DRAMA : CLASSICAL VERSUS MODERN

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at explaining classical drama and modern drama in general. It is also purposed to compare the differences between classical drama and modern drama. One of the most significant contrasts between classical drama and modern is the difference in the protagonists. Classical tragedy, for instance, involves royalty, the elite. The idea was that for a character to have a great and far-reaching influence over society he/she had to be in a position of great power and authority. In contrast, modern drama often uses common people as protagonists. Modern drama no longer had its heroes, heroines and villains of days gone by—the subjects of the stories were now ordinary people one might meet any day on the street.

Keywords: *Drama, Classical, Modern*

CLASSICAL DRAMA

Drama was introduced to England from Europe by the Romans, and auditoriums were constructed across the country for this purpose. There are some periods of drama;

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

By the medieval period, the mummers' plays had developed, a form of early street theatre associated with the Morris dance, concentrating on themes such as Saint George and the Dragon and Robin Hood. These were folk tales re-telling old stories, and the actors travelled from town to town performing these for their audiences in return for money and hospitality.

The morality play is a genre of Medieval and early Tudor theatrical entertainment. In their own time, these plays were known as "interludes", a broader term given to dramas with or without a moral theme.[6] Morality plays are a type of allegory in which the protagonist is met by personifications of various moral attributes who try to prompt him to choose a Godly life over one of evil. The plays were most popular in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries. Having grown out of the religiously based mystery plays of the Middle Ages, they represented a shift towards a more secular base for European theatre.

The Somonyng of Everyman (The Summoning of Everyman), usually referred to simply as Everyman, is a late 15th-century English morality play. Like John Bunyan's 1678 Christian novel Pilgrim's Progress, Everyman examines the question of Christian salvation by use of allegorical characters, and what Man must do to attain it. The premise is that the good and evil deeds of one's life will be tallied by God after death, as in a ledger book. The play is the allegorical accounting of the life of Everyman, who represents all mankind. In the course of the action, Everyman tries to convince other characters to accompany him in the hope of improving his account. All the characters are also allegorical, each personifying an abstract idea such as Fellowship, (material) Goods, and Knowledge. The conflict between good and evil is dramatized by the interactions between characters.

RENAISSANCE: ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN PERIODS

The period known as the <u>English Renaissance</u>, approximately 1500—1660, saw a flowering of the drama and all the arts. The two candidates for the earliest comedy in English <u>Nicholas Udall's</u> <u>Ralph Roister Doister</u> (c. 1552) and the anonymous <u>Gammer Gurton's Needle</u> (c. 1566), belong to the 16th century.

During the reign of <u>Elizabeth I</u> (1558–1603) and then James I (1603–25), in the late 16th and early 17th century, a London-centered culture, that was both <u>courtly</u> and popular, produced great poetry and drama. The English playwrights were intrigued by Italian model: a conspicuous community of Italian actors had settled in London. The linguist and lexicographer <u>John Florio</u> (1553–1625), whose father was Italian, was a royal language tutor at the Court of <u>James I</u>, and a possible friend of and influence on <u>William Shakespeare</u>, had brought much of the <u>Italian language</u> and culture to England. He was also the translator of <u>Montaigne</u> into English. The earliest Elizabethan plays includes <u>Gorboduc</u> (1561) by <u>Sackville</u> and <u>Norton</u> and <u>Thomas Kyd's</u> (1558–94) <u>revenge tragedy</u> <u>The Spanish Tragedy</u> (1592), that influenced Shakespeare's <u>Hamlet</u>.

<u>William Shakespeare</u> stands out in this period as a <u>poet</u> and <u>playwright</u> as yet unsurpassed. Shakespeare was not a man of letters by profession, and probably had only some grammar school education. He was neither a lawyer, nor an aristocrat as the "university wits" that had monopolized the English stage when he started writing. But he was very gifted and incredibly versatile, and he surpassed "professionals" as <u>Robert Greene</u> who mocked this "shake-scene" of low origins. He was himself an actor and deeply involved in the running of the theatre company that performed his plays. Most playwrights at this time tended to specialize in, either <u>histories</u>, or <u>comedies</u>, or <u>tragedies</u>. But Shakespeare is remarkable in that he produced all three types. His 38 plays include tragedies: <u>Hamlet</u> (1599–1601) and <u>King Lear</u> (1605); comedies: <u>A Midsummer Night's Dream</u> (1594–96) and <u>Twelfth Night</u> (1602); history plays: <u>Henry IV, parts 1 and 2</u>. In addition, he wrote his so-called "problem plays", or "bitter comedies", that includes, amongst others, <u>Measure for Measure</u>, <u>Troilus and Cressida</u>, <u>A Winter's Tale</u> and <u>All's Well that Ends Well</u>. Though most of his plays met with success, it was in his later years, that Shakespeare wrote what have been considered his greatest plays: <u>Hamlet</u>, <u>Othello</u>, <u>King Lear</u>, <u>Macbeth</u>, <u>Antony and Cleopatra</u>, and the last play that he wrote (without a collaborator) <u>The Tempest</u> (c. 1611).

