



**19 AND 20TH
CENTURY
1800-1875
THEATRE**

Historical Background

- Industrial Revolution
 - Replacement of hand tools and human power by machinery and the development of the factory and factory system
- Middle Class continuing to rise in power
 - Legislatures passing reforms to benefit the middle class
- Influential people who disturbed traditional beliefs:
 - Karl Marx
 - Charles Darwin
 - Sigmund Freud

Romanticism

- Stressed strong emotion as a source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as doubt, horror, and the awe experienced in confronting the sublimity of nature
- Rejected the neoclassical rules
 - Actually they rejected all artistic rules, suggesting that genius creates its own rules
- More interested in creating mood and atmosphere than developing believable plots or depth of character
- Did not believe in purity of genre
 - Considered all subject matter appropriate for the stage
- Patriotism, nationalism, revolution and armed struggle for independence became popular themes in the arts of this period
- Romantic hero was frequently a social outcast who quested for justice, knowledge, and truth

Romanticism in Art

- Music
 - Ludwig van Beethoven
 - Frederic Chopin
- Literature
 - Edgar Allan Poe
 - Nathaniel Hawthorne
 - Emily Dickinson
 - Lord Byron
 - William Wordsworth
 - Coleridge
 - Shelley
 - Etc.



Third of May 1808 by Francisco Goya

Common Themes in Romanticism

- Libertarianism: free from convention and tyranny, the Democratic spirit
- Nature: unspoiled scenery
- Lure of the Exotic: picturesque, romanticized view of the past, mystery, superstition
- The Supernatural: folktales, connection of identity of self

Melodrama

- Melodrama means “song drama” or “music drama”
- The first melodrama was performed in France in 1798
- Plays were written putting emphasis on surface effects that would evoke suspense, fear, nostalgia, and other strong emotions
- “If you believe, as the Greeks did, that man is at the mercy of the gods, then you write tragedy. The end is inevitable from the beginning. But if you believe that man can solve his own problems and is at nobody's mercy, then you will probably write melodrama.”

The Death of Melodrama

- Melodrama died in 1915, according to theatre history textbooks
 - The truth is that the entertainment industry moved to film to distribute the melodramas for way cheaper than doing plays
 - A lot of the same people who created the theatre industry moved it to Los Angeles
- Melodrama is the standard Hollywood model
 - “Melodramatic” suggests a style that is over the top, extremely emotional, larger than life

Elements of Melodrama

1. Music
 - Underscore, not like a musical with singing and dancing
2. Morally polarized characters
 - Good guys versus bad guys
3. Heroine
 - Damsel in distress who must be saved by the hero
4. Happy Ending
5. Cosmic justice has to prevail – good has to win over bad
6. Sidekicks - usually a best friend or hero's companion
6. Mixture of suspense and comedy
7. Physical conflict
 - Always ends in a final physical conflict – a battle of good and evil; like a showdown in a western

8. Exotic Locations

- New places to escape
- Set things in the past, the future or far away places

9. Animal Acts

- Brings animals on stage

10. Technology, stage combat, stunts and special effects

- Trains on stage
- The purpose is to keep an audience interested from start to finish

More on Melodramas

- Melodramas can be socially or politically progressive, but it is always culturally conservative
- Melodrama follows the mainstream cultural expectations of society
- Women are portrayed, culturally, today as successful in business, succeeding in a man's job, multi-tasking
- They can beat up the guys, but they haven't neglected their feminine side, beautiful, tender and emotionally vulnerable and still get rescued

Acting Theory: Delsarte

- Much of the acting between 1800 and 1875 was based on stereotypical physical gestures and vocal patterns taught by Francois Delsarte
- Believed actors could convey emotions and inner thoughts through specific, pre-established gestures and body movements
- Scientific approach to acting, consistent with the scientific spirit of the age
- System was rejected by modern realists because it assumed that all human beings reacted the same way



