

## Unit 3

# Drama, theatre and performance

In groups of three or four, discuss the following questions: What do you think theatre and drama are associated with? Do you think that they mean the same thing? If not, how are they differentiated? Is 'drama' a literary art, a theatrical art, or a combination of both? When we use the word 'drama' do we refer to a certain type of written literature that is meant to be performed? Or, maybe, to a specific type of play? What about 'theatre'? Does it refer to the actual performance of a play? Do you have the feeling that 'drama' is considered to be more serious compared to 'theatre' which is taken to be a bit more trivial?

Now use a dictionary or other resources to make a list of definitions of the terms *theatre* and *drama*. Write the definitions you have found in the space provided below.

<i>Theatre</i>	
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<i>Drama</i>	
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Read the following text keeping in mind the finer distinctions between theatre and drama.

### Text 1

5 Drama begins in make-believe, in the play acting of children, in the ritual of primitive religion. And it never forsakes its primitive beginnings, for imitative action is its essence. When an actor appears on stage, he makes believe he is someone other than himself, much as a child does, much as primitive people still do. Thus like play-acting and ritual, drama creates an experience by doing things that can be heard and seen. "Drama," in fact, comes from a Greek work which means "thing done." And the things it does, as with play-acting and ritual, create a world apart – a world modelled on our own, but one which has its own charmed existence.

10 Drama, of course, is neither primitive ritual nor child's play, but it does share with them the essential quality of enactment. This quality should remind us that drama is not solely a form of literature. It is at once literary art and representational art. As literary art, a play is a fiction made out of words. It has a plot, characters, and dialogue. But it is a special kind of fiction – a fiction *acted out* rather than narrated. Thus in a novel or short story, we learn about characters and events through the words of a narrator who stands between us and them. But in a play nothing stands between us and the total make-up of its world. Characters appear and events happen without any intermediate comment or explanation. Drama, then, offers us a direct representation of its reality. In this sense it is representational art.

25 As students of drama, this faces us with something of a paradox. Because it is literature, a play can be read. But because it is representational art, a play is meant to be witnessed. We can see this problem in other terms. The text of a play is like the score of a symphony – a finished work, yet only a potentiality until it is performed. Most plays are written to be performed. Those eccentric few that are not – that are written only to be read – we usually refer to as "closet dramas." Very little can take place in a closet, but anything is possible in the theatre, from the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the garbage cans of *Endgame*. The magic of theatre, its ability to conjure up such incredible worlds, depends on the power of spectacle. And by spectacle we mean all the sights and sounds of performance – the slightest twitch or the boldest thrust of a sword, the faintest whisper or the loudest cry.

Scholes et al, 1971:1-2.

## Reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises

A. In groups of three or four, discuss the following questions. Numbers in brackets refer to lines in the text.

1. *make-believe* (1) most likely means: (a) feigning, pretense, (b) trust, (c) real, (d) fact. Give examples of other similar compounds you can find in the text.
2. *forsakes* (2) means: (a) imitates, (b) remembers, (c) abandons.
3. *imitative action* (3). In what sense is *imitative action* linked to *primitive beginnings* (2)?
4. Comment on the use of *charmed* (9). In what sense do you think it is used here?
5. *the total make-up of its world* (18). What does this refer to?
6. How can the text of a play be *a potentiality* (25)? What is the exact meaning of the word *potentiality* in this specific context?
7. What does *spectacle* (31) refer to according to the writer of the passage?

B. What do the following words refer to? Numbers in brackets refer to lines in the text.

1. *he* (3) \_\_\_\_\_
2. *its* (9) \_\_\_\_\_
3. *its* (20) \_\_\_\_\_
4. *this* (22) \_\_\_\_\_

C. Based on your understanding of the text, decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. Novels, short stories, and plays offer a mediated representation of reality through the use of a narrator.
2. Novels are examples of representational art whereas plays of narrated fiction.
3. In no way can drama be considered as a form of literature since it is meant to be enacted.
4. Drama is a literary art as well as a performance art.

5. The magic of theatre rests upon the power of narration.
6. Plays, just like musical scores, are written to be performed.

D. Explain the following term using your own wording. Write your answer in the space provided below.

*closet-drama*

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E. Read the following sentences and fill in each blank with the most suitable word from the ones given in brackets.

1. The play refers to the written \_\_\_\_\_ (novel, text, language) whereas the performance to the totality of the live experience of the \_\_\_\_\_ (presence, enactment, action) of the play.
2. The term *drama* most often refers to dramatic literature whereas theatre refers to the \_\_\_\_\_ (performer, performance, perforation) of dramatic literature.

F. Find the odd one out in each group.

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|----------------|----------|------------|-----------|
| 1. conjure up  | evoke    | call up    | forget    |
| 2. include     | renounce | forsake    | abandon   |
| 3. performance | novel    | literature | narration |
| 4. actuality   | fact     | reality    | fiction   |

G. Derive adjectives from the following words.

1. spectacle

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2. fiction

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3. literature

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4. imitation

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5. eccentricity \_\_\_\_\_

6. magic \_\_\_\_\_

Now read this passage on theatre and performance studies carefully and complete the exercises that follow. While reading the text make sure you have followed the thread of the argument presented in all its ramifications and the finer distinctions that emerge between the terms involved. If you have any unknown words try to work their meaning out from the immediate or wider context.