Other important playwrights of this period include <u>Christopher Marlowe</u>, <u>Thomas Dekker</u>, <u>John Fletcher</u> <u>Francis Beaumont</u>, <u>Ben Jonson</u>, and <u>John Webster</u>.

17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

During the Interregnum 1649—1660, English theatres were kept closed by the Puritans for religious and ideological reasons. When the London theatres opened again with the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, they flourished under the personal interest and support of Charles II. Wide and socially mixed audiences were attracted by topical writing and by the introduction of the first professional actresses (in Shakespeare's time, all female roles had been played by boys).

VICTORIAN ERA

A change came in the Victorian era with a profusion on the London stage of farces, musical burlesques, extravaganzas and comic operas that competed with Shakespeare productions and serious drama by the likes of James Planché and Thomas William Robertson. In 1855, the German Reed Entertainments began a process of elevating the level of (formerly risqué) musical theatre in Britain that culminated in the famous series of comic operas by Gilbert and Sullivan and were followed by the 1890s with the first Edwardian musical comedies. W. S. Gilbert and Oscar Wilde were leading poets and dramatists of the late Victorian period. Wilde's plays, in particular, stand apart from the many now forgotten plays of Victorian times and have a much closer relationship to those of the Edwardian dramatists such as Irishman, George Bernard Shaw and Norwegian Henrik Ibsen.

In the early days of its history, theatrical productions in Ireland tended to serve the political purposes of the administration, but as more theatres opened and the popular audience grew, a more diverse range of entertainments were staged. Many Dublin-based theatres developed links with their London equivalents and performers and productions from the British capital frequently found their way to the Irish stage. However, almost all Irish playwrights from William Congreve to George Bernard Shaw found it necessary to leave their native island to establish themselves.

At the beginning of the 20th century, theatres and theatre companies dedicated to the staging of Irish plays and the development of indigenous writers, directors and performers began to emerge. This allowed many of the most significant Irish dramatists to learn their trade and establish their reputations in Ireland rather than in Great Britain or the United States to look like the interior of a house, complete with doors, windows and furniture, figured prominently in most, if not all, of the plays performed in the modern realistic tradition at the beginning of the 20th Century.

MODERN DRAMA

The early twentieth century denoted the split between 'frocks and frills' drama and serious works, following in the footsteps of many other European countries. "The impact of these continental innovations was delayed by a conservative theatre establishment until the late 1950s and 1960s when they converged with the counter-cultural revolution to transform the nature of English language theatre." The West End, England's Broadway, tended to produce the (Greenblatt 1844) musical comedies and well-made plays, while smaller theatres and Irish venues took a new direction. The new direction was political, satirical, and rebellious. Common themes in the new early 20th century drama were political, reflecting the unease or rebellion of the workers against the state, philosophical, delving into the who and why of human life and existence, and revolutionary, exploring the themes of colonization and loss of territory. They explored common societal business practices (conditions of factories), new political ideologies (socialism), or the rise of a repressed sector of the population (women).(Chothia) Industrialization also had an impact on Twentieth century drama, resulting in plays lamenting the alienation of humans in an increasingly mechanical world. Not only did Industrialization result in alienation; so did the wars. Between the wars, two types of theatre reined. In the West End, the middle class attended popular, conservative theatre dominated by Noël Coward and G.B. Shaw. "Commercial theatre thrived and at Drury Lane large budget musicals by Ivor Novello and Noel Coward used huge sets, extravagant costumes and large casts to create spectacular productions." (West End) After the wars, taboos were broken and new writers, directors, and actors emerged with different views. Many played with the idea of reality, some were radically political, others shunned naturalism and questioned the legitimacy of previously unassailable beliefs. (Chothia) Towards the end of the century, the term 'theatre of exorcism' came into use due to the amount of plays conjuring the past in order to confront and accept it. Playwrights towards the end of the century count among their numbers: Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Brian Friel, Caryl Churchill, and Tom Stoppard. The last act of the century was a turn back towards realism as well as the founding of Europe's first children's cultural center.

