

Modern Theatre

Before Modern Theatre

- Previous ages include –
- Classical (Greece and Rome)
- Medieval (Mystery and Morality Plays)
- Renaissance (Italian, England, Spain and France)
- The Restoration
- The Romantic Theatre

Introduction

- This is the period of theatre that we are currently in.
- This period of drama dates back to the late 1800's.
- The industrial revolution was on its way.
- Public communication and transportation had huge advancements.
- City life grew exponentially and with this, populations around the world were in need of theatre.

Introduction

- Intellectual curiosity in the sciences and regions was also on the upswing. The intellectual revolution was taking place.
- The Copernican theory made it clear that humans do not stand in center of the universe.
- These ideas and many others challenged traditional thinking.
- Theatre of this time paralleled what was going on in the world.

Introduction

- Playwrights of the past seemed simplistic and did not fulfill the intellectual needs of modern playwrights and audience members.
- The chaos and confusion of the time was directly reflected in the modern theatre.
- Within modern theatre, many different movements evolved.

Realism

- This is by far the most popular and longest standing movement of modern theatre.
- This form of drama has a “likeness to life” without any abstractions.
- Realism was a reaction against romanticism, sought to develop an aesthetic that was not abstract, rather, one that was “like life.”
- The idea was, instead of actors representing characters, the actor would become the character.

Realism

- Think of realism as a laboratory. Everything that exist in society is shown as an objective performance in front of an impartial audience.
- Everything is to be as real as possible.
- This form of theatre would expose
 - The nature of relationships
 - Society
- Realism gives the audience a large amount of real life “evidence” that allows them to arrive at their own conclusion.

Scenery of Realism

- The proscenium stage was modified
 - No longer raked
 - Accommodates box sets (real walls)
- Real bookcases, walls, doors and dressing.
- The audience should feel as if they are looking into an actual environment.
- The 4th wall now being utilized.

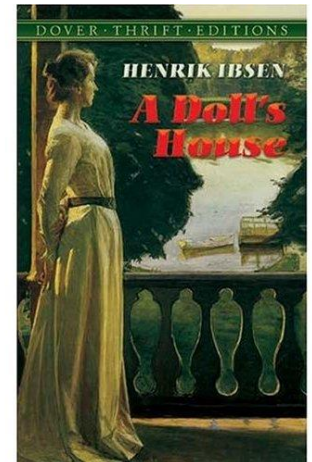
Pioneers of Realism

Henrik Ibsen, 1828-1906
“Father of dramatic realism”



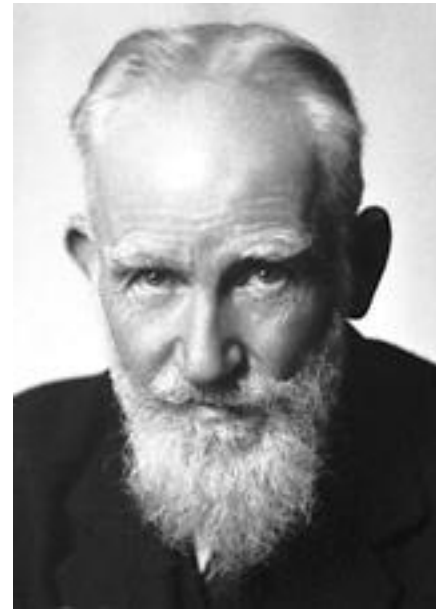
Ibsen's plays are about ordinary people with ordinary issues that are relevant to society. These are issues that are still relevant today.

