" / "Enter King"), or very detailed and comprehensive, as in some modern plays; they refer to the **locale** (place of action) and the movement and performance of the actors, but they may also indicate the kind of scenery, props (or properties, movable objects like furniture) and lighting to be used.

Various types of plays have been produced over the centuries, reflecting historical and social change and changing conditions of public performance. Full-length plays (suitable for an evening's entertainment) are traditionally composed of **acts** (units that reflect main stages in the development of the action), which are further subdivided into **scenes** (sequences of continuous uninterrupted action). Modern plays with less intricate actions may do without acts and just present a series of scenes.

Modern theatre has given rise to a new short form, the modern one-act-play, which has few or no subdivisions into scenes, runs for only 15 to 40 minutes, and, like the short story, concentrates on a single incident and a restricted number of characters.

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drama: a piece of fiction, also called **play**, usually written for performance on stage, in films or on television.

act: major division of a drama, often divided further into scenes.

scene: subdivision of an act of a drama, usually established by a unity of time, place and action, often marked by the entrance and exit of one or more characters.

stage direction: author's notes in a drama on how it is to be performed, often with important details about the setting, the characters' appearances, actions, movements, gestures, ways of speaking and attitudes, thus providing explicit as well as implicit characterization.

entrance: in drama, the coming of a character onto the stage.

exit: in drama, a character's leaving the stage.

characterization: way of presenting a character in a fictional text. If the reader or audience is told about the characters' traits directly by the author, another character, or the characters themselves, we speak of **explicit** characterization. If the reader (or audience) is expected to find out about the characters' traits indirectly through what the characters say and do (their actions, opinions, and way of speaking) we speak of **implicit** characterization.

When trying to understand the characters of a play the audience (or reader) concentrates mainly on the actions and words.

The actors (and readers) must also consider the writer's instructions how to perform the play, the stage directions.

plot: in fictional texts, the structure of the actions as a set of events connected by cause and effect and centred around one or more conflicts. Plot is typically composed of the following elements, usually in this order: exposition, rising action, climax, turning-point, falling action, solution or open ending.

conflict: clash between different forces. In fictional texts, the struggle may be one of ideas or values within a character (internal conflict) or between two characters or between one character and fate/nature/society etc (external conflict).

rising action: structural element of a fictional text, marked by an increase in the suspense and an intensifying of the conflict.

falling action: structural element of a fictional text, marked by a reduction of the suspense. It usually follows the turning-point.

exposition: structural element of a fictional text, usually at the very beginning, including the introduction of the main character(s), the theme and the setting, as well as first indications of atmosphere and tone.

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