The Attack



HORROR



FLIGHT



Discovery



MOURNING



Supplication

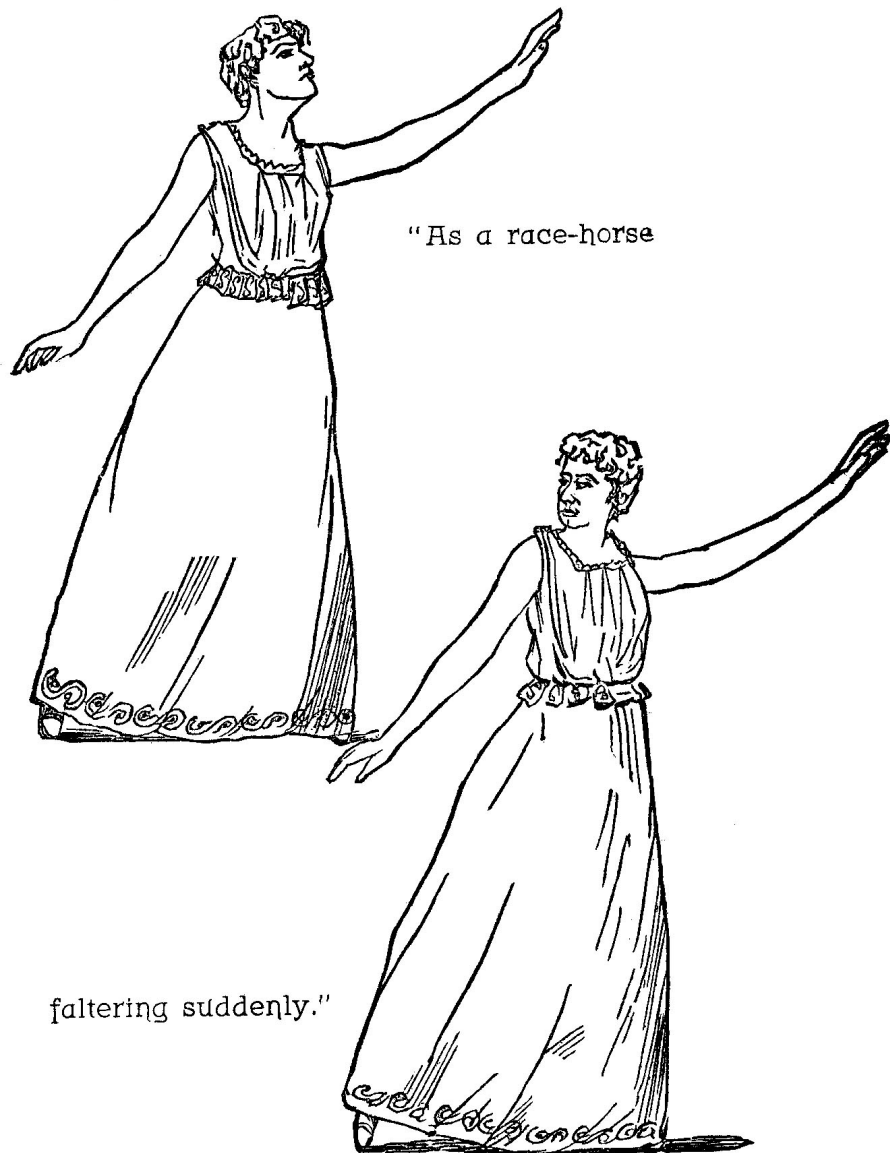
W.C.B.

"He was as a giant"



"Who sometimes proved a dwarf."

"As a race-horse



faltering suddenly."

Ibsen and Realism in Drama

- Born in 1828, in Norway (at the time part of Sweden)
- Son of well-to-do merchant whose business failed when Henrik was young
- Father died not long thereafter
- When Henrik was 19 , the household servant bore his illegitimate child
- Early plays and writings were romantic
- Began developing more realistic plays in 1860's (even though audience preferred lighter works)
- Published plays first, then staged them
- Realism (1850-1950) refers to a style showing life as "it really is" reflects real life It established the fourth wall and as a result - the idea that the actors can see through an invisible wall into the lives of the characters.

Ibsen's Works

- Catiline (1850)
- The Burial Mound (1850)
- Brand (1865) Peer Gynt (1867)
- Emperor and Galilean (1873)
- A Doll's House in 1879
- Ghosts (1881)
- An Enemy of the People (1882)
- The Wild Duck (1884)
- Hedda Gabler (1890)

Naturalism: Chekov and Stanislavsky

- Developed around 1850 to 1922
- The relationship between character and environment
- 2 important “creators” - Anton Chekhov (Russian playwright) and Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938). Both men demanded natural responses from their actors. Psychological reactions of the characters could be more important than the situation itself.
- Stanislavsky created “The System” or “Method” acting - actor uses an “emotional memory” to create character/motivation.

