

Realism in modern drama assignment

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A Summer Project On " REALISM IN MODERN DRAMA" In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) in English

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It is certified that the summer project work titled " REALISM IN MODERN DRAMA" is the work of Ms. Bisma Irfan, B. A. (Hons,) English, and has been completed under my supervision. Dr. Deepankar sukul Lecturer AIESR

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Introduction

Realism is a literary term which is so widely used as to be more or less

meaningless except when used in contradistinction to some other

movement, such as Naturalism, Expressionism, Surrealism. The original

definition of realism by Sir P. Harvey was " a loosely used term meaning

truth to the observed facts of life (especially when they are gloomy). "

Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life

among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social

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factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications.

Realism?? in literature is an approach that attempts to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity. Although realism is not limited to any one century or group of writers, it is most often associated with the literary movement in 19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac. In the drama, realism is most closely associated with Ibsen's social plays. Later writers felt that realism laid too much emphasis on external reality.

Many, notably Henry James, turned to a psychological realism that closely examined the complex workings of the mind (stream of consciousness). The French realist school of the mid-19th cent. stressed "sincerity" as opposed to the "liberty" proclaimed by the Romantics; it insisted on accurate documentation, sociological insight, an accumulation of the details of material fact, an avoidance of poetic diction, idealization, exaggeration, melodrama, etc. subjects were to be taken from everyday life, preferably from lower-class life. This emphasis clearly reflected the interests of an increasingly positivist and scientific age. French Realism developed into Naturalism, an associated but more scientifically applied and elaborated doctrine, seen by some later critics (notably Marxist critics) as degenerate. George Eliot introduced realism into England (William Dean Howells 1837-1920 introduced it into the United States).

In England, the French realists were imitated consciously and notably by George Augustus Moore (1852-1933) and Arnold Bennett (1867-1931), but

the English novel from the time of Defoe had had its own unlabelled strain of realism, and the term is thus applied to English literature in varying senses and contexts, sometimes qualified as “ social” or “ psychological” realism etc. Realism in literature is an approach that attempts to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity.

Although realism is not limited to any one century or group of writers, it is most often associated with the literary movement in 19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists. Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications. In the drama, realism is most closely associated with social plays. ?? The original definition of realism was ‘ a loosely used term meaning truth to the observed facts of life (especially when they are gloomy)’ (Sir P.

Harvey) that would seem to indicate such post-French-realist works, most of which have proletarian or lower-class settings. The French realist school of the mid-19 cent. stressed ‘ sincerity’ as opposed to the ‘ liberty’ proclaimed by the Romantics; it insisted on accurate documentation, sociological insight, an accumulation of the details of material fact, an avoidance of poetic diction, idealization, exaggeration, melodrama, etc. ; and the subjects were to be taken from everyday life, preferably from lower-class life. This emphasis clearly reflected the interests of an increasingly positivist and scientific age. [French Realism developed into Naturalism, an associated but more scientifically applied and elaborated doctrine, seen by some later critics (notably Marxist critics) as degenerate.] ?? George Eliot introduced <https://assignbuster.com/realism-in-modern-drama-assignment/>

realism into England, and William Dean Howells introduced it into the United States. Later writers felt that realism laid too much emphasis on external reality. Many, notably Henry James, turned to a psychological realism that closely examined the complex workings of the mind. ??

In England, the French realists were imitated consciously and notably by George Edward Moore (1873-1958) and Arnold Bennett (1867-1931), but the English novel from the time of Defoe (18th cent.) had had its own unlabelled strain of realism, and the term is thus applied to English literature in varying senses and contexts, sometimes qualified as ' social' or Psychological' realism etc. Realism?? was a general?? movement?? in?? 19th-century theatre?? that developed a set of dramatic and theatrical?? conventions?? with the aim of bringing a greater fidelity to real life to texts and performances.

Realism began earlier in the 19th century in?? Russia?? than elsewhere in Europe and took a more uncompromising form. Beginning with the plays of?? Ivan Turgenev??(who used " domestic detail to reveal inner turmoil"),?? Aleksandr Ostrovsky??(who was Russia's first professional playwright),?? Aleksey Pisemsky??(whose?? A Bitter Fate??(1859) anticipated?? Naturalism), and?? Leo Tolstoy(whose?? The Power of Darkness??(1886) is " one of the most effective of naturalistic plays"), a tradition of psychological realism in Russia culminated with the establishment of the?? Moscow Art Theatre?? by?? Constantin Stanislavski?? and?? Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko.

Their ground-breaking productions of the plays of Anton Chekhov in turn influenced Maxim Gorky and Mikhail Bulgakov. Stanislavski went on to develop his 'system', a form of actor training that is particularly suited to psychological realism. 19th-century realism is closely connected to the development of modern drama, which, as Martin Harrison explains, "is usually said to have begun in the early 1870s" with the "middle-period" work of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen's realistic drama in prose has been "enormously influential." In opera, verismo refers to a post-Romantic Italian tradition that sought to incorporate the naturalism of Emile Zola and Henrik Ibsen. It included realistic, sometimes sordid or violent depictions of contemporary everyday life, especially the life of the lower classes. Realism in the last half of the 19th-century began as an experiment to make theatre more useful to society. The mainstream theatre from 1859 to 1900 was still bound up in melodramas, spectacle plays (disasters, etc.), comic operas, and vaudevilles. But political events, including attempts to reform some political systems, led to some different ways of thinking.

Revolutions in Europe in 1848 showed that there was a desire for political, social, and economic reform. The many governments were frightened into promising change, but most didn't implement changes after the violence ended. Technological advances were also encouraged by industry and trade, leading to an increased belief that science could solve human problems. But the working classes still had to fight for every increase in rights: unionization and strikes became the principal weapons workers would use after the 1860s, but success came only from costly work stoppages and violence.

In other words there seems to be rejection of Romantic idealism; pragmatism reigned instead. The common man seemed to feel that he needed to be recognized, and people asserted themselves through action. It is where people move and talk in a manner similar to that of our everyday behaviour. The style has been dominant for the last 120 years. It holds the idea of the stage as an environment, rather than as an acting platform. Realism's early phase was Romanticism, which had its roots in the 1790's with works by Goethe (Faust)?? and Schiller (William Tell).

