

First Lecture: Introduction to Modern English Drama

Modern English drama refers to plays written in the 19th and 20th century. It deals with real situations: real characters, real incidents, the use of everyday language. It also deals with common man, an ordinary man who suffers the difficulties of life. This type of drama is called anti-hero drama. Why because there is no distinguished hero like that in Shakespeare's drama, on the contrary he/she suffers as other individuals who complain the same difficulties of life.

The dramatists of the earlier years of the 20th century were interested in naturalism and it was their attempt to argue real problems of life in a realistic technique to their plays.

It was Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist who popularised realism in Modern Drama. He dealt with the problems of real life in a realistic manner of his play. His example was followed by G. B. Shaw in his plays.

The modern drama has developed the Problem Play and there are many Modern Dramatists who have written a number of problem plays in our times. They dealt with the problems of marriage, justice, law, corruption, poverty, and inequality. Not only social problems are shown in their writings, political and religious issues are also by so daring dramatists like Ibsen and Bernard Shaw.

They used theatre as a means for bringing about reforms in the conditions of society prevailing in their days. Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* is a good example of a problem play. In it, the dramatist focuses on the fake relation of modern marriage. The woman's place starts to emerge gradually after a long years of exploitation and deprivation.

The modern drama is essentially a drama of ideas rather than action. The theatre is exploited to spread a free expressions of real issues. With treatment of actual, the modern drama develops its message to be drama of didactic purposes in addition to ideas.

A drama is striking, influential and real as it presents characters along with a natural and credible aspects. Common themes in the new early 20th century drama were political, reflecting the restlessness or rebellion of the workers against the state, philosophical, investigating the who and why of human life and existence, and revolutionary, exploring the themes of colonization and loss of territory. Henrik Ibsen is famously known as the Father of Modern Drama, and it is worth recognizing how literal an assessment that is. He depicts life as it is in its real features, thus he gets the approval of the modern readers and viewers.

The difference between 'traditional drama' and 'modern drama' is actually the theme and style. Traditional drama dealt with Supernatural elements, Fate, Heroic deeds etc whereas Modern drama deals with Realism, Absurdism etc. Some of famous Modern Playwrights are, Henric Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and the American modern

dramatists are; Edward Albee, Arthur Miller etc. Among them Henrik Ibsen considered as “Father of Modern Drama”.

There are some characteristics of MODERN DRAMA. These are given below. • Naturalism • Absurdism • Realism Absurdism.

Naturalism: A manner or technique of treating subject matter that presents, through volume of detail, a deterministic view of human life and actions. Modern Playwrights like Henrik Ibsen show naturalism in their writings. As Henrik Ibsen showed in his *A Doll's House* that women are always dominated by men and society as well.

Absurdism: The philosophical and literary doctrine that human beings live in essential isolation in a meaningless and irrational world. One of the prominent modern Playwrights is J.M Synge. In his play *Playboy of the Western World* he showed how people accept absurd things or happenings in their life. Samuel Beckett has developed this type of drama throughout his plays; *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Not I*.

Realism: The movement or style of representing familiar things as they actually are. Realism in the theatre was a general movement that began in 19th-century theatre, around the 1870s, and remained present through much of the 20th century. It developed a set of dramatic and theatrical conventions with the aim of bringing a greater reliability of real life to texts and performances.

The main features of the theatre of Realism are: A focus on real life. The theatre of Realism investigated and spoke about real people in everyday situations, dealing with common problems. An emphasis on behaviour and tough decisions. Believable dialogue, and common everyday settings are also characterized as important norms of realism. The most remarkable themes of realism are:

- A- close, detailed, and comprehensive portrayal of reality.
- B- emphasis on appearance of what is real and true.
- C- importance of character over action and plot.
- D-complex ethical decisions are often the subject matter.
- E-characters appear real in their complexity, behaviour, and motives.

The dialogue of the characters is natural, everyday speech. It is not heightened or exaggerated for dramatic effect.

The dramatic conflict of a play arises from within the characters and the environment in which the events of the play occur, rather than from some outside source or influence imposed on the characters. The conflict is usually psychologically-driven rather than event-driven, and the plot is often secondary to the internal lives of the characters. Realistic plays afford the playwright an opportunity to address social issues. The protagonists of the plays often assert themselves against an injustice that affects them personally and/or a segment of society that the protagonist represents.

The process of playwriting, whether the dramatist is writing a realistic play or not, requires a certain selection process.