REALISM AND MYTH

Sigmund Freud inspired an interest in myth and dreams as playwrights became familiar with his studies of psychoanalysis. Along with the help of Carl Jung, the two psychiatrists influenced playwrights to incorporate myths into their plays. This integration allowed for new opportunities for playwrights to increase the boundaries of realism within their writing. As playwrights started to use myths in their writing, a "poetic form of realism" was created. This form of realism deals with truths that are widespread amongst all humans, bolstered by Carl Jung's idea of the collective unconscious.

POETIC REALISM

Much of the poetic realism that was written during the beginning of the twentieth century focused on the portrayals of Irish peasant life. John Millington Synge, W.B. Yeats, and Lady Gregory were but a few writers to use poetic realism. Their portrayal of peasant life was often unappealing and many audiences reacted cruelly. Many plays that are poetically realistic often have unpleasant themes running through them, such as lust between a son and his step-mother or the murder of a baby to "prove" love. These plays used myths as a surrogate for real life in order to allow the audience to live the unpleasant plot without completely connecting to it.

WOMEN

The female characters progressed from the downtrodden, useless woman to an empowered, emancipated woman. They were used to pose subversive questions about the social order. Many female characters portray the author's masculine attitudes about women and their place in society. As time passed, though, females began gain empowerment. G.B. Shaw became one of the first English playwrights to follow Ibsen's influence and create roles of real women. Mrs. Warren, Major Barbara, and Pygmalion all have strong female leads. Women first started voting in 1918. Later in the century, females (and males) were both subjected to the alienation of society and routinely were not given names to suggest to the audience the character's worth within the play.

POLITICAL THEATRE AND WAR

Political theatre uses the theatre to represent "how a social or political order uses its power to 'represent' others coercively." It uses live performances and often shows the power of politics through "demeaning and limiting" prejudices. Political theatre often represents many different types of groups that are often stereotyped - "women, gay men, lesbians, ethnic and racial groups, [and] the poor." Political theatre is used to express one's political ideas. Agitprop, a popular form of political theatre, even had its roots in the 1930s women's rights movement. Propaganda played a big role in political theater, whether it be in support of a war or in opposition of political schemes, theater played a big role in influencing the public. The wars also affected the early theatre of the twentieth century. The consternation before WWI produced the Dada movement, the predecessor to Surrealism and Expressionism.

TYPES OF MODERN DRAMA

1) Realism
Realism, in theater, was meant to be a direct observation of human behavior. It began as a way to make theater more useful to society, a way to hold a mirror up to society. Because of this thrust towards the "real" playwrights started using more contemporary settings, backgrounds and characters. Where plays in the past had, for the most part, used mythological or stereotypical characters, now they involved the lower class, the poor, the rich; they involved all genders, classes and races. One of the main contributors to this style was Henrik Ibsen.

2) Social Realism
Social Realism began showing up in plays during the 1930s. This realism had a political conscience behind it because the world was in a depression. These plays painted a harsh picture of rural poverty. The drama began to aim at showing governments the penalties of unrestrained capitalism and the depressions that lax economies created. One of the main contributors to this style was G.B. Shaw.

3) Absurdist Drama
Absurdist Drama was existentialist theatre which put a direct perception of a mode of being above all abstract considerations. It was also essentially a poetic, lyrical theatre for the expression of intuitions of being through movement, situations and concrete imagery.

Language was generally downplayed. (Barnet) Symbolism, Dadaism and their offspring, Surrealism, Theatre of Cruelty, and Expressionism all fall into this category.

4)   Dadaism

Dadaism, or Dada, was a reaction against WWI. Like many of the movements, Dada included writing, painting and poetry as well as theatre. Many Dadaists wrote manifestos detailing their beliefs, which normally outlined their disgust in colonialism and nationalism and tried to be the opposite of the the current aesthetics and values. The more Dada offended the better. It was considered to be (by Dadaists), the 'anti-art'. It rejected the values of society and turned everything on it shead, preferring to disgust and offend.

5)   Symbolism/Aestheticism

In England, Symbolism was also known as Aestheticism. A very stylized format of drama, wherein dreams and fantasies were common plot devices, Aestheticism was used by numerous playwrights from Yeats to Pinter. The staging was highly stylized, usually using minimal set pieces and vague blocking. While the playwrights who could be considered Aestheticists lived and worked at the beginning of the century, it influenced all of the following   styles.

