

**A BOOK OF  
ONE-ACT PLAYS**

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A book of one-act plays by Barbara Louise Schafer

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**BARBARA LOUISE SCHAFER**

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~~PROPERTY OF~~  
~~DEPARTMENT OF DRAMATIC ART~~

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B. L. S.





# PROPERTY OF DEPARTMENT OF DRAMATIC ART

## INTRODUCTION

### THE ONE-ACT PLAY: Its Relation to the Short Story

One fateful night, we are told, a king was entertained at the home of his most famous general. But even as he supped, the treacherous host sat in another room of his castle, planning the murder of his royal guest. He mused upon the deed at length, until in the silence of his own chamber, he began to speak aloud:

“If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly.”

And the significance of Macbeth's assertion is not confined to the complexity of the affairs which called it forth. It would scarcely be an extreme perversion to extend the significance of this declaration further. Indeed the “key-words” of all modern life may be said to be, “'Twere well it were done quickly!”

This tendency toward brevity and compression, is perhaps most phenomenal in the field of literature. In a certain sense the short story has already superseded the novel; and now its *congenial* cousin, the one-act play, has come to assume certain of the prerogatives of the traditional drama!

Of these two “short” forms, the short story having been longer with us, is better known. Its limits, pos-

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sibilities, and technique have been so frequently exhibited as to require little discussion. The workings of the one-act play, though similar, are more abstruse. In either case, however, it is essential for a sane comparison that the form shall speak for itself.

An interesting introduction to the modern one-act play may be obtained in the little plays of this volume. Simple situations, "out-of-the-way" episodes, single ideas, and few characters make up the effectiveness of each.

As may be seen, often the one-act play is only a "dramatized anecdote" without any particular complication of plot. In so short a space, there can, of course, be little or no character development, but there certainly is character portrayal, and that of a rather subtle sort. The characters in these plays are suggested by a few broad telling strokes, at the outset being sometimes connected by a bit of sparkling dialogue:

### *THE BANK ROBBERY*

CHIEF ROBBER (*Whispers*): The stuff is in our hands, boys. Get to work.

FIRST ROBBER: I got me drill ready.

CHIEF ROBBER: Quick, attach the wires.

SECOND ROBBER: Say—soft pedal that gas. I ain't hurryin'.

Were these characters to be described in a short story they would undoubtedly lose some of the innate charm which the first-hand contact of the playlet reveals. In the one-act play a personal sense of companionship is gained through action and speech, while in the short story the characters are viewed more dis-

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tantly and indirectly because of the combination of speech and action with description and analysis.

How utterly inadequate would indirect methods become in the treatment of vivacious life! The short story gives its readers the opportunity of probing down into the depths of a man's mind, we may study there at length his problems and his emotions,—his loves and his hates. The value of all this should not be underestimated. There is, however, a possibility that there has been of late an extreme psychological emphasis in the short story, so it is refreshing to find more frequently in the one-act play the action which results in a deed. And in one-act plays like *The Bank Robbery* and *The Deacon's Hat* physical action has its importance.

This physical action of the one-act play creates intensity. There is a compression about the play for the narrow compass demands that the dialogue though entertaining be succinct. It is not always so with the short story, often its primary interest is in style. Even when the plot of the story is well handled it is frequently the complete and illuminating descriptions which give it its fine artistic finish.

On the other hand, some one-act plays are simply impressions, but powerful impressions. In fact there is little to forget, because there is so little action. As in the little drama, *In the Light of the Manger*, and *Ever Young* the illumination is great just because there is no thesis, there is simply a transcendent picture of life. In even so short a compass the reader's experience is permanently enriched; he learns for the first time the life of a new world.