Romanticism is known for exotic locales and swashbuckling heroes. As the 19th century progressed, there were several contributing elements to Realism, which came together in the late 19th century. Social, and political ideas, play writing, and some spectacular theatrical innovations helped bring Realism to the theatre. From the time of the Renaissance on, theatre seemed to be striving for total realism, or at least for the illusion of reality. As it reached that goal in the late 19th century, a multifaceted, antirealistic reaction erupted.

Avant-garde Precursors of Modern Theatre Many movements generally lumped together as the avant-garde, attempted to suggest alternatives to the realistic drama and production. The various theoreticians felt that Naturalism presented only superficial and thus limited or surface reality-that a greater truth or reality could be found in the spiritual or the unconscious. Others felt that theatre had lost touch with its origins and had no meaning for modern society other than as a form of entertainment.

Paralleling modern art movements, they turned to symbol, abstraction, and ritual in an attempt to revitalize the theatre. Although realism continues to be dominant in contemporary theatre, television and film now better serve its earlier functions. The originator of many antirealist ideas was the German opera composer Richard Wagner. He believed that the job of the playwright/composer was to create myths. In so doing, Wagner felt, the creator of drama was portraying an ideal world in which the audience shared a communal experience, perhaps as the ancients had done.

He sought to depict the “soul state”, or inner being, of characters rather than their superficial, realistic aspects. Furthermore, Wagner was unhappy with the lack of unity among the individual arts that constituted the drama. He proposed the Gesamtkunstwerk, the “total art work”, in which all dramatic elements are unified, preferably under the control of a single artistic creator. Wagner was also responsible for reforming theatre architecture and dramatic presentation with his Festival Theatre at Bayreuth, Germany, completed in 1876.

The stage of this theatre was similar to other 19th-century stages even if better equipped, but in the auditorium Wagner removed the boxes and balconies and put in a fan-shaped seating area on a sloped floor, giving an equal view of the stage to all spectators. Just before a performance the auditorium lights dimmed to total darkness-then a radical innovation.

Chapter 1- The beginning of realism
Beginning of realism
Realism is a literary movement that started in?? France?? in the 1850s as a reaction against Romanticism and which tried to show “life as it was” in literature all over?? Europe.

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Although the concept is also questioned by some critics, it is a useful term to understand the general spirit of the second half of the 19th century: a reaction to Romanticism, a stress on reason and positivism, and a faith in the power of the artist to show reality. In England, this movement coincided approximately with the “Victorian era”, a period ruled by Queen Victoria (1837-1901) which meant the height of the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution. The United Kingdom expanded its borders into America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania and became the first economic and political world power.

Many critics prefer to talk about the “Victorian Age”, since many of the best English novelists of the period are not “realistic” in the same sense as their French or Russian counterparts. But whether more or less realistic, NOVELS are certainly the most important literary form of the period, excellent novels read by an expanding educated middle class that had developed with economic prosperity. Walter Scott (1771-1832) started out as a writer of Romantic narrative verse and ended up as a historical novelist. He wrote several historical novels, mainly about Scottish history.

Ivanhoe (1819). JANE AUSTEN (1775-1817) shared the chronological time with the Romantics, but she shares some of the features of Realism. She has a unique talent and cannot really be assigned to any group. Her novels (Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Emma (1816)) remain as popular and critically acclaimed as ever. Her primary interest is people, not ideas, and her achievement lies in the meticulously exact presentation of human situations and in the delineation of characters that are really living creatures.

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Her novels deal with the life of rural land-owners, seen from a woman's point of view, have little action but are full of humour and true dialogue. The Bronte sisters wrote after Jane Austen but are the most Romantic of the Victorian novelists, particularly Emily Bronte (1818-1848), who wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the epitome of the Romantic novel, wild passion set against the Yorkshire moors. Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855) wrote *Jane Eyre* (1847), a love story of great realism. CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870) was perhaps the most popular novelist of the period.

He serialized most of his novels, which may explain some of his weak plots. Dickens wrote vividly about London life and the struggles of the poor, but in a good-humoured fashion (with grotesque characters) which was acceptable to readers of all classes. His early works such as *Pickwick Papers* (1836) are masterpieces of comedy. Later his works became darker, without losing his genius for caricature: *Oliver Twist* (1837), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Great Expectations* (1861). *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is the popular story of Mr. Scrooge visited by the four Christmas ghosts.

William M. Thackeray (1811-1863) wrote *Vanity Fair* (1847), a satire of high classes in English society. George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans, 1819-1890) might be the most realistic of these writers: *Middlemarch* (1874). Anthony Trollope (1815-1888) wrote novels about life in a provincial English town. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was a very pessimistic writer who wrote stories of people in the countryside (the fictional county of Wessex) whose fate was governed by forces outside themselves (which connects him to Naturalism). *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891).

The expansion of the reading middle classes allowed for the development of?? POPULAR LITERATURE, like the?? Detective Stories written by?? Arthur Conan Doyle??(1859-1930), who, following the example of Edgar Allan Poe, wrote his tales of Sherlock Holmes. G. K. Chesterton??(1874-1936) wrote his Father Brown detective stories as well as other non-genre novels. H. G. Wells??(1866-1946) wrote very interesting?? science fiction, like?? The Time Machine??(1895) or?? The War of the Worlds??(1898) as well as non-genre novels. Literature for children?? also developed in the Victorian Age as a separate genre.

Some works become globally well-known, such as those of?? Lewis Carroll?? (1832-1898), author of the extremely rich fantasies?? Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland??(1865) and?? Through the Looking Glass??(1865). Adventure novels, such as those by?? Robert Louis Stevenson??(1850-1894), were written for adults, and although they are now generally classified as for children and teenagers they are still powerful:?? Treasure Island??(1883),?? Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde??(1886). Helen Beatrix Potter??(1866-1943) was an English author and illustrator, best known for her children’s books, which featured animal characters:?? The Tale of Peter Rabbit??(1902).

Some?? Victorian poets?? worth mentioning are Robert and Elizabeth Browning (husband and wife), Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844-1849), a precursor of Modernism, and?? the pre-Raphaelites??(school of painters and poets) Christina and Gabriel Rosseti (brother and sister). Lord (Alfred) Tennyson??(1809-1892) was Poet Laureate during most of Queen Victoria’s reign and sang the values of the British Empire and the Victorian Age in some of his poems, like “ The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854).