6)   Surrealism

Like Aestheticism, Surrealism has its base in the mystical. It developed the physicality of theatre and downplayed words, hoping to influence its audiences through action. Other common characteristics of surreal plays are unexpected comparisons and surprise. The most famous British playwright in the 20s surrealist style is Samuel Beckett. Theatre of Cruelty is a subset of surrealism and was motivated by an idea of Antonin Artaud. It argues the idea that theatre is a "representational medium" and tried to bring current ideas and experiences to the audience through participation and "ritualistic theater experiments." Artaud thought that theatre should present and represent equally. This type of theatre relies deeply on metaphors and rarely included a description of how it could be performed.

7)   Expressionism

The term 'Expressionism' was first coined in Germany in 1911. (Michaelides) Expressionism also had its hey-day during the 20s although it had two distinct branches. The branches had characters speaking in short, direct sentences or in long, lyrical expanses. This type of theatre usually did not name the characters and spend much time lamenting the present and warning against the future. Spiritual awakenings and episodic structures were also fairly common.

EPIC THEATRE

Epic theater was created by Bertold Brecht who rejected realistic theatre. He found that such plays were too picture-perfect. Epic Theatre is based on Greek Epic poetry. There are dramatic illusions such as "stark, harsh lighting, blank stages, placards announcing changes of scenes, bands playing music onstage, and long, discomfiting pauses" (Jacobus). Brecht believed that drama should be made within its audiences and he thought that Epic Theatre drama would reinforce the realities that people were facing rather than challenge them. Epic Theatre helped to preserve the social issues that they portrayed.

PHYSICAL ADVANCES ARCHITECTURE

In the late nineteenth century, early twentieth century, theatre architecture changed from hosting as many audience members as possible without regarding their needs to creating better acoustical, visual, and spatial arrangements for both actors and audience members. Whereas before, theatres were cylindrical shaped, in the twentieth century fan-shaped auditoriums were favored. Audiences liked them because of fan shaped theatre, the clear sight-lines and favorable acoustics and actors liked them because the natural style of acting that was becoming more popular was conducive to smaller venues. (Klaus). There was also a renewed interest in the earlier forms of staging such as the thrust and arena stages (theatre-in-the-round). The theatre that most audiences are used to are like the pictured Olivier Theate. Everyone has basically the same view of the stage and the stage itself is viewed through the Proscenium arch, which acts as a picture frame surrounding the stage and framing the play. The Proscenium arch may be anything from a gilded, brightly lit masterpiece surrounding the curtain at the beginning of a show to the simple black walls preventing you from seeing into the wings of the theatre. In a Proscenium theatre, the action takes place either behind the Proscenium or slightly in front of it, on what is known as the apron of a stage. (The piece closest to the audience and which the curtain generally does not hide.) In a thrust theatre, the action takes place almost completely in front of the 'Proscenium arch', if indeed there is one. The audience is seated on three sides of the stage and many of these types of theatres make great use of entrances and exits by the hallways through the audience. An arena stage has audience seating on all four sides and has four entrances/exits called vomitoria. (from the Latin 'vomitorium' meaning (generally): [an audience] spews forth from them). In today's American culture, arena stages (and vomitoria) are most commonly found as sports arena.Found Space is another recycled theatrical convention. The term 'Found Space' refers to streets, personal homes, a grocery store, anywhere that is not specifically designated as a theatre.

SET

The set in a theatre is the background upon which the story is told. It can be anything from a very detailed box set (explained below) to absolutely nothing. The set can be physical platforms and walls or it can be projections on sheets. The box set, or three walls designed

LIGHTING

Before the invention of the electric light bulb in 1879, theatres used either gas or carbon arc lamps. Both gas and carbon arc lamps were 1990 Light Board Example prone to fires. Numerous theatres had switched to the carbon arc lamp during the 1840s, but since the concept of the arc lamp is to send voltage through the open air, there was still a high chance of fire. The Savoy in London was the first public building to operate completely on electricity. In 1882, a year after the Savoy opened, the Munich Exposition displayed an electrified theatre, marking the beginning of a general change-over to electricity-lit theatres. Existing theatres that already had gas lines repurposed them by threading wires through the old gas lines and inserting a row of light bulbs in front of the gas jets. Unfortunately, electricity had quite a few drawbacks. The set designers or scenographers (combination set designer/costume designer)