Anton Pavlovich Chekov

- Born in 1860 from a mother who was excellent in storytelling
- Medical School at Moscow State University
- 1883 – resigned due to sickness. Devotes the rest of his life to literature
- Mainly wrote short stories
- His career as playwright was brief but influential both on dramatic literature and performance
- His major works include:
 - The Seagull
 - Uncle Vanya
 - Three Sisters
 - The Cherry Orchard

Chekhov's Talent and Manner

- Selecting important moments from the trivial ones
- Brevity and conciseness
- Anti-ideological
- Anti-pedagogical
- Objectivity
- Free artist
- No blame for anybody
- Acute delineation of human weaknesses and delights, of human psychology
- Naturalist of the theater
- Delineation of ordinary characters
- Exceptional importance of dialogue

Chekhov and Stanislavsky

- Collaborators – both paid closer attention to the important unsaid messages within the writing
- Chekhov by many is acknowledged as someone who made Stanislavsky's Theater famous
- Some arguments. E.g., *Cherry Orchard* was comedy according to Chekhov and drama to Stanislavsky.
- “You say you have cried at my plays...But this is not why I wrote them, it was Stanislavsky who turned them into cry-babies. I simply wanted to say to people honestly: “Understand, how bad and boring your lives are!” People should understand this and...create themselves another and better life. What is here to cry about?”

George Bernard Shaw

- Born in Dublin, Ireland in 1856 to Poor Protestant parents
- Educated at Wesley College.
- Wandered around London, educating himself at the British Museum
- First few years: writes 6 novels, only one published
- Became music critic on the *Star* newspaper.
- 1895 he became the drama critic of the *Saturday Review*
- 1882 heard lecture by the American political theorist Henry George and then became an active socialist supporter.
- 1898: Married Charlotte Payne Townshend and lived together until Charlotte's death in 1943.
- He had a secret and passionate correspondence with an actress and widow Mrs. Patrick Campbell for whom he wrote *Pygmalion* in 1912

Shaw's Plays

- Shaw's plays pushed the envelope with his controversial opinions within his plays. For example, *Widowers' Houses* talks about slum landlords, or *Mrs. Warren's Profession* discusses prostitution.
- Many plays were refused performance licenses by the official censor because of their content. He began to publish his play texts, at this time, a very uncommon practice.
- In the books, he wrote long prefaces and epilogues where he discussed his opinions further.
- Shaw believed that modern plays should contain the traditional plot conflict and its resolution as well as a consideration of important problems and suggestions for their resolution
- 1925, Shaw was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He accepted the honor but refused the money.
- His two major plays are *Arms and the Man* and *Pygmalion*.

Satirical and Notorious Oscar Wilde

- Born in Dublin in 1854 and he became a disciple of Walter Pater, the theorist of aestheticism.
- He was one of the most successful playwrights of late Victorian London and one of the greatest celebrities of his days and eventually suffered a dramatic downfall and was imprisoned after been convicted of “gross indecency” for homosexual acts. His works satirize the hypocrisy of Victorian society.
- He died in Paris in 1900.
- Oscar Wilde adopted the aesthetical ideal. He affirmed “*my life is like a work of art*”. His aestheticism clashed with the didacticism of Victorian novels. To him the artist is the creator of beautiful things.
- Art is used only to celebrate beauty and the sensorial pleasures. Virtue and vice is employed by the artist as raw material in his art: “*No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style*”.

Works

- Poetry: *Poems* (1891) and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898)
- Fairy tales : *The Happy Prince and other Tales* (1888) and *The House of Pomegranates* (1891)
- Novel: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)
- Plays: *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of no Importance*, (1893), *Salomé* (1893), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

Wilde's Famous Quotations

- I have nothing to declare except my genius
- Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes
- A man can be happy with any woman as long as he does not love her
- One should always be in love. That is the reason why one should never marry
- Art is the most intense form of individualism that the world has known