

Theater studies: writing, directing, and acting essay examples

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Introduction

Theater is one of the oldest forms of entertainment in the history of mankind. Even the ancient Greek philosophers, Aristotle and Plato, argued about the nature and purpose of theater (Downs, Wright and Ramsey 7).

Perhaps the reason behind its long lasting persistence is because theater is a complicated and multi-dimensional work of art that when done correctly can truly speak to the deepest parts of the human soul. But for it to be done correctly, multiple aspects should be taken care of. This paper will discuss three of those aspects, namely writing, directing, and acting.

I chose to discuss those three specific aspects because I believe that they are the core of theater art. Of course, it is undeniable that things such as costumes, scenic design, lighting, sounds, make-up, and others help improve a play. However, they are optional (Downs, Wright and Ramsey 15). On the other hand, the aspects of playwriting, directing, and acting are the fundamentals of theater.

During theater's humble beginnings, there were no sound effects, no artificial lighting, and no make-up. Theater artists relied only on words, direction, and acting. However, people still found their plays to be invigorating, engaging, and captivating. It took centuries before the art of theater started to become more complex and tailored with the addition of modern enhancements. While these modern enhancements in contemporary plays absolutely amaze me, I still find that theater is most fascinating when at its rawest form. In tracing its history—all the way back to the earliest examples of theater—it is evident that theater at its rawest form simply boils down to playwriting, directing, and acting.

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Playwriting

Playwriting will be the first topic for this paper because this is where a play starts (Downs, Wright and Ramsey 125). This is the first step towards creating a play. The script acts like a skeleton, providing a framework for the play, which the rest of the theater cast and crew would need to follow (Hatcher 32). But the scripts used in theater are extremely different from those used for television shows and movies. Scripts for TV and films are made with the consideration that there will be cameras that can zoom into every tiny detail of the scene. Likewise, the cameras can also zoom out and provide a bigger picture of the specific scene. These camera tricks help the audience know which parts of the scene they should be focusing on.

In theater, however, scripts are made with the knowledge that there would be no cameras that can guide the audience in the right direction. However, this does not limit the ability of the theater script. On the contrary, it provides more opportunities. It motivates the playwright, the one in charge of writing the script, to be more creative in writing the dialog and developing the characters (Hatcher 63). The dialog and character development are the two most important contributions that a script provides. It is then the playwright's responsibility to be able to come up with characters that would not only capture the audience's interest but would also allow them to empathize with the characters (Hatcher 38). A play that has uninteresting characters is, to be blunt, an uninteresting play. In this regard, the playwright should be able to create a story that would continuously keep the audience guessing and emotionally invested. This entails being able to come

up with gripping conflicts that can move the story into new and exciting places (Hatcher 31).

Directing

In the early years of the theater, the playwrights usually took it upon themselves to direct the play (Kansese 73). However, from the year 1750 to the year 1850, more people began to appreciate the art of theater and more people began taking notice of the scenery development, scene shifting, and scene blocking (Kansese 73). Because of this newly found interest for the process and aesthetics of play production, the responsibility of directing shifted from the playwrights to the actual directors; hence, the world saw the birth of professional theater directors.

Directing is basically “ the art of communicating a play’s message and essence to an audience through a meticulous (re)ordering, control, management and manipulation of available materials and human resources” (Kansese 72). In other words, it is the responsibility of the director to live out the playwright’s story with the use of space, actors, and other logistical factors. It is his or her job to bring the story from the paper to the stage for all to see.

The act of directing has both an objective and a subjective aspect. The objective aspects refer to the fact that directors have to stick to a source material (Kansese 75). There is a script to be followed. Directors are required to master every detail of the script such as the dialog, the scenes, the characters, the setting, and the plot.

On the other hand, the subjective aspect refers to the fact that directors

have the right to their own stylistic interpretation (Kansese 75). This means that although directors have to abide by the source material, they are still free to interpret it any way they can—creating a vision of their own. The vision is how a director understood the script and how he or she wishes to translate it (Kansese 76). A director's vision sets up the whole tone and direction of the play. It determines which metaphors will be emphasized, which images will be shown, how actors should play their parts, what kind of music will be used, how the backdrop will be created, and others.

Acting

Acting is the last aspect to be discussed among all three because it is the amalgamation of the script and the play's direction (Cohen 1). Actually, acting is in a way the final product that is presented to the consumers, if one is to think of theater as more of a business than an art. It is the aspect that the audience gets to experience the most. This is why actors are usually the most well-known and most talked about within the theater world. They are usually the ones used during promotions for the plays. They get most of the spotlight due to their performance on stage; however, their work actually begins off stage.

Actors are responsible for living out the story of the playwright and the vision of the director (Cohen 1). But acting is more than just memorizing lines and memorizing body movements. Acting is the skill of being able to feel and make other people feel with you (Bloch 2). An actor is burdened with the task of having to summon and control specific emotions at will. Moreover, it has to look and feel genuine or else the audience will not be able to

emotionally invest themselves in the play. So how exactly can actors achieve this feat? They do so by, first, understanding their characters and, second, understanding the scenes.

Actors should master the roles they are playing because the characters within a play are not supposed to be one-dimensional people (Bloch 3).

There are stories, personalities, perspectives, histories, attitudes, and emotions behind every character. Acting entails being able to interpret all those things based solely on the script and then using that interpretation in order to determine how to react to the scenes. Mastering the characters they are playing will enable actors to determine how they should react to and act in particular scenes (Bloch 5). Only upon the mastery of their roles can actors execute a performance that will feel genuine to the audience. When it comes to theater, sincerity is what separates the good plays from the bad ones.

Conclusion

Theater is an art form that requires team effort. It is a collaboration among artists. Some of these artists include the playwright, the director, and the actors. Without those three, there would be no play. Even if two of these aspects are amazing, if one of them is horrible, these would still lead to a disastrous play. This is what makes theater a highly tricky and particularly difficult form of art. However, this is also what makes it beautiful because it gives it depth. Through theater, a playwright's story comes to life; a director's vision is made into reality; and an actor's emotions are turned into a performance.

Works Cited

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