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CLASSICAL DRAMA AND MODERN DRAMA

One of the most significant contrasts between classical drama and modern is the difference in the protagonists. Classical tragedy, for instance, involves royalty, the elite. The idea was that for a character to have a great and far-reaching influence over society he/she had to be in a position of great power and authority. In contrast, modern drama often uses common people as protagonists. John Synge, for instance, uses Irish peasants in his tragedy, *Riders to the* Sea, even though the play imitates Greek tragedy. In modern drama, tragedy can be indicative of a society, without totally involving and disrupting that society. The first issue here is that classical drama was not uniform. Greek tragedy and Old Comedy were radically different from most modern dramas, while Greek New Comedy, Roman Comedy, and some Roman tragedies were closer in style to modern drama. Of course, modern drama is also tremendously varied, with some modern playwrights borrowing elements such as the chorus or integration of singing and dancing into their staging.
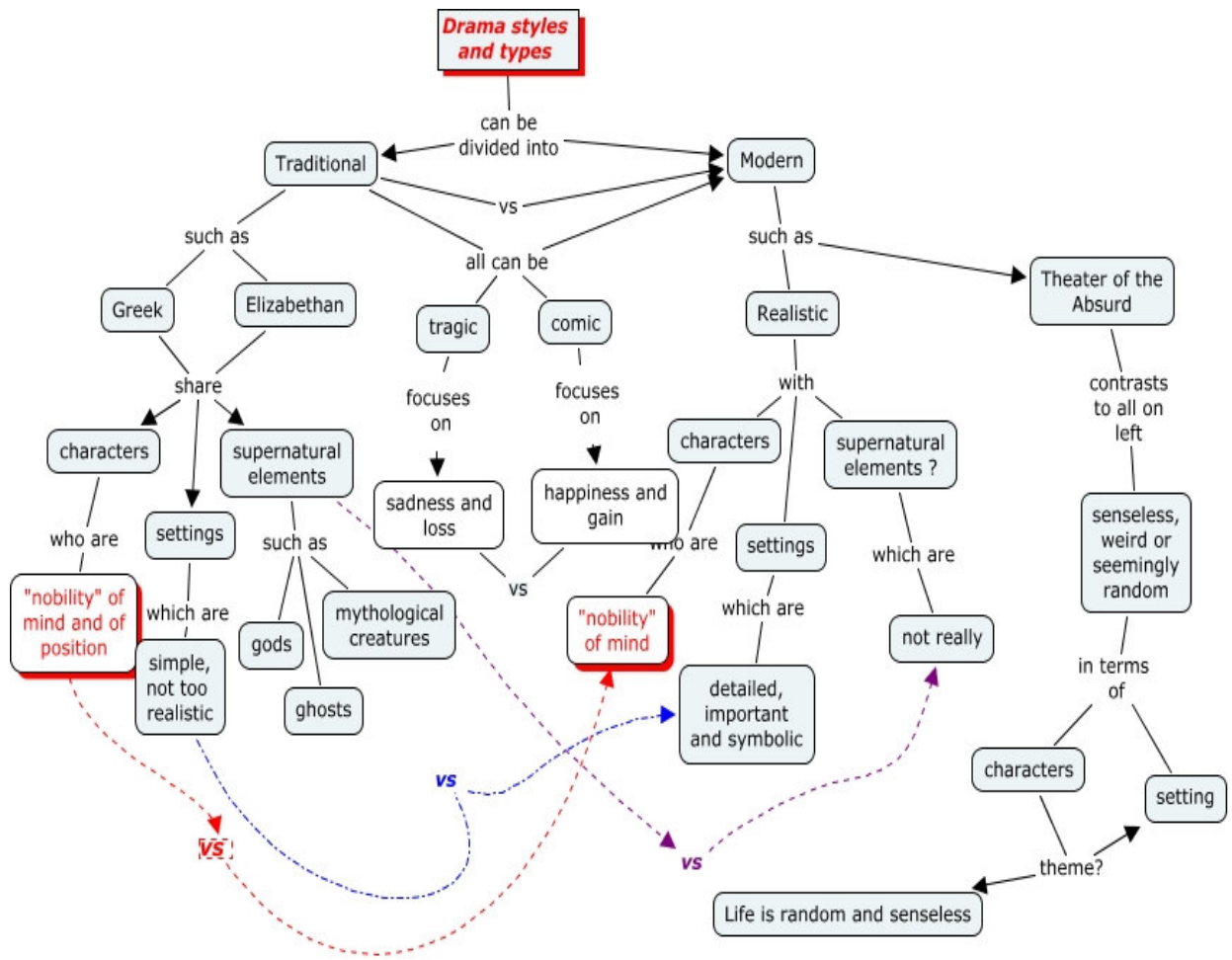
Greek Tragedy and Old Comedy differ from much of modern drama by being written in verse. Both genres have a limit of three actors, who play multiple roles. Actors wear masks and stylized costumes (as they also do in Japanese Noh drama), and female roles are played by men as they are in Shakespeare and most Elizabethan drama. The chorus sings and dances (as do choruses in opera and musical theater). Classical drama was presented in amphitheaters, with a circular orchestra and the audience seated in rows built into a hillside surrounding the performance area, while recent (19th through 21st century) drama often uses proscenium stages. Ancient drama was performed outdoors using natural light while contemporary drama is performed indoors using artificial light. Contra another answerer, while ancient tragedy had noble protagonists, Old and New Comedy and Roman Comedy had protagonists from all classes, including poor farmers, shopkeepers, soldiers, and slaves as well as wealthier protagonists. The "mixed" genre combining rustic comedy with elevated tragedy, though, was mainly an early modern invention, although some of Euripides' plays anticipate this.

