UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- analyze the preparatory stages of writing a play,
- write a play,

5.2 INTRODUCTION

In unit-1 you have found some important information on the history and growth of drama and some ideas on dramaturgy. This information should provide a good background knowledge to those trying to write a play. So, in this unit we will provide you some of the basic ideas of writing a play. A playwright is the maker of a script for the stage, a useful text. You must remember that writing for the stage implies that you are writing words that will be spoken by actors and heard by an audience. You should note that if you are writing for actors, then actors are your vehicles, your instruments. One might say that this is the most important distinction between writing a play and writing in another genre. Prose and poems occur in a private space between the reader. The play however, like a composer's score or an architect's blueprint, exists as a written text as a stop along the way. You should remember that a play fully exists only in production, and therefore the single most vital element that a playwright has to attend in shaping her craft is access to a theatre.

5.3 WRITING A PLAY

There are certain ways of writing a play . So let us now move on to know how to write a play and what are the norms and rules of writing so .

1) KNOWLEDGE AND ACQUINTANCE :

Plays are to be written and re-written and should be tested in the theatre by production. You will have to acquire as much experience in the theatre as you can. It is good if you are associated with performances of plays in any capacity, because proximity to the stage-craft is an added advantage for a playwright. Many playwrights like Shakespeare, Moliere, Harold Pinter and others were associated with the stage and they were also actors. Of course, many successful playwrights may not be connected with the stage, but they should have the required knowledge and vision.

Read the scripts, then go to the theatre and see the plays in performance.

Then you will understand the relationship between the page and the stage.

You will need to gain the experience as to how a text is produced in the stage with the collaboration of the director, the stage-manager and the producer, the technicians and the actors. Only then you will understand how your own writing could be fitted into the system of production in the stage. Before writing a play a brief knowledge about modern times plays is necessary . So in the following paragraph I have mentioned few of them which will help you to write a play accordingly

Plays of Various Sizes :

In modern times plays have come in all shapes and sizes. There are **ten-minute plays, street-plays** and **one-Act plays** besides full length plays. The short-duration plays ideally take place in one scene and

runs only a few pages . It is not a sketch, it has some unity with a beginning, the middle and the end. We have already mentioned about one-Act plays in the unit-1 .

The One-Act play derives its name from having only one-Act; its time-limit in production being half an hour or forty-five minutes. It focuses on one main point or one problem out of the various events in life or situations. It has a few scenes and takes place in one setting.

About full-length plays consisting of acts and scenes and covering a few hours, the basic structure and their contents have been discussed earlier.

2) Search for 'Content' and 'Form'

Whatever may be the type of plays, as a playwright your concern will be *What you will say* and *How you will say*. That will determine your type. In other words, in making experiments on the writing of a play, you will have to be constantly thinking about your *'content'* and the *'form'* You will have to think for the interest and attention of the audience who will sit for a long time in witnessing the performance of a play. A poet or a novelist need not do that. A novelist, however, needs the readers to keep turning the pages, but a reader may not finish his reading with one sitting. But in case of a play the audience faces the problem of passing the time, if the narrative or its form of presentation cannot keep their interest and suspense. So a new playwright.s has to deliver within the time frame and structure of the play and this would require the effective use of technique and language to hold the attention of the audience which may be distracted otherwise .

3) Narrative and Events:

You may approach writing in various ways. You may want to expose the conditions of the working class, you may want to exorcise a permanent demon; perhaps you want to tell a good story or perhaps you want to criticize or focus on some social events of the society for a change. The play is to be formed from any of these materials. For that you will require the narrative, and then the plot or sequence of

events. As you know, Aristotle referred to the plot as the most significant and important ingredient of a play out of the six ingredients he mentioned [Reference : Unit-I]

Things have to happen in a drama. Consider the plot of *King Lear*. The king gives up his kingdom, divides it on the basis of the proportion of love professed by his daughters, disinherits the youngest one who really loved him but could not proclaim her love in a hypocritical manner in public and disinherits her . The king also banishes his most trusted courtier who points out to him the folly of all this; that is only scene one, but the plot has plausibility. A story having a chain of events and not having plausibility does not create interest. Chains of plausibly-connected events keep the audience bound in their seats because they create anticipation and suspense. Not only that, in these events **Character** is explored and thoughts are provoked.

4) Character

The play explores character and ideas through the medium of events. When characters confront obstacles, they have to act in one way or another. The choice they make reveals them.

Take the case of Macbeth in *Macbeth* of Shakespeare(Shakespeare ‘s play by the same name) Macbeth is a loyal subordinate but when ambition overpowers the obstacles of conscience he kills the king. Macbeth is thus exposed and we realise that he is not so loyal. This is the story-event and along with it the charter.

You have to make sure that there is an event for your play. It is not enough for two characters to sit around and talk for a while and then leave. There needs to be some important reason why we are watching them now, at this particular moment. The characters talk and reveal the situation. You as a playwright want to reveal them through what they say, through what they do and through what others say about them.

