

# Characteristics of modern drama

Experience, Human Nature



The essence of this paper is to list and discuss characteristics of modern period drama. These characteristics are realism, naturalism and interaction between characters and the readers. They will be discussed along with Henrik Ibsen's ' Ghosts' and Arthur Miller's ' Death of a Sales man'. Realism and naturalism are considered to be the cornerstones of modern drama as we know it today. They are the major influencers of the modern drama. Henrik Ibsen is considered to be the founding father of these two movements.

It is crucial to note that characters in these two movements represent themselves as normal human beings and this aid to the readers to interact and analyse the play to make their own judgements which is a feature of modern drama. Realism in literature was first developed in France in the mid-nineteenth century. Realist writers sought to narrate their plays from an objective, unbiased perspective that simply and clearly represented the factual elements of the play.

They became masters at psychological characterization, detailed descriptions of everyday life in realistic settings, and dialogue that captures the idioms of natural human speech. The realists endeavoured to accurately represent contemporary culture and people from all walks of life. Ghosts capture the issues that concern us in everyday life. They are real issues that concern us in the contemporary world. The fact that they are real and not shielded they led to the play being rejected when it was first produced in 1891.

What Ibsen was saying was the truth which was took place in the society before 19th Century and was concealed. By revealing issues such as sex, sexual transmitted infections, incest, and infidelity he hurt the society since such issues were not openly discussed prior the 19th Century.

The reason why ' Ghosts' was rejected is that it dramatise those secret issues. " Daily Telegraph leader is perhaps the most damning, describing the play as: ' an open drain; a loathsome sore unbandaged; a dirt act done publicly; a lazar house with all its doors and windows open'. Ibsen, (2002: xxvi). In reality matters such as promiscuity does happen.

Captain Alving represents this issue and in turn it is concealed at first because the only time Mrs Alving mentions it is in Act 2 after Oswald made sexual advances to Regina at the end of Act 1. Pastor Manders not to believe it but she tells her that she confirmed it from Johanna, who is Regina's mother. And also sexual transmitted does affect children. So it was of no help to conceal reality because at the end of everything it will bounce back with its consequences having to be addressed.

At the end Mrs Alving had no choice but to tell the truth though it is late at Oswald's side because his syphilitic condition its already in the advanced stage for being cured. In ' Death of a Sales man' we see Willy Loman concealing the reality that he is no longer doing well in travelling sales. He claims that he is doing exceptionally well though he is in the habit of borrowingmoneyfrom Charlie pretending it to be his weekly wages. He also claims to be well liked yet he is fired shamelessly in his job.

He taints Biff and Happy by saying that being well liked is the key to success yet he is not successful himself. Now we can see how realism present itself in these two plays. On the other hand naturalism is a movement in theatre, film, and literature that seeks to replicate a believable everyday reality, as opposed to such movements as Romanticism or Surrealism, in which subjects may receive highly symbolic, idealistic, or even supernatural treatment. Naturalistic writers were influenced by the evolution theory of Charles Darwin. They believed that one's heredity and social environment decide one's character.

Whereas realism seeks only to describe subjects as they really are, naturalism also attempts to determine "scientifically" the underlying forces (i. e. the environment or heredity) influencing these subjects' actions. They are both opposed to romanticism, in which subjects may receive highly symbolic, idealistic, or even supernatural treatment. Naturalistic works often include uncouth or sordid subject matter. For example, Emile Zola's works had frankness about sexuality along with a pervasive pessimism. Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, prejudice, disease, prostitution, filth, etc.

They were often very pessimistic and frequently criticized for being too blunt. Naturalism applies to ' Ghosts' and ' Death of a Salesman in the sense that it sees human fate as the result of the environment they find themselves in. As Sigmund Freud said ' man' s basic instincts are sexuality and extent that he was a highly promiscuous man who ended up impregnating her maid. Looking at Charles Darwin also we find that the

environment is the primary cause of everything that man does therefore man has no control over his actions. This will backup Captain Alving for being promiscuous.

By making sexual advances to Regina, Oswald is also the victim of the environment and heredity. Furthermore in 'Death of a Sales man' the reason why Willy Loman find himself in the situation he is in it is because of the environment. He wants to conquer new territories thus he refers to himself a New England man. He also says if one is well liked he will never want yet he is an unknown character. The fact that he commitssuicideat the end of the play is the causality of the environment. The environment he occupied could not let him to achieve the values by which lives.

According to naturalists he has no control all over things that happen in his life. Moreover the interaction between the readers and the characters is a characteristic of modern period drama. It is captured by the fact that these two plays are realistic. The characters in 'Ghosts' and 'Death of a Salesman' represents themselves as normal human beings. The issues that they capture are known and their consequences to the characters are mirroring what is happening in the society at large. The readers feel what the characters feel and also sympathize with them as in the real life.

In 'Ghosts' the readers feel pity for Oswald for having acquired syphilis from his father. This situation also reminds us of the babies who are born HIV positive today. It is indeed a sad situation for an individual to find themselves in. Also in 'Death of a Sales man' as readers we wish Willy Loman could think otherwise in order for him to escape the fate he is in. We

wish he could realise that the frontier was reached by those who arrived there first. And that he could teach his sons that being well liked and personally attractive has nothing to do with success at all.

This is never achievable because the play was written to portray the reality of natural fate such as death. As human beings we do not have a control over these things. In conclusion realism and naturalism and the interaction between the readers and the characters are the characteristics in modern period drama. The plays portrays the real issues of life and also the natural part of life which human beings have no control over. Also we find that the readers are able to interact with the characters because what is going on in the play is the same as what is going on in life.

#### REFERENCES

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- Using any two plays that you have studied in this course list and analyse any three characteristics, features or conventions of drama of the modern period.