

THE NATURE OF THEATRE

Chapter 1

Theatre has been with us since ancient Egypt – 4,000 years ago

- Saw a popularity in ancient Greece and Rome
- Gradually degenerated into the Roman Circus
- From 400 A.D. to 1000 it lacked widespread support and attention.
- Saw a resurgence of theatre in the Middle Ages, beginning in the Church.

- Gained increasing popularity in all classes proceeding into the time of Shakespeare (16th-17th centuries)
- Did suffer proscription in England during the Puritan Rebellion under Oliver Cromwell
- A variety of theatrical forms would develop

- Tropes
- Miracle plays
- Morality plays
- Cycles
- Commedia del Arte
- “straight” drama
 - Tragedies
 - Comedies
 - Histories
- Opera
- Melodrama

WHATEVER THE TYPE OF THEATRE, THERE ARE THREE BASIC ELEMENTS

- What is performed
- The performance itself
- The audience

What Is Performed

- May be scripted, semi-scripted, or impromptu
- May be comedy, dance, juggling, tumbling, drama, etc.
- May be entertaining, thought provoking, or social commentary

The Performance

- Often the cooperation of many people
- May just be the one
- May use a formal stage, or just an empty space
- Whatever space is used may require great or little arrangement

The Audience

- Necessary for Theatre by definition
- Assembled as a group at a given time and place
- Provides feedback to the performers
- Provides for interaction within itself (one audience segment affecting another)
- Provides expectations and motives for attending

Theatre as Art

“A man-made form of expression, a unified ordered whole, that stimulates the imagination, intellect, and/or emotions, evoking pleasure/pain, and provides meaning.”

- Theatre should be entertaining, but not everyone “likes” the same entertainment.
- Theatre is a “fine” art rather than a “useful” art
- Designed for
 - Elitist culture OR
 - Populist culture

SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THEATRE

- Lifelikeness
- Ephemerality
- Objectivity
- Complexity (of means)
- Immediacy

These are theatre's strengths AND weaknesses

The Value of Art (& Theatre)

- Art's capacity to improve the quality of life
- Art as a form of cultural expression