Consider the plays of George Bernard Shaw. Very often he gives elaborate stage-directions and in the process he also makes direct comments about the characters.

Thus **characterisaton** is an important element for you. You can ask yourselves

(1) What kind of person am I portraying?

(2) How would he say this line?

(3) What key word would he emphasize?

(4) At what point in the play would he speak happily, angrily, sadly, quickly?

5) Dialogue

You will see that when the curtain rises, characters are to convey information through their own words or behaviour. The audience does not know what the characters think unless they speak. We may have some information from the stage-directions you have given; but the audience will remain quite in the dark in many matters such as location, setting, relationship among the characters etc, or the events leading to the action.

So the importance of dialogue exists.

But yet you know that drama is not dialogue. Drama is about doing things. If a characters tells us everything-what about himself; then what is left for audience to find out-why should we continue watching?

What is at bottom Hamlet's problem? Or Lear's? – We are not sure; so we keep thinking about them even after the play has ended.

Thus dialogue is also connected with story-events. Sometimes silence, gestures or a mere glance may be more expressive than the noisest dialogue, so you will have to be careful. Get rid of unnecessary words, yet tell the story. In any way, write dialogue that illuminates your characters and advance the plot at the same time.

6) Language :

Language is intimately connected with dialogue and diction. You have read some discussion about this in unit-I.

You must note that every single fact or idea in a play has to be conveyed to the audience by some one saying it. There is no scope for explanation and comment. So words should be suitable to the characters or the speakers and at the same time to the action. Sometimes the actor's emphasis on a particular word may be very important. You may like to write that direction in the script or you may italicise the word to be emphasized.

You will notice that in Greek poetic plays or tragedies, the speech or dialogue amongst the characters were somtimes shown in the method of one line i.e. alternating single line- at the moments of emotional excitement. It was called *stichomythia*. In modern dramas today, the use of one line dialogue is mostly prevalent, particularly in **Absurd dramas**.

In any case, for the use of language in the dialogue a new playwright should only consider the aspect of its suitability in relation to the story-event, characters and action. A scene with with long speeches move in a slower and stately manner, and with short speeches coming in quick succession move the play faster. Thus the handling of dialogue modifies the speed of the drama.

7) Story-structure :

Scenes or Acts?

Will you divide your play into Acts, or just into scenes?

There should not be any rigid rule for that. It is a matter of personal discretion-but it should have some link with the story-events and you must recognise a few basic principles of play-construction. As per thematic ideas, the play may consist of divisions with some scenes or may have acts and scenes.

As already discussed in unit-I the structural division of the story should be normally fitted into this way- :

The first act should be the *protasis* or exposition, the second act should be the *epitasis* or complication.

The final act is the *catastrophe*, or resolution.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Who were associated with stage ?

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2. Say true or false

a) The content is very important for writing a play.

b) Language is not intimately connected with dialogue and diction.



LET US KNOW

One Act Play : It is a play in one act. One act plays deals wih one single, dominant dramatic situation.

5.4 TIPS TO WRITE A PLAY

Now if you write a play , here are some tips for you to consider :

1. You need to create a world that is true to real life or fantastical or that mixes the mundane with the magical. But whatever set of rules you create for that world, make sure you follow them.
2. You should write a conflict that builds as the play progresses. As you structure the conflict, you should think in terms of your play having a beginning, a middle and an end.
3. You need to write characters that want something (which puts them in conflict with other characters) and try to get what they want at every moment.
4. Please make sure that each character has something at stake, a consequence if he doesn't get what he wants.
5. It is for your good if you can create a "ticking clock" that puts the characters under pressure to get what they want right away.

6. You should make sure that there is a good reason, an "event," for your play. It's just not enough for two characters to sit around and talk for a while and then leave. There needs to be some important reason why we're watching them now, at this particular moment.

7. You write dialogue that illuminates and characters and advances the plot at the same time.

8. You make each character speak in a distinctive voice. If you have trouble with that, try imagining a specific actor you know - even if it's someone who will never play the part - in the role.

9. Do not have a character that tells us something she can show us instead. Give each character a "moment," something that justifies the character's existence in your play and that makes him attractive for an actor to play.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have provided you some of the norms that are important while writing a play. There are certain rules and norms which are essential in writing a play So this unit studied along with unit -1 will enable you write a play.



5.6 FURTHER READINGS

Allardyce Nicoll The Theory of drama

Worth , Katherine , Revolutions in Modern English Drama (London : G. Bell and Sons)

The making of Theatrical Reputations : Studies from the Modern London Theatre (Iowe City : University of Iowe Press , 2008).



5.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Mention some of the ways of writing a play ?
2. Write short note on plays of various sizes .?
3. How important is language in a play ?
4. What are the various tips that are needed while writing a play.
5. Develop a play on your own ?

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