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PG TRB ENGLISH

Unit-VIII -- APPROACHES TO LITERATURE

1. Modern Drama
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3. Literary Movements
4. Literary Criticism and Theory
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Chapter1. Modern Drama

- ❖ Drama was introduced to England from Europe by the Romans, and auditoriums were constructed across the country.
- ❖ Medieval period: These were folk tales re-telling old stories, and the actors travelled from town to town performing these in return for money and hospitality. Themes were St. George and the Dragon and Robin Hood.
- ❖ Mystery plays and Miracle plays: It focused on the representation of Bible stories in churches. They developed from the 10th to the 16th century, reaching their popularity in the 15th century. Most contain episodes such as the Fall of Lucifer, the Creation and Fall of Man, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Abraham and Isaac, the Nativity, the Raising of Lazarus, the Passion, and the Resurrection.
- ❖ The morality plays were known as "*interludes*", with or without a moral theme. 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.
- ❖ The period known as the English Renaissance, approximately 1500—1660, saw a flowering of the drama and all the arts. The two candidates for the earliest comedy in English Nicholas *Udall's Ralph Roister Doister* (c.1552) and the anonymous *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (c.1566), belong to the 16th century.
- ❖ During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and then James I (1603–25), produced great poetry and drama. The English playwrights followed Italian model. The earliest Elizabethan plays includes

Gorboduc (1561) by Sackville and Norton and Thomas Kyd's (1558–94) revenge tragedy *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592), that influenced Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

- ❖ William Shakespeare stands out in this period as a poet and playwright as yet unsurpassed. Most playwrights at this time tended to specialise in, either histories, or comedies, or tragedies but Shakespeare produced all three types.
- ❖ Other important playwrights of this period include Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, John Fletcher Francis Beaumont, Ben Jonson, and John Webster. Ben Jonson (1572/3-1637) is best known for his satirical plays, particularly *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*.
- ❖ Others who followed Jonson's style include Beaumont and Fletcher, whose comedy, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c.1607-8), satirizes the rising middle class.
- ❖ Another popular style of theatre during Jacobean times was the revenge play, popularized by John Webster (c.1578-c.1632). Webster's major plays, *The White Devil* (c.1609-1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (c.1612/13).
- ❖ During the Interregnum 1649—1660, English theatres were kept closed by the Puritans. When the London theatres opened again with the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, they flourished under interest and support of Charles II. New genres of the Restoration were **heroic drama, pathetic drama, and Restoration comedy**. Notable heroic tragedies of this period include John Dryden's *All for Love* (1677) and *Aureng-zebe* (1675), and Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682). George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1676), John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696), and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700).
- ❖ In the 18th century, Restoration comedy lost favour, to be replaced by **sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy** such as George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731). By the early 19th century, few English dramas were being written, except for closet drama, plays intended to be presented privately rather than on stage.

Problem Plays / Realism

- ❖ F. S. Boas used the term to refer to a group of Shakespeare's play, which seem to contain both comic and tragic elements. For Boas the 'problem' plays were *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Troilus and Cressida*.
- ❖ The genre was especially influential in the 19th Century and early 20th century.
- ❖ The problem play (also called "thesis play," "discussion play," and "the comedy of ideas") is a comparatively recent form of drama. It originated in nineteenth-century France but was effectively practised and popularized by the Norwegian playwright Ibsen.
- ❖ It was introduced into England by Henry Arthur Jones and A. W. Pinero towards the end of the nineteenth century.

- ❖ G. B. Shaw and Galsworthy took the problem play to its height in the twentieth century. H. Granville Barker was the last notable practitioner of this dramatic type.
- ❖ Thus the problem play flourished in England in the period between the last years of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Realism is the most significant and outstanding quality of modern English drama. The dramatists of the earlier years of the 20th century were interested in naturalism and it was their endeavour (try) to deal with real problems of life in a realistic technique to their plays.
- ❖ His example was followed by **Robertson Arthur Jones, Galsworthy and G. B. Shaw** in their plays.
- ❖ 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, administration and strife between capital and labour in their dramas.
- ❖ 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 problem play.
- ❖ *Widowers' Houses, Mrs Warren's Profession and The Apple Cart* are the problem Plays of G.B.Shaw.
- ❖ The problem play was a new experiment in the form and technique and dispensed with the conventional devices and expedients of theatre.