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These Imperial values were also sung by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) several years later in his poems and in novels like *The Man Who Would Be King* (1888) and *The Jungle Book* (1894). Many of us use the word “realistic” to mean little more than we approve of something. For example, when your uncle from Topeka, Chicago, or the Bronx advises you to “do something realistic and take a course in accounting,” he implies that such a course of action matches his notion of the way things are.

Be careful that when you apply the term to a work of literature you refer to the nineteenth-century movement that believed novelists and painters should concentrate on describing the physical, material details of life. Unlike Platonism and Philosophical Realism (or Idealism), Realism assumes that reality inheres in the here and now, in the everyday. It therefore emphasizes accurate descriptions of specific setting, dress, and character in ways that would have appeared entirely inappropriate to Neoclassical and earlier authors.

Realism, which emphasizes the importance of the ordinary—the ordinary person and the ordinary situation, tends to reject the heroic and the aristocratic and embrace the pedestrian, the comic, and the middle class. According to George Levine, “Whatever else it means, it always implies an attempt to use language to get beyond language, to discover some nonverbal truth out there.” Changing notions of what is out there obviously affect these essentially problematic notions of realism.

Levine also points out that, unlike the movement in France, Realism in England does not focus on the dregs of society [or] on the degradations and

degenerations of humans in bondage to a social and cosmic determinism. It belongs . . . to a “ middling” condition and defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literatures. [At the same time] what is unconventional and most exciting about the [English] tradition of realism is its pleasure in abundance, in energy, and the vivid engagement, through language, with the reality just beyond the reach of language. . . Realistic novels contain more than they formally need. The antiliterary thrust of realism can be taken either as an assertion of the power of the real over the imagined, and hence of a determined world, or as an assertion of the variety and energy against the enclosing and determining forms of art. Some aspects of fiction, such as description or dialogue, often appear more suited to Realism than do others, such as plot, whose beginning and ending reveals its artificiality. Take each novel you have read in the course and determine which elements seem adequately described by the terms “ realist” or “ realistic. The realist movement in literature first developed in France in the mid-nineteenth century, soon spreading to England, Russia, and the United States. Realist literature is best represented by the novel, including many works widely regarded to be among the greatest novels ever written. Realist writers sought to narrate their novels from an objective, unbiased perspective that simply and clearly represented the factual elements of the story. 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 endeavored to accurately represent contemporary culture and people from all walks of life. Thus, realist writers often addressed themes of socioeconomic conflict by contrasting the living conditions of the poor with those of the upper classes in urban as well as rural societies. In France, the major realist writers included Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Emile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant, among others. In Russia, the major realist writers were Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy. In England, the foremost realist authors were Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope.

In the United States, William Dean Howells was the foremost realist writer. Naturalism, an offshoot of Realism, was a literary movement that placed even greater emphasis on the accurate representation of details from contemporary life. In the United States, Regionalism and local color fiction in particular were American offshoots of Realism. Realism also exerted a profound influence on drama and theatrical productions, altering practices of set design, costuming, acting style, and dialogue. The?? Emergence of?? Realism 3 major developments helped lead to the emergence of realism: 1.

August Comte??(1798-1857), often considered to be the “ father of Sociology,” developed a theory known as Positivism. Among the Comte’s ideas was an encouragement for understanding the cause and effect of nature through precise observation. 2. Charles Darwin (1809-1882)?? published?? The Origin of Species???? in 1859, and creators a worldwide stir which exists to this day. Darwin’s essential series suggested that life developed gradually from common ancestry and that life favoured “ survival of the fittest. ” The implications of Darwin’s Theories were threefold: 1. eople <https://assignbuster.com/realism-in-modern-drama-assignment/>

were controlled by heredity and environment 2. behaviours were beyond our control 3. humanity is a natural object, rather than being above all else Karl Marx (1818-1883) in the late 1840's espoused a political philosophy arguing against urbanization and in favour of a more equal distribution of wealth. These three stated ideas that helped open the door for a type of theatre that would be different from any that had come before. Even Richard Wagner (pronounced " Rih-Kard' Vahg'-ner") (1813-1883), while rejecting contemporary trends toward realism, helps lead toward a moderate realistic theatre.

Wagner wanted complete illusionism, but wanted the dramatists to be more than a recorder he wanted to be of " myth-maker. " True drama, according to Wagner, should be " dipped in the magic founding of music," which allows greater control over performance than spoken drama. Wagner wanted complete control over every aspect of the production in order to get a " gesamtkunstwerk," or " master art work. " Because Wagner aimed for complete illusion, even though his operas were not all realistic, many of his production practices helped lead the way for realism.

For instance the auditorium was darkened, the stage was framed with a double proscenium arch, there were no side boxes and no center aisle, and all seats were equally good. Further, he forbade musicians to tune in the orchestra pit, allowed no applause or curtain calls, and strove for historical accuracy in scenery and costumes. Therefore, even though Wagner's operas are fantastic and mythical, his attempts at illusionism helped gain public acceptance for realism. Beginnings of the Movement: Realism came about partly as a response to these new social / artistic conditions.

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The “ movement” began in France and by 1860 had some general precepts:

1. truth resides in material objects we perceived to all five senses; truth is verified through science 2. the scientific method??? observation??? would solve everything 3. human problems were the highest were home of science Art??? according to the realist view??? had as its purpose to better mankind. Drama was to involve the direct observation of human behaviour; therefore, there was a thrust to use contemporary settings and time periods, and it was to deal with everyday life and problems as subjects.

As already mentioned, realism first showed itself in staging and costuming.

Three-dimensional details had been added by 1800. By 1850, theatre productions used historically accurate settings and costumes and details, partly as a result of romantic ideals. But it was harder to get realism accepted widely. The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen helped unify productions; Richard Wagner wanted theatre to fuse the emotional and the intellectual, though his operas were highly mythical and fantastic. Chapter 2-THE

EMERGENCE OF REALSIM IN MODERN DRAMA

Origin of Realism in modern drama Ancient Drama The origins of Western drama can be traced to the celebratory music of 6th-century BC Attica, the Greek region centered on Athens. Although accounts of this period are inadequate, it appears that the poet Thespis developed a new musical form in which he impersonated a single character and engaged a chorus of singer-dancers in dialogue. As the first composer and soloist in this new form, which came to be known as tragedy, Thespis can be considered both the first dramatist and the first actor.