## Text 2

5 However we now define it, and wherever we locate the cause, there is no denying that the field of theatre studies has undergone a paradigm shift. The advent of theatre studies was already an innovation beyond the study of drama because it emphasized that theatre's meaning is produced not just through its texts but through all its significations and practices - including training, uses of space and technology, performance style and scenography, for example. Beginning in the United States in the 1970s - but burgeoning in the 1980s and 1990s and moving well beyond the US - performance studies began to explore non-theatrical cultural practices that shared performance characteristics with theatre. This was partly motivated by expanding interdisciplinary links that proposed new ways of understanding things, and by growing interest in redressing theatre studies' potential focus on cultural practice that was both elite and Western. In one direction, led by Richard Schechner at New York University, 15 this new scholarship explored links with anthropology in particular; examined such activities as religious and other social rituals, including rites of passage and sporting events; and observed performance practices in Asia and in Native American communities. In another direction, led by scholars at Northwestern University in Chicago, performance studies developed out of speech communication studies to examine such things as rhetoric and graffiti. Performance studies also responded to the increasing diversification of performance practices, especially the rise of performance art and body art and the growth of installation art. In this context, again, 20 performance studies was interdisciplinary, crossing over with fine art and various critical fields such as feminism, sociology and philosophy. 25

30 Also, performance studies introduced new critical concerns that were shared by new forms of performance as well as more traditional theatre form. These concerns include liveness and the ephemerality of performance, the politics of protest, and new critical practices such as performance writing.

35 Performance studies has received much criticism - for proposing too vast a field, for dehistoricizing and taking things out of their social context, and for being amateur in its efforts to practice interdisciplinarity. But it has also demonstrated the profound resonance of thinking of a huge range of cultural practices as performance, and it has greatly expanded the strategies through which we can think about performance.

Allain et al, 2006:8.

Have you found this passage more demanding and difficult to follow? Let us split in groups and try to disentangle some of the main ideas expressed in the passage as well as explain a number of difficult terms involved.

### ***Reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises***

A. *In small groups, discuss the following questions. Numbers in brackets refer to lines in the text.*

1. *it* (1). What does it refer to?
2. *paradigm shift* (2) implies: (a) a substantial change in the basic assumptions about theatre studies, (b) minor changes taking place in the field of theatre studies, (c) a refusal to conform to new realities in the field of theatre studies.
3. *advent* (3) means: (a) arrival, (b) refinement, (c) extinction, (d) existence.
4. *The advent of theatre studies was already an innovation beyond the study of drama* (3-4). Explain the reasons for this.
5. *significations and practices* (5). Explain.
6. Can you give examples of different *performance styles* (6)?
7. *burgeoning* (8). Can you find any near synonyms?
8. *redressing* (12) implies: (a) lack of change, (b) unwillingness to

- change, (c) stagnation, (d) reform.
9. *Native American communities* (18). What does this phrase refer to?
  10. *diversification* (22). Explain.
  11. *In this context* (23). Which context?
  12. Explain *liveness* (28). What sort of performance do you think it characterizes? How does it connect with the idea of ephemerality?
  13. *dehistoricizing* (32) means: (a) taking things out of their social and historical context, (b) studying things in their social and historical context, (c) ignoring things.
  14. What is the opposite of *amateur* (33)?
  15. *its* (33). What does it refer to?

B. Match the terms in column A with their definitions in column B.

<i>Column A</i>	<i>Column B</i>
1. scenography	a. an established procedure for religious or other rites.
2. rhetoric	b. an artistic genre of three-dimensional works that are of ten site-specific.
3. installation art	c. the study and practice of stage design.
4. performance studies	d. the academic field concerned with the study of performance.
5. ritual	e. the art of using language effectively and persuasively.

Answers: 1. \_\_\_\_\_, 2. \_\_\_\_\_, 3. \_\_\_\_\_, 4. \_\_\_\_\_, 5. \_\_\_\_\_.

C. Work in groups of three or four. Based on your understanding of the text, decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. Performance studies is characterized, and, to a certain extent, determined by its interdisciplinarity.
2. Performance studies have often been criticized for their bewildering expansion into various other fields.
3. Performance studies expanded beyond the traditional fields of theatre & drama into the areas of fine arts, amongst others.
4. There is no doubt that the deep change we have witnessed in the

field of theatre and performance studies has greatly enriched our thinking about performance.

5. Performance studies focused exclusively on traditional theatrical practices.
6. The text discusses the exceptional paradigm shift from theatre to performance studies.

*D. Find all the words in the text that refer to the fields to which performance studies had a strong relationship. List the words in the space provided below.*

*E. The term performance is extremely broad and can include an amazing variety of performances and events. Find all the words in the text that refer, however subtly, to these types of performances and events. List the words in the space provided below.*

*F. Find synonyms and antonyms for the following words.*

<i>word</i>	<i>synonym</i>	<i>antonym</i>
1. religious	_____	_____
2. innovative	_____	_____



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|------------------|-------|-------|
| 3. critical      | _____ | _____ |
| 4. expand        | _____ | _____ |
| 5. understanding | _____ | _____ |
| 6. communication | _____ | _____ |

***Language focus***

*Rewrite the following sentences using the introductory words given.*

- a. Drama never forsook its primitive beginnings.

Never \_\_\_\_\_.

- b. The world created by drama is modelled on our own, but it has its own charmed existence.

Although \_\_\_\_\_.

***Discussion questions***

1. Why is it difficult to pin down Performance Studies as an academic field?
2. Discuss the complex relationship of performance studies to the practice of *performance art* (also known as *live art*).

***Broader and more adventurous activities***

You are teaching a course with the title *Introduction to Theatre & Performance Studies* to first year University students in the Faculty of Fine Arts, department of Drama & Theatre Studies. You are asked to write a detailed course description. In small groups, prepare a list of the main points you would include in the course description and then join your notes together in a completed paragraph. Use the information and vocabulary you have acquired from text 2 as well as your wider theatrical experience to tackle the activity. Write your answers in the space provided below.