Experimental theatre

- ❖ Experimental theatre (also known as avant-garde theatre) began in Western theatre in the late 19th century.
- ❖ Writers
 - Antonin Artaud (Theatre of Cruelty)
 - Bertolt Brecht (Epic Theatre)
- Theatre of Cruelty**
- ❖ This derives from the theories of Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) who published *Le Theatre et son double* in which he formulated its principles.
- ❖ According to Artaud, the theatre must disturb the spectators profoundly and force men to view themselves as they really are.
- ❖ Artaud had produced *Le Cenci* (1935), based on the versions of Shelley as well as Stendahl. The theatre of Adamov, Genet, and Camus has been influenced by the Theatre of Cruelty.

Epic theatre

- ❖ Epic theatre (German: episches Theater) is a theatrical movement arising in the early to mid-20th century from the theories and practice of a number of theatre practitioners who responded to the political climate of the time through the creation of a new political theatre. These practitioners included Erwin Piscator, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and, most famously, Bertolt Brecht.
- ❖ The term "epic theatre" comes from Erwin Piscator who coined it during his first year as director of Berlin's Volksbühne (1924—1927).
- ❖ Brecht developed his Verfremdungs-effekt ("alienation effect")
- ❖ The Verfremdungseffekt, known in English as the "**estrangement effect**" or the "**alienation effect**," was made popular by Brecht and is one of the most significant characteristics of Epic theatre.
- ❖ The Verfremdungseffekt makes the audience feel detached from the action of the play, so they do not become immersed in the fictional reality of the stage or become overly empathetic of the characters with the hope that Epic theatre will turn "the spectator into an observer" and arouse "his capacity for action, force[ing] him to take decisions."
- ❖ Brecht's most important plays, which included *Leben des Galilei* (*The Life of Galileo*), *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (*Mother Courage and Her Children*), and *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (*The Good Person of Szechwan, or The Good Woman of Setzwan*), were written between 1937 and 1945 when he was in exile from the Nazi regime, first in Scandinavia and then in the United States.
- ❖ In Britain the effect became evident in the work of such playwrights as John Arden and Edward Bond and in some of the bare-stage productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company.
- ❖ Western theatre in the 20th century, however, has proved to be a cross-fertilization of many styles (Brecht himself acknowledged a debt to traditional Oriental theatre), and by the 1950s other approaches were gaining influence.

The Theater of the absurd / Absurd Plays

- ❖ Or as Eugène Ionesco, French author of *The Bald Soprano* (1949), *The Lesson* (1951), and other plays in the theater of the absurd, has put it: "Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless."
- ❖ Ionesco also said, in commenting on the mixture of moods in the literature of the absurd: "People drowning in meaninglessness can only be grotesque; their sufferings can only appear tragic by derision."

- ❖ Samuel Beckett (1906-89), the most eminent and influential writer in this mode, both in drama and in prose fiction, was an Irishman living in Paris who often wrote in French and then translated his works into English. His plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* (1954) and *Endgame* (1958), project the irrationalism, helplessness, and absurdity of life in dramatic forms that reject realistic settings, logical reasoning, or a coherently evolving plot.
- ❖ *Waiting for Godot* presents two tramps in a waste place, fruitlessly and all but hopelessly waiting for an unidentified person, Godot, who may or may not exist and with whom they sometimes think they remember that they may have an appointment; as one of them remarks, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful."
- ❖ Beckett's prose fiction, such as *Malone Dies* (1958) and *The Unnamable* (1960), present an antihero who plays out the absurd moves of the end game of civilization in a nonwork which tends to undermine the coherence of its medium, language itself.