A Doll's House (pictured)
Hedda Gabler
Ghosts
An Enemy of the People



George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

- Created a comic realism and addressed such issues as
 - Prostitution
 - Urban poverty
 - Slum landlordism



Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

- He created deeply complex relationships between his characters.
- Famous plays include
 - *The Three Sisters*
 - *The Cherry Orchard*
 - *The Seagull*
 - *Uncle Vanya*

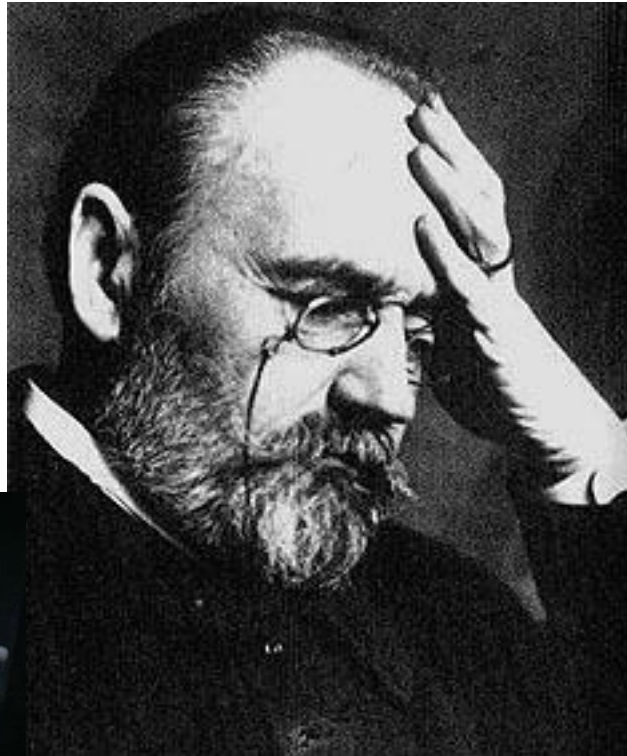
Naturalism

- An extreme form of realism.
- Began in France in the 19th century.
- Everything presented on stage should have been lifted directly from the real world.
- Dramatic action should never be contrived. It should look like a “slice of life”
- Naturalists believed that the most appropriate subject matter for this form of drama is the lower class.
- Despised climaxes and characters as heroes.

Pioneers of Naturalism

- Emile Zola (1840-1902)
 - Chief theoretician
- Believed that humans were merely biological phenomena whose behavior was determined entirely by genetic and social circumstances.
- Remove all theatrical conventions.

Emile Zola (1840-1902)



Antirealism

- Around the same time other movements were on their way.
- Theatrical realism is seen as having some serious limitations.
- Realistic theatre excludes several very effective theatrical vices.
 - Music
 - Dance
 - Symbolism
 - Poetry

Symbolism

- Leading the antirealistic movement between 1880 and 1910.
- Its major proponents were French, but it influenced theatres around the world.
- Drama should not present non mundane, everyday activities, but the mystery of being and the infinite qualities of the human spirit.
- Focused on symbolic imagery instead of concrete actions to communicate with the audience.

Symbolism

- Symbolist plays often take place in a dream world.
- Most important goal is to not tell a story, but evoke atmosphere and mood.
- Focus upon inner realities that cannot be directly perceived
- Leaders in this movement include Paul Fort (1872-1960) Theatre d'Art.
- This movement spread rapidly. Designers and authors were excited by the possibility of a theatre free of rigid realistic constraints.

Designers of the Time

- Adolph Appia (1862-1928) and Gordon Craig (1872-1966) were huge supporters of anti-realistic theatre.
- They believe a setting should suggest a locale but not reproduce it.
- Both designers were huge into multi level sets. Also they incorporated electricity heavily into their designs.

Vsevolod Meyerhold

- Realistic directors like Antoine and Stanislavsky were challenged by scores of new directors.
- Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) was a leading Russian antirealist.
- He frequently experimented with theatricality (making the audience aware that they are watching theatre.)
- He liked to explore how stage machinery worked in front of the audience.
- Experimented with found spaces and use of multimedia on stage.
- Created a style of acting called biomechanics. (machine like in motion and emotions could be represented externally.)

THE ERA OF “ISMS”

- FUTURISM
- DADAISM
- IMPRESSIONISM
- EXPRESSIONISM
- CONSTRUCTIVISM
- SURREALISM

*...ALL ARE FORMS OF
STYLIZED THEATRE*

Constructivism



The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, 1920

Expressionism

- Flourished in Germany during WWI.
- The representation of reality was distorted in order to communicate inner feelings.
- Plays are highly subjective. Dramatic action is seen through the eyes of the protagonist and can seem distorted and dreamlike.
- The protagonist character is usually a Christ like figure who travels through a series of incidents that are not related.
- Characters are often given the titles such as man, woman, clerk.

