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