Comedy of Menace

- ❖ Another French playwright of the absurd was **Jean Genet** (who combined absurdism and diabolism); some of the early dramatic works of the Englishman **Harold Pinter** and the American **Edward Albee** are in a similar mode. The plays of **Tom Stoppard**, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) and *Travesties* (1974), exploit the devices of absurdist theater more for comic than philosophical ends.
- ❖ Harold Pinter's plays fall under the category of Comedy of Menace.
- ❖ Comedy of menace is the body of plays written by David Campton, Nigel Dennis, N. F. Simpson, and Harold Pinter. The term was coined by drama critic Irving Wardle, who borrowed it from the subtitle of Campton's play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*.
- ❖ *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumb Waiter* (1960), *The Caretaker* (1960), *The Collection* (1961), *The Lover* (1963), *Tea Party* (1965, 1968), and *The Homecoming* (1965), *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) and *Celebration* (2000) are some of Pinter's Comedy of Menace plays.
- ❖ Harold Pinter won the Noble Prize for Literature in 2005.

Black Comedy

- ❖ There are also affinities with this movement in the numerous recent works which exploit **black comedy or black humour**: baleful, naive, or inept characters in a fantastic or nightmarish modern world play out their roles in what Ionesco called a "tragic farce," in which the events are often simultaneously comic, horrifying, and absurd. Examples are *Joseph Heller's Catch-22* (1961), *Thomas Pynchon's V* (1963), *John Irving's The World According to Garp* (1978)

Angry young men/ Kintchen Sink Drama

- ❖ The "angry young men" were a group of mostly working and middle class British playwrights and novelists who became prominent in the 1950s.
- ❖ The trend that was evident in John Wain's novel *Hurry on Down* (1953) and in *Lucky Jim* (1954) by Kingsley Amis was crystallized in 1956 in the play *Look Back in Anger*, which became the representative work of the movement.
- ❖ When Sir Laurence Olivier played the leading role in Osborne's second play, *The Entertainer* (1957), the Angry Young Men were acknowledged as the dominant literary force of the decade.
- ❖ The group's leading members included John Osborne and Kingsley Amis.
- ❖ The phrase was originally coined by the Royal Court Theatre's press officer to promote John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*.
- ❖ Following the success of the Osborne play, the label "angry young men" was later applied by British media to describe young writers who were characterised by disillusionment with traditional British society.
- ❖ Among the other writers embraced in the term are the novelists John Braine (*Room at the Top*, 1957) and Alan Sillitoe (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, 1958).
- ❖ The main issues that Angry Young Men had were "impatience with the status quo, refusal to be co-opted by a bankrupt society, an instinctive solidarity with the lower classes."
- ❖ Referred to as "kitchen sink realism," literary works began to deal with lower class themes.
- ❖ Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* is an influential "kitchen sink drama".

The Celtic Revival /the Celtic Twilight or Celtomania/ The Irish Literary Movement

- ❖ The growing interest in the culture of Ireland's ancient Celts was called Celtic Revival/ Celtic Twilight or Celtomania, a literary movement led by W B Yeats which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
- ❖ This triggered a new appreciation of traditional Irish literature and Irish poetry. Together with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn Yeats formed an Irish National Theatre (the Abbey Theatre) to promote Irish literature in English.
- ❖ Works included: *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by JM Synge, and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Seán O'Casey.
- ❖ The active members of the Celtic literary movement included: W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, JM Synge, Seán O'Casey, "AE" Russell, Percy French, Oliver St John Gogarty, Padraic Colum, and Edward Plunkett.

Poetic Drama

- ❖ T.S. Eliot was the main dramatist who gave importance to poetic plays and was against the realistic prose drama of the modern drama. Stephen Phillips, John Drink Water, Yeats etc were from those who wrote poetic plays.
- ❖ T. S. Eliot had begun this attempt to revive poetic drama with *Sweeney Agonistes* in 1932, and this was followed by *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and *Family Reunion* (1939).

Closet drama

- ❖ A closet drama is written in dramatic form, with dialogue, indicated settings, and stage directions, but is intended by the author to be read rather than to be performed; examples are Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671), Byron's *Manfred* (1817), Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), and Hardy's *The Dynasts* (1904-8).

History and Biographical Plays

- ❖ Another trend, visible in modern English drama is in the direction of using history and biography for dramatic technique. There are many beautiful historical and biographical plays in modern dramatic literature.
- ❖ Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* are historical plays of great importance. John Drink Water's *Abraham Lincoln* and *Mary Stuart* are also historical plays.