Expressionism

- Major German playwrights include Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser.
- Included exaggerated scenery, bright lights and piercing sounds.
- American expressionist writers addressed the growing concerns that country's rapid industrial and financial growth was crushing human freedom.
- American writers include Elmer Rice (1892-1967)
- Plays include *Subway*, *The Adding Machine*, and *Street Scene*.

Futurism & Surrealism

- Futurism originated in Italy around 1909.
- Idealized war and the machine age.
- Attacked ideas of the past. “museum art”
- They believed audiences should be confronted and antagonized.
- Surrealism began in 1924 in France.
- They argued that the subconscious is the highest plane of reality.
- Their plays seem to be set in a dream world.

Theatre of Cruelty

- Originated in France in the 1930s.
- Developed by Antonin Artaud (1896-1948).
- This was a revolt against realistic theatre.
- Antonin believed that the viewers senses should be bombarded.
- This idea is based on magic and ritual which would evoke deep, violent and erotic impulses.
- He wanted to organize the theatre space so the audience was the center of attention.
- He spent most of his later life in mental institutions.
- He only published one play *Jet of Blood*, 1925.

Epic Theatre

- Developed by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)
- His theories influenced many contemporary playwrights and directors.
- A form of theatre aimed at intellect rather than emotions in order to affect social change.
- Play were episodic in nature, they cover a great deal of time and change locations frequently. They also have complex plots and large casts.
- The goal of epic theatre is to instruct.

Epic Theatre

- The audience should always remain emotionally detached or alienated from the action on stage.
- The audience must always know that they are in a theatre.



Existentialism

- An idea started by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Albert Camus (1913-1960).
- This idea was in reaction to WWII.
- Existentialist believed
 - Existence has little meaning
 - God does not exist
 - Humanity is alone in an irrational universe
 - The only thing a person can do is accept responsibly for his or her actions.

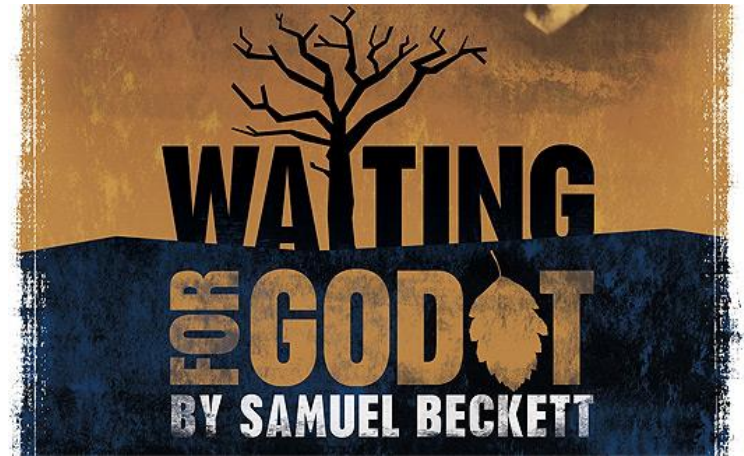
Theatre of the Absurd

- A small unorganized movement in the 50's and 60's.
- Absurdist playwrights believe
 - Our existence is futile and nonsensical
 - Nothing seems to happen in the play
 - The plot moves in circles
 - No climatic action or episodic plot
 - The characters are not realistic
 - Setting are sometimes unrecognizable
 - Language is sparse and characters fail to communicate effectively.

Theatre of the Absurd

- Pioneers of this movement include
 - Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)
 - Eugene Ionesco (1912-1994)
 - Edward Albee (1928-)
 - Harold Pinter (1930-2008)

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD



Edward Albee (1928-)

- Seascape
 - Premiered on Broadway in 1975



SCCC, 2010

Summary

- Today's theatre is and can be anything and everything. As styles merge, blend, morph, reconfigure—all theatre remains essentially one of two forms:
 - Representational (realism)
 - -or-
 - Presentational (stylized)
- Individual artists will continue to explore old and new forms so long as audiences come.