In the early days of drama, the Church was primarily involved. This would change, sometime during the 16th Century. The English Renaissance arrived in England close to one hundred years after Italy's Renaissance. This "rebirth" opened up new possibilities to those who worked with the arts. The Renaissance brought with it the great drama of classical Greece and Rome. These great dramatists would include the works of Aristotle, Sophocles, and Seneca among others. Drama changed enormously. The first plays to follow the mystery, miracle and morality (religious) plays included a conflict centered around three principle characters: the hero, heroine and villain, which is not seen in modern drama. Shakespearean drama followed the beginnings of early dramatic presentations. With the writings of authors like Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare, historical plays became very popular because the audience was enthralled with England's "heroic past."

Shakespeare was able to manipulate his audience into feeling "terror and pity" in his tragedies (e.g. *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, etc.). Shakespeare's comedies were also popular, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ben Jonson was another writer who enjoyed

"poking fun at society." Drama took on a new "face" with the introduction of materials that made the audience laugh. And although today we may not be able to appreciate or understand risque elements of the dialogue of that time because of the changes in language since that era, plays at that time were full of sexual innuendo: "off-color" jokes that were hidden between the lines. These kinds of plays were described as "bawdy." However, in modern drama, the story's villain is "internalized," something *within* a major character; in some cases, he/she became his/her worst enemy. This occurred around the turn of the twentieth century.

Modern drama no longer had its heroes, heroines and villains of days gone by—the subjects of the stories were now ordinary people one might meet any day on the street. Henrik Ibsen's modern drama *A Doll's House* is an example of a modern drama. With modern drama: ...the political -- even radical -- implications of the work of playwrights...were evident. Authors of modern dramas included Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, and Leo Tolstoy among others.*Realism* was a major distinction between the drama of Shakespeare's time and modern drama. There were elements of politics included in drama, as well as opportunities for the playwright to address concerns at the forefront of the public's attention. Drama allowed its player to "air" their concerns in a public forum. In additiona, the theater became more modern in its layout, as did popular methods of direction. From a global perspective, then, the very term modern drama must reflect the specific cultural and political history that has shaped it, *locally*.

Drama styles and types

can be divided into

Traditional   vs   Modern

Traditional — such as → Greek, Elizabethan

Modern — such as → Realistic, Theater of the Absurd

all can be → tragic, comic

Greek and Elizabethan — share → characters, settings, supernatural elements

characters — who are → "nobility" of mind and of position

settings — which are → simple, not too realistic

supernatural elements — such as → gods, ghosts, mythological creatures

tragic — focuses on → sadness and loss

comic — focuses on → happiness and gain

sadness and loss   vs   happiness and gain

Realistic — with → characters, settings, supernatural elements ?

characters — who are → "nobility" of mind

settings — which are → detailed, important and symbolic

supernatural elements ? — which are → not really

Theater of the Absurd — contrasts to all on left → senseless, weird or seemingly random

senseless, weird or seemingly random — in terms of → characters, setting

characters / setting — theme? → Life is random and senseless

vs   vs   VS

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