Of the hundreds of works produced by Greek tragic playwrights, only 32 plays by the three major innovators in this new art form survive. Aeschylus created the possibility of developing conflict between characters by introducing a second actor into the format. His seven surviving plays, three of which constitute the only extant trilogy are richly ambiguous inquiries into the paradoxical relationship between humans and the cosmos, in which people are made answerable for their acts, yet recognize that these acts are determined by the gods.

Medieval Drama Medieval drama, when it emerged hundreds of years later, was a new creation rather than a rebirth, the drama of earlier times having had almost no influence on it. The reason for this creation came from a quarter that had traditionally opposed any form of theater: the Christian church. In the Easter service, and later in the Christmas service, bits of chanted dialogue, called tropes, were interpolated into the liturgy. Priests, impersonating biblical figures, acted out minuscule scenes from the holiday stories.

Eventually, these playlets grew more elaborate and abandoned the inside of the church for the church steps and the adjacent marketplace. Secular elements crept in as the artisan guilds took responsibility for these performances; although the glorification of God and the redemption of humanity remained prime concerns, the celebration of local industry was not neglected. Restoration And 18th-Century Drama The theaters established in the wake of Charles II's return from exile in France and the Restoration of the monarchy in England (1660) were intended primarily to serve the needs of a socially, politically, and aesthetically homogeneous class.

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At first they relied on the pre-Civil War repertoire; before long, however, they felt called upon to bring these plays into line with their more “refined,” French-influenced sensibilities. The themes, language, and dramaturgy of Shakespeare’s plays were now considered out of date, so that during the next two centuries the works of England’s greatest dramatist were never produced intact. Owing much to Moliere, the English comedy of manners was typically a witty, brittle satire of current mores, especially of relations between the sexes.

Among its leading examples were *She Would if She Could* (1668) and *The Man of Mode* (1676) by Sir George Etherege; *The Country Wife* (1675) by William Wycherley; *The Way of the World* (1700) by William Congreve; and *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux’ Stratagem* (1707) by George Farquhar. The resurgence of Puritanism, especially after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, had a profound effect on 18th-century drama.

Playwrights, retreating from the free-spirited licentiousness of the Restoration, turned towards softer, sentimental comedy and moralizing domestic tragedy. *The London Merchant* (1731) by George Lillo consolidated this trend.

A prose tragedy of the lower middle class, and thus an important step on the road to realism, it illustrated the moral that a woman of easy virtue can lead an industrious young man to the gates of hell. Satire enjoyed a brief revival with Henry Fielding and with John Gay, whose *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) met with phenomenal success. Their wit, however, was too sharp for the government, which retaliated by imposing strict censorship laws in 1737. For

the next 150 years, few substantial English authors bothered with the drama.

19th Century Drama and The Romantic Rebellion

In its purest form, Romanticism concentrated on the spiritual, which would allow humankind to transcend the limitations of the physical world and body and find an ideal truth. Subject matter was drawn from nature and “natural man” (such as the supposedly untouched Native American). Perhaps one of the best examples of Romantic drama is *Faust* (Part I, 1808; Part II, 1832) by the German playwright Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Based on the classic legend of the man who sells his soul to the devil, this play of epic proportions depicts humankind’s attempt to master all knowledge and power in its constant struggle with the universe.

The Romantics focused on emotion rather than rationality, drew their examples from a study of the real world rather than the ideal, and glorified the idea of the artist as a mad genius unfettered by rules. Romanticism thus gave rise to a vast array of dramatic literature and production that was often undisciplined and that often substituted emotional manipulation for substantial ideas. Romanticism first appeared in Germany, a country with little native theatre other than rustic farces before the 18th century. By the 1820s Romanticism dominated the theatre of most of Europe.

Many of the ideas and practices of Romanticism were evident in the late 18th-century *Sturm und Drang* movement of Germany led by Goethe and the dramatist Friedrich Schiller. These plays had no single style but were generally strongly emotional, and, in their experimentation with form, laid the groundwork for the rejection of Neo-Classicism. The plays of the French

playwright Rene Charles Guilbert de Pixerecourt paved the way for French Romanticism, which had previously been known only in the acting of Francois Joseph Talma in the first decades of the 19th century.

Victor Hugo's *Hernani* (1830) is considered the first French Romantic drama. The Modern Drama From the time of the Renaissance on, theatre seemed to be striving for total realism, or at least for the illusion of reality. As it reached that goal in the late 19th century, a multifaceted, anti realistic reaction erupted. Avant-garde Precursors of Modern Theatre Many movements generally lumped together as the avant-garde, attempted to suggest alternatives to the realistic drama and production.

The various theoreticians felt that Naturalism presented only superficial and thus limited or surface reality-that a greater truth or reality could be found in the spiritual or the unconscious. Others felt that theatre had lost touch with its origins and had no meaning for modern society other than as a form of entertainment. Paralleling modern art movements, they turned to symbol, abstraction, and ritual in an attempt to revitalize the theatre. Although realism continues to be dominant in contemporary theatre, television and film now better serve its earlier functions.

The originator of many antirealist ideas was the German opera composer Richard Wagner. He believed that the job of the playwright/composer was to create myths. In so doing, Wagner felt, the creator of drama was portraying an ideal world in which the audience shared a communal experience, perhaps as the ancients had done. He sought to depict the "soul state", or inner being, of characters rather than their superficial, realistic aspects.

Furthermore, Wagner was unhappy with the lack of unity among the individual arts that constituted the drama.

He proposed the Gesamtkunstwerk, the “total art work”, in which all dramatic elements are unified, preferably under the control of a single artistic creator. Wagner was also responsible for reforming theatre architecture and dramatic presentation with his Festival Theatre at Bayreuth, Germany, completed in 1876. The stage of this theatre was similar to other 19th-century stages even if better equipped, but in the auditorium Wagner removed the boxes and balconies and put in a fan-shaped seating area on a sloped floor, giving an equal view of the stage to all spectators.

