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Undergraduate Studies

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Subject: Drama

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Textbook: Twaij, Mohammed Baqir et. al. *One Act Plays*. University of Baghdad Press, 1986.

Introduction

The one-act play might not be as simple as some think. Playwrights face restrictions of time and language, and they must ensure their characters and stories are clear and enjoyable for the audience. This means their dialogues should be clever, and their language should be concise

and straightforward. Unnecessary details, confusing events, long speeches, and complex plots are usually avoided in this type of drama. But that doesn't mean playwrights rush through dialogues or use quick comments.

The one-act play is ideally suited for our contemporary world, with a rich history in theater. Its origins can be traced back to medieval morality plays like "Everyman" and even Japanese Noh plays. These plays thrived, especially during the Victorian era, serving as afterpieces and curtain raisers before full-length plays. Furthermore, they have also found a place in schools, universities, and amateur productions, evolving to align with modern tastes while retaining their historical legacy.

In the past, one-act plays were often considered secondary to full-length plays, primarily due to limitations in skill and technical knowledge. Only a few of these plays could be regarded as masterpieces alongside modern one-act plays. During the late 19th century, one-act plays started to become their own independent form of drama. This shift coincided with the rise of experimental theaters in various countries, like the Theatre Libre in Paris (founded in 1887) and the Freie Buhne in Berlin (established in 1889). London's Independent Theatre (founded in 1891) also contributed to this recognition by staging works by playwrights like Ibsen and G. B. Shaw.

Various theaters around the world played important roles in the development of one-act plays. In Paris, the Theatre d'Art, later led by Lugne-Poe, featured works by famous playwrights. In Dublin, the Abbey Theatre, owned by W. B. Yeats from 1904, presented notable plays by J. M. Synge, G. B. Shaw, and Sean O'Casey. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J. M. Synge significantly contributed to the theater's fame.

In the United States, the Provincetown Players, founded by George Cram Cook in 1915, included notable playwrights like Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill. In New York, the

Neighborhood Playhouse (founded by Alice and Irene Lewisohn) showcased works by Chekhov, Yeats, G. B. Shaw, and others. The Washington Square Players, established in New York in 1915 by Edward Goodman and others, began with one-act plays and later performed full-length plays by Ibsen, G. B. Shaw, and Chekhov. These theaters contributed significantly to the development of one-act plays.

The popularity of one-act plays in Europe and the United States can be traced to changes in society influenced by industrialization, world wars, and a shift away from traditional values. Society now prefers shorter literary forms, like short stories and one-act plays, over longer ones.

There's a growing rebellion against traditional social and political conventions and a dislike for typical stage rules. The term "well-made play" has lost its appeal as better plays emerged. One-act plays have also influenced TV programming. One act plays offer flexibility and have explored various styles, ranging from melodrama to absurdity. They have even reintroduced old techniques, such as the chorus and masks, while continuing to evolve with modern technology, such as using tape recorders instead of characters.

One-act plays come in various forms, including verse, dialect, and even a pseudo-language, reflecting the struggles of modern communication. They can emphasize a character, action, background, or emotion, and they continue to evolve and experiment to capture our attention.

Distinguishing one-act plays from full-length plays is important. Here is a comparison between the two:

1. Structure and Focus:

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- One-Act Plays: Emphasize a single incident, a specific dramatic situation, and have a clear, concise purpose.
 - Full-Length Plays: Offer a more extensive structure, with multiple acts, subplots, and a broader scope of themes.

2. Character Depiction:

- One-Act Plays: Strive to depict characters naturally, avoiding exaggeration or superhuman qualities.
- Full-Length Plays: Can feature a wider range of character portrayals, including exaggeration or superhuman traits when the storyline demands it.

3. Climax and Denouement:

- One-Act Plays: Feature a straightforward and closely connected climax and denouement with minimal time between them.
- Full-Length Plays: Often involve a significant time gap and more extensive action development between the climax and denouement.

4. Exposition:

- One-Act Plays: Require essential exposition to acquaint the audience with off-stage situations and events before the play's beginning, often achieved through informative comments and instructive dialogues.
- Full-Length Plays: Due to their longer duration, have more time to develop various elements and, as a result, don't demand as much exposition.

5. Duration and Classical Unities:

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- One-Act Plays: Typically performed without breaks and in a short time, adhering more closely to classical unities of time, plot, and place.
 - Full-Length Plays: Tend to be longer and may include intermissions, allowing for more flexibility in terms of time, plot development, and setting.

6. Theater and Audience:

- One-Act Plays: Often enacted by amateurs in amateur, university, school, or experimental theaters, with the audience primarily consisting of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances of the amateur actors.
- Full-Length Plays: Commonly performed in commercial theaters by professional actors, attracting a broader and more diverse audience.

These distinctions highlight the unique characteristics of one-act plays and full-length plays, each serving different artistic and dramatic purposes within the world of theater.

Work Cited

Twaij, Mohammed Baqir et. al. *One Act Plays*. University of Baghdad Press, 1986.