Just before a performance the auditorium lights dimmed to total darkness—then a radical innovation. Symbolist Drama The Symbolist movement in France in the 1880s first adopted Wagner’s ideas. The Symbolists called for “detheatricalizing” the theatre, meaning stripping away all the technological and scenic encumbrances of the 19th century and replacing them with a spirituality that was to come from the text and the acting. The texts were laden with symbolic imagery not easily construed—rather they were suggestive. The general mood of the plays was slow and dream-like.

The intention was to evoke an unconscious response rather than an intellectual one and to depict the nonrational aspects of characters and events. The Symbolist plays of Maurice Maeterlinck of Belgium and Paul Claudel of France, popular in the 1890s and early 20th century, are seldom performed today. Strong Symbolist elements can be found, however, in the plays of Chekhov and the late works of Ibsen and Strindberg. Symbolist

influences are also evident in the works of such later playwrights as the Americans Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams and the Englishman Harold Pinter, propounder of "theatre of silence".

Also influenced by Wagner and the Symbolists were the Swiss scenic theorist Adolphe Appia and the English designer Edward Henry Gordon Craig, whose turn-of-the-century innovations shaped much of 20th-century scenic and lighting design. They both reacted against the realistic painted settings of the day, proposing instead suggestive or abstract settings that would create, through light and scenic elements, more of a mood or feeling than an illusion of a real place. In 1896 a Symbolist theatre in Paris produced Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*, for its time a shocking, bizarre play.

Modelled vaguely on *Macbeth*, the play depicts puppet-like characters in a world devoid of decency. The play is filled with scatological humor and language. It was perhaps most significant for its shock value and its destruction of virtually all-contemporaneous theatrical norms and taboos. *Ubu roi* freed the theatre for exploration in any direction the author wished to go. It also served as the model and inspiration for future avant-garde dramatic movements and the absurdist drama of the 1950s. Expressionist Drama The Expressionist movement was popular in the 1910s and 1920s, largely in Germany.

It explored the more violent, grotesque aspects of the human psyche, creating a nightmare world onstage. Scenographically, distortion and exaggeration and a suggestive use of light and shadow typify Expressionism. Stock types replaced individualized characters or allegorical figures, much as

in the morality plays, and plots often revolved around the salvation of humankind. Other movements of the first half of the century, such as Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism, sought to bring new artistic and scientific ideas into theatre. Ensemble Theatre

Perhaps the most significant development influenced by Artaud was the ensemble theatre movement of the 1960s. Exemplified by the Polish Laboratory Theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook's Theatre of Cruelty Workshop, Theatre du Soleil, the French workers' cooperative formed by Ariane Mnouchkine, and the Open Theatre, led by Joseph Chaikin, ensemble theatres abandoned the written text in favor of productions created by an ensemble of actors. The productions, which generally evolved out of months of work, relied heavily on physical movement, nonspecific language and sound, and often-unusual arrangements of space .

Absurdist Theatre The most popular and influential nonrealistic genre of the 20th century was absurdism. Absurdist dramatists saw, in the words of the Romanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco, " man as lost in the world, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. Absurdist drama tends to eliminate much of the cause-and-effect relationship among incidents, reduce language to a game and minimize its communicative power, reduce characters to archetypes, make place nonspecific, and view the world as alienating and incomprehensible.

Absurdism was at its peak in the 1950s, but continued to influence drama through the 1970s. The American playwright Edward Albee's early dramas were classified as absurd because of the seemingly illogical or irrational

elements that defined his characters' world of actions. Pinter was also classed with the absurdists. His plays, such as *The Homecoming* (1964), seem dark, impenetrable, and absurd. Pinter explained, however, that they are realistic because they resemble the everyday world in which only fragments of unexplained activity and dialogue are seen and heard.

Contemporary Drama Although pure Naturalism was never very popular after World War I, drama in a realist style continued to dominate the commercial theatre, especially in the United States. Even there, however, psychological realism seemed to be the goal, and nonrealistic scenic and dramatic devices were employed to achieve this end. The plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, for instance, use memory scenes, dream sequences, purely symbolic characters, projections, and the like.

Even O'Neill's later works-ostensibly realistic plays such as *Long Day's Journey into Night* (produced 1956)-incorporate poetic dialogue and a carefully orchestrated background of sounds to soften the hard-edged realism. Scenery was almost always suggestive rather than realistic.

European drama was not much influenced by psychological realism but was more concerned with plays of ideas, as evidenced in the works of the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello, the French playwrights Jean Anouilh and Jean Giraudoux, and the Belgian playwright Michel de Ghelderode.

In England in the 1950s John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) became a rallying point for the postwar "angry young men"; a Vietnam trilogy of the early 1970s, by the American playwright David Rabe, expressed the anger and frustration of many towards the war in Vietnam. Under the influence of

Brecht, many postwar German playwrights wrote documentary dramas that, based on historical incidents, explored the moral obligations of individuals to themselves and to society.

An example is *The Deputy* (1963), by Rolf Hochhuth, which deals with Pope Pius XII's silence during World War II. Many playwrights of the 1960s and 1970s—Sam Shepard in the United States, Peter Handke in Austria, Tom Stoppard in England—built plays around language: language as a game, language as sound, language as a barrier, language as a reflection of society. In their plays, dialogue frequently cannot be read simply as a rational exchange of information. Many playwrights also mirrored society's frustration with a seemingly uncontrollable, self-destructive world.

In Europe in the 1970s, new playwriting was largely overshadowed by theatricalist productions, which generally took classical plays and reinterpreted them, often in bold new scenographic spectacles, expressing ideas more through action and the use of space than through language. In the late 1970s a return to Naturalism in drama paralleled the art movement known as Photorealism. Typified by such plays as *American Buffalo* (1976) by David Mamet, little action occurs, the focus is on mundane characters and events, and language is fragmentary—much like everyday conversation.

The settings are indistinguishable from reality. The intense focus on seemingly meaningless fragments of reality creates an absurdist, nightmarish quality: similar traits can be found in writers such as Stephen Poliakoff. A gritty social realism combined with very dark humour has also been popular; it can be seen in the very different work of Alan Ayckbourn,

Mike Leigh, Michael Frayn, Alan Bleasdale, and Dennis Potter. In all lands where the drama flourishes, the only constant factor today is what has always been constant: change.

The most significant writers are still those who seek to redefine the basic premises of the art of drama. Emergence of realism in modern English drama One of theatre's greatest periods continues today. The modern period and its drama were shaped by world-changing forces, such as industrial-technological revolution, democratic revolutions, and an intellectual revolution that would disrupt earlier conceptions of time, space, the divine, human psychology, and social order.

As a result, a theatre of challenge and experimentation emerged. Realism, the movement with the most pervasive and long-lived effect on modern theatre, was conceived as a laboratory in which the ills of society, familial problems, and the nature of relationships could be “objectively” presented for the judgment of impartial observers. Its goal, of likeness to life, demanded that settings resemble their prescribed locales precisely and seem like rooms from real life in which one wall have been removed.

The playwright Henrik Ibsen initiated the realistic period with plays focused on contemporary, day-to-day themes that skillfully reveal both sides of a conflict through brilliantly capturing psychological detail. Anton Chekhov, in Russia, would bring the form to its stylistic apogee with plays whose even minor characters seem to breathe the air we do and in which the plots and themes are developed primarily between the lines. An independent but concurrent movement, naturalism, would be an even more extreme attempt

to dramatize human reality without the appearance of dramaturgical shaping.

While realist plays would address well-defined social issues, naturalist plays offered a simple “ slice of life” free from dramatic convention. With the same reverence for nature, the human being was conceived as a mere biological phenomenon whose behavior was determined by heredity and environment. A counterforce to realism, initiated by symbolism, began in the late nineteenth century that would expand into what might be called antirealistic theatre.

Symbolism would contest realism’s apparent spiritual bankruptcy with a form that would explore, through images and metaphors, the inner realities of human experience that cannot be directly perceived. A focus on traditional aesthetic values, such as poetry, imagery, and profundity would reflect the importance of purity of vision over observation, abstraction and enlargement over the mundane and ordinary. The movement spread quickly and affected every aspect of theatrical production.

Symbolism’s contestation of realism gave rise to an era of “ isms,” during which the aesthetics of dramatic art assumed a new social and political significance. Such “ isms” became, in time, used consciously as stylization in new dramatic formats. Such antirealistic theatre does not discard reality but enhances it with symbol and metaphor, elucidates parable and allegory, deconstructs and reconstructs subjects through language, scenery, and lighting, and finally uses the theatre’s own theatricality explicitly.

Briefly examining eleven of these movements makes the diverse qualities and perspectives within antirealistic theatre apparent. From the emotional and “irrational” perspectives of Theatre of Cruelty to the rational and thought-provoking nature of Intellectual Comedy, pre-World War II antirealistic approaches such as Expressionism, Theatricalism, and the French Avant-Garde challenged and extended the limits of theatrical art.

Through redefining the importance and function of language, extending the concept of character to include abstract forces or archetypes, reconstructing stage imagery through metaphoric scenery and lighting, and exploring themes often tinged with anxiety, such as isms and stylizations have created much of the theatrical language used on today’s stages. Following World War II, Theatre of Alienation would introduce new theatre practices and reawaken theatre’s sense of social responsibility, while the Theatre of the Absurd would express the futility of all action and pointlessness of all direction.

Philosophical Melodrama accepted the Absurd’s premise that humans are alone in a silent universe, but takes it as a challenge to creating an effective life. The Comedy of Contemporary Manners would unmask the ridiculousness of social convention, while Political Satire ruthlessly reveals the hypocrisies and exploitations of political and economic systems within a comedic and often highly stylized framework. The Case Study uses, most often, medical problems as a perspective for philosophical investigations, frequently taking the audience into and back out of the “patient’s” experience.

By contrast, the ostensible realism of Suprarealism is actually suffused with a menacing obscurity and mythic symbolism that seeks out patterns below

surfaces. CHAPTER3-WRITERS OF REALISM Writers of realism In France, to Playwrights helped popularized the idea of realism but both clung to two inherent traditional morality and values: Alexandre Dumas?? fils??(the?? fils???? stands for “ son,” and designates the “ illegitimate son of Alexandre Dumas”) ??? (1824-1895) His novel,?? Camille, was dramatized in 1849. About a “ kept woman,” the play was written in prose, and dealt with contemporary life.

Eventually, he wrote “ thesis plays,” about contemporary social problems. Dumas was one of the very first to implement the new ideas of Realism. His dramatic adaptation of his own novel?? The Lady of the Camellias?? was a forbidden production for three years due to its realism. The plays protagonist was based on a well-known prostitute of the time and had a happy ending. The Demi-Monde?? presented an opposite view about a prostitute. Dumas wanted to show that a “ woman with a past” must be prevented from marrying into good families.

He wrote for the betterment of society and sometimes his work seemed a bit preachy. As he said, “ if I can exercise some influence over society if I can find some means to force people to discuss the problem, and the lawmakers to revise the law, I shall have done more than my duty as a writer, I shall have done my duty as a man. ” Emile Augier??(1820-1889) also wrote plays about contemporary conditions. Emile Augier,?? in full?? Guillaume-victor-emile Augier???? (born Sept. 17, 1820,?? Valence, France?? died Oct. 5, 1889,?? Croissy-sur-Seine),?? popular dramatist who wrote comedies extolling the virtues of middle-class life and who, with Alexandre Dumas?? fils?? and?? Victorien Sardou, dominated the French stage during the Second <https://assignbuster.com/realism-in-modern-drama-assignment/>

Empire (1852-70). Augier was an unbending moralist, and all of his plays are to some extent didactic in purpose. His verse play *Gabrielle* (1849) attacks the Romantic belief in the divine right of passion, while his *Le Mariage d'Olympe* (1855; "The Marriage of Olympia") opposes the idea of the rehabilitation of a prostitute by love, as expressed in Dumas's *La Dame aux Camélias* ("The Lady of the Camellias").

A champion of the institution of marriage, Augier satirized adultery in *Les Lionnes pauvres* (1858; "The Poor Lionesses") and saw in greed, and money itself, the root of evil. His best-known play, *Le Gendre de Monsieur Poirier* (1854; "Monsieur Poirier's Son-in-Law"), written in collaboration with Jules Sandeau, advocated the fusion of the new prosperous middle class with the dispossessed nobility. In Norway: Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is considered to be the father of modern realistic drama. His plays attacked society's values and dealt with unconventional subjects within the form of the well-made play (causally related).

Ibsen perfected the well-made play formula; and by using a familiar formula made his plays, with a very shocking subject matter, acceptable. He discarded soliloquies, asides, etc. Exposition in the plays was motivated, there were causally related scenes, inner psychological motivation was emphasized, the environment had an influence on characters' personalities, and all the things characters did and all of things the characters used revealed their socio-economic milieu. He became a model for later realistic writers. Among the subjects addressed by Ibsen in his plays are: euthanasia, the role of women, war and business, and syphilis.

Some of Ibsen's Plays: * Ghosts??? 1881??? dealt with the concept of the sins of the father transferring to the son, resulting in syphilis. * Pillars of Society????? 1877 ??? dealt with war and business. * Hedda Gabler ????? 1890 ??? a powerful woman takes her life at the end of the play to get away from her boredom with society. * A Doll's House????? 1879 ??? Nora leaves her husband Torvald and her children at the end of the play; often considered "the slam heard around the world," Nora's action must have been very shocking to the Victorian audience.

Later in life, Ibsen turned to more symbolic and abstract dramas; but his "realism" affected others, and helped lead to realistic theatre, which has become, despite variations and rejections against it, the predominant form of theatre even today. Other writers of realism: George Bernard Shaw?? (1856-1950) An acclaimed playwright, critic, and social reformer, George Bernard Shaw (but he hated being called George) was born in 1856 into a family he described as of shabby genteel lineage.

He grew up a Protestant in the predominantly Catholic city of?? Dublin, the capital of?? Ireland. Although he quit school at age 14 and was always critical of formal education, Shaw gave himself a rigorous informal education, frequenting the National Gallery of Dublin and reading voraciously. Through his mother's work as a music teacher and vocalist, he also developed a keen interest in classical music that would assist him in his early career as a music critic. At age 20, Shaw followed his mother to?? London?? to embark on a literary career.

He struggled through the late 1870s and much of the 1880s trying to establish a name for himself by writing reviews and criticism for numerous publications: book reviews for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, art criticism for *The World*, music criticism for *The Star and The World*, and drama criticism for *Saturday Review*. During these years he also wrote five highly original novels that no one would publish until friends serialized them in magazines, started on his first play, and made public speeches on various topics of political and social controversy.

Influenced by socialist lectures and by reading Marx's *Das Kapital*, Shaw joined the fledgling Fabian Society in 1884. The Fabian Society was an influential group dedicated to establishing a socialist democracy in Britain. Shaw quickly became a major spokesperson for the Fabians and their ideas. Among his associates in the Society were the artist William Morris, author H. G. Wells, feminist Annie Besant, and economic reformers Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Shaw's first play, *Widowers' Houses*, was produced in 1892 by J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre, a company founded to produce new plays by new modern playwrights.

Widowers' Houses was this company's second production, following the English premiere of Ibsen's *Ghosts* the year before. Like many of his peers, Shaw was greatly impressed with Ibsen's new drama of social realism. In 1891 he wrote an essay on the subject entitled *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Shaw despised the sentimental romance being presented to London audiences in contemporary plays. He advocated instead that greater attention be paid to Ibsen and his innovations. Shaw valued the way the stage could become a platform for the communication of ideas: through <https://assignbuster.com/realism-in-modern-drama-assignment/>

his own plays he sought to confront audiences with issues of social and political importance. He aimed to stimulate not only the hearts, but also the minds of London's theatre-goers. One of the major innovations of Shawian drama was the unusually large role he gave to thought and debate – but thought enlivened with a love of wordplay and paradox. Although initially considered subversive because of the subjects he chose to portray, by the turn of the century Shaw had secured his reputation as a major playwright. His plays were produced on both sides of the Atlantic, and his scripts were published and distributed widely.

The young actor-manager Harley Granville Barker helped to advance Shaw's popularity with three landmark seasons (1904-7) at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Of the thousand performances presented under the Barker-Vedrenne management, over 700 were of eleven plays by Shaw. Barker himself created a number of memorable Shawian roles, including John Tanner in *Man and Superman*, Adolphus Cusins in *Major Barbara*, and Louis Dubedat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. At the Court, Barker also directed the first popular production of *You Never Can Tell*, the success of which was partly due to his own performance as Valentine.

After the advent of talking films in the 1920s, Shaw's scripts began to find a place in the burgeoning film industry. Although a fan of movies since the early days of silent films, Shaw refused to sell the screen rights to his scripts unless he could retain some control over the final product. In the 1930s and 1940s he adapted several of his plays for film, including *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1931), *Arms and The Man* (1932), *Pygmalion* (1938), *Major Barbara* (1941), and *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945). Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize

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for Literature for 1925 and donated the prize money to the founding of the Anglo-Swedish Literary Foundation.

In the 1930s he travelled around the world with his wife, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, an Irish heiress whom he had married in 1898. He continued to write plays and essays on religion and socialism until his death in 1950.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was born in Russia. Chekhov is known more for poetic expression and symbolism, compelling psychological reality, people trapped in social situations, hope in hopeless situations. He claimed that he wrote comedies; others think they are sad and tragic. Characters in Chekhov's plays seem to have a fate that is a direct result of what they are. His plays have an illusion of plotlessness. * *The Seagull* (1898). * *Three Sisters* (1900) we did the show here last year; about three sisters who want to move to Moscow but never do. * *The Cherry Orchard* (1902) Again, his realism has affected other playwrights, as did his symbolic meanings in the texts of his plays and in the titles of his plays. CHAPTER 4-AMERICAN AND CHINESE REALISM AMERICAN REALISM American Realism: 1865-1910 In most people's minds, the years following the Civil War symbolized a time of healing and rebuilding.

For those engaged in serious literary circles, however, that period was full of upheaval. A literary civil war raged on between the camps of the romantics and the realists and later, the naturalists. People waged verbal battles over the ways that fictional characters were presented in relation to their external world. Using plot and character development, a writer stated his or her philosophy about how much control mankind had

over his own destiny. For example, romantic writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson celebrated the ability of human will to triumph over adversity.

On the other hand, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells and Henry James were influenced by the works of early European Realists, namely Balzac's?? *La Comedie Humaine*??(begun in the 1830s); Turgenev's?? *Sportsman's Sketches*??(1852); and Flaubert's?? *Madame Bovary*??(1856). These American realists believed that humanity's freedom of choice was limited by the power of outside forces. At another extreme were naturalists Stephen Crane and Frank Norris who supported the ideas of Emile Zola and the determinism movement. Naturalists argued that individuals have no choice because a person's life is dictated by heredity and the external environment.

In summary, here's how the genres portrayed their characters: Genre| American Author| Perceived the individual as... | Romantics| Ralph Waldo Emerson| a god| Realists| Henry James William Dean Howells Mark Twain| simply a person| Naturalists| Stephen Crane Frank Norris| a helpless object|

Emergence of American Realism The industrial revolution that took place at the end of the 19th?? century changed our country in remarkable ways. People left rural homes for opportunities in urban cities. With the development of new machinery and equipment, the U. S. conomy became more focused on factory production; Americans did not have to chiefly rely on farming and agriculture to support their families. At the same time, immigrants from all over the world crowded into tenements to take advantage of new urban opportunities. In the end, the sweeping economic, social, and political changes that took place in post-war life allowed American Realism to prevail. The realism of the 1880s featured the works of

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Twain, Howells and James among other writers. American Realists concentrated their writing on select groups or subjects.

Examples of this practice include: * The factory workers of Upton Sinclair and Rebecca Harding Davis * Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Charles Chesnut's stories of black life * Kate Chopin's views of marriage and women's roles The writing during this period was also very regional. The industrial revolution called for?? standardization, mass production of goods and streamlined channels of distribution. America was leaping into a new modern age and people feared that local folkways and traditions would be soon forgotten.

Responding to these sentiments, realistic writers set their stories in specific American regions, rushing to capture the "local color" before it was lost. They drew upon the sometimes grim realities of everyday life, showing the breakdown of traditional values and the growing plight of the new urban poor. American realists built their plots and characters around people's ordinary, everyday lives. Additionally, their works contained regional dialects and extensive dialogue which connected well with the public. As a result, readers were attracted to the realists because they saw their own struggles in print.

Conversely, the public had little patience for the slow paced narratives, allegory and symbolism of the romantic writers. America was shifting into higher gear and readers wanted writers who clearly communicated the complexities of their human experiences. Spurring Change At its basic level, realism was grounded in the faithful reporting of all facets of everyday American life. According to William Dean Howells, "Realism is nothing more

and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material" (Carter, 36). The reading public's preference for realism parallels the changes that were occurring at the end of the 19th and into the 20th century.

For example, the modern scientific revolution advocated that truth and knowledge be based on empirical data. Reinforcing that notion, the industrial revolution proclaimed that a better civil society could be built upon machinery and factory labor. Given this atmosphere, several developments occurred around the same time: (1) The growth of investigative journalism; (2) the rise of muckrakers; and (3) the establishment of a new-found fascination with the camera as a means of capturing the realities of a single instant, unvarnished by sentimentality. In many ways, these turn of the century developments are still alive and well.

With regard to contemporary literature, realism is so pervasive that it seems natural and unimportant. However, upon close examination, we realize that realism planted the seeds for many of America's core values. Basic Tenets As with all literary genres, we cannot rely on generalizations to interpret a work. After all, realistic literature reflected more than mere external reality. According to Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, realism has specific social, political, and artistic characteristics that set it apart from other genres.

Below are the salient points that Chase makes about realism: Plot and Character * Character is more important than action and plot; complex ethical choices are often the subject. * Characters appear in the real complexity of temperament and motive; they are in explicable relation to

nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past. * Humans control their destinies; characters act on their environment rather than simply reacting to it. * Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail.

Selective presentation of reality with an emphasis on verisimilitude, even at the expense of a well-made plot. * Events will usually be plausible. Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances. * Class is important; the novel has traditionally served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class. Interpretation and Analysis * Realism is viewed as a realization of democracy. * The morality of Realism is intrinsic, integral, relativistic ??? relations between people and society are explored. Realists were pragmatic, relativistic, democratic and experimental. The purpose of writing is to instruct and to entertain. Structure of Prose * Diction is the natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone may be comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact. * The use of symbolism is controlled and limited; the realists depend more on the use of images. * Objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important: overt authorial comments or intrusions diminish as the century progresses. Other Important Aspects * Interior or psychological realism is a variant form. Realism of James and Twain critically acclaimed in the twentieth century; Howellsian realism fell into disfavor as part of an early twentieth century rebellion against the “ genteel tradition. ” REALISM IN MODERN CHINESE DRAMA In terms of subject matter, ideological orientation and artistic techniques, Xiang Peiliang’s Amnon is deeply influenced by Salome. Clearly filled with a wild and tragic sense featuring “ Salome”, these plays depict strong personalities, express fiery feelings and challenge the feudalistic asceticism.

In addition, they also hint the dejected feelings of the awakened Chinese youth. The western symbolism also produced a far-reaching influence on Chinese playwrights. For example, in poetic drama *The Rebirth of the Goddess*, Guo Moruo combined ancient Chinese myths and legends with his own reflections on the then social reality and poetic ideals. The war between emperors symbolizes the warlords' war while the Goddess who creates the new Sun signifies the birth of a good ideal. The early dramatic works by Tian Han are also filled with the mysterious and sentimental tone of symbolism.

In *The Sound of the Old Pond*, the old pond, which is profound, quiet and life-killing, is employed to symbolize a kind of unknown force that is alluring and destructive at once. The poet's decision to throw a piece of stone into the pond manifests his will to dive to the bottom of the pond and explore the essential meaning of human life. In *The Tragedy on the Lake*, Tian Han described man's abandon of "body" for "soul" by presenting the heroine's two suicidal acts. The western expressionism, as a new trend of thinking, also attracted Chinese playwrights.

Its most distinctive feature lies in its exploration of man's soul by means of externalization. In *Zhao, the King of Hell*, Hong Shen depicted Zhao Da, a Chinese soldier escaping in the dark forest with some pelf, terrified intern