Comedy of Manners

- ❖ Witty, cerebral form of dramatic comedy that depicts and often satirizes the manners and affectations of a contemporary society.
- ❖ A comedy of manners is concerned with social usage and the question of whether or not characters meet certain social standards. Often the governing social standard is morally trivial but exacting.
- ❖ The plot of such a comedy, usually concerned with an illicit love affair or similarly scandalous matter, is subordinate to the play's brittle atmosphere, witty dialogue, and pungent commentary on human foibles.
- ❖ The comedy of manners, which was usually written by sophisticated authors for members of their own coterie or social class, has historically thrived in periods and societies that combined material prosperity and moral latitude.
- ❖ Such was the case in ancient Greece when Menander (c. 342–c. 292 bc) inaugurated **New Comedy**, the forerunner of comedy of manners. Menander's smooth style, elaborate plots, and stock characters were imitated by the Roman poets Plautus (c. 254–184 bc) and Terence (186/185–159 bc), whose comedies were widely known and copied during the Renaissance.

- ❖ In England the comedy of manners had its great day during the Restoration period.
- ❖ Although influenced by Ben Jonson's comedy of humours, the Restoration comedy of manners was lighter, defter, and more vivacious in tone.
- ❖ Playwrights declared themselves against affected wit and acquired follies and satirized these qualities in caricature characters with label-like names such as **Sir Fopling Flutter** (in Sir George Etherege's **Man of Mode**, 1676) and **Tattle** (in William Congreve's **The Old Batchelour**, 1693).
- ❖ The masterpieces of the genre were the witty, cynical, and epigrammatic plays of William Wycherley (**The Country-Wife**, 1675) and William Congreve (**The Way of the World**, 1700). In the late 18th century Oliver Goldsmith (**She Stoops to Conquer**, 1773) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (**The Rivals**, 1775; **The School for Scandal**, 1777) revived the form.
- ❖ The tradition of elaborate, artificial plotting and epigrammatic dialogue was carried on by the Anglo-Irish playwright **Oscar Wilde** in **Lady Windermere's Fan** (1892) and **The Importance of Being Earnest** (1895).
- ❖ In the 20th century the comedy of manners reappeared in the witty, sophisticated drawing-room plays of the British dramatists Noël Coward and Somerset Maugham and the Americans Philip Barry and S.N. Behrman.

Play of Ideas

- ❖ Modern Drama is essentially a drama of ideas rather than action. The stage is used by dramatists to give expression to certain ideas which they want to spread in the society.
- ❖ The Modern Drama dealing with the problems of life has become far more intellectual than ever it was in the history of drama before the present age. With the treatment of actual life, the drama became more and more a drama of ideas, sometimes veiled in the main action, sometimes didactically act forth.
- ❖ In the 1930s W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood co-authored verse dramas, of which **The Ascent of F6** (1936) is the most notable, that owed much to Bertolt Brecht.

Radio Plays

- ❖ An important new element in the world of British drama, from the beginnings of radio in the 1920s, was the commissioning of plays, or the adaption of existing plays, by BBC radio.
- ❖ This was especially important in the 1950s and 1960s. Many major British playwrights in fact, either effectively began their careers with the BBC, or had works adapted for radio.
- ❖ Most of playwright Caryl Churchill's started as a radio playwright and, starting in 1962 with **The Ants**, there were nine productions with BBC radio drama up until 1973 when her stage work began to be recognised at the Royal Court Theatre.

- ❖ Joe Orton's dramatic debut in 1963 was the radio play *The Ruffian on the Stair*. Tom Stoppard's "first professional production was in the fifteen minute *Just Before Midnight* programme on BBC Radio.
- ❖ John Mortimer made his radio debut as a dramatist in 1955, with his adaptation of his own novel *Like Men Betrayed* for the BBC Light Programme.
- ❖ Other notable radio dramatists included Brendan Behan, and novelist Angela Carter. Novelist Susan Hill also wrote for BBC radio, from the early 1970s.
- ❖ Irish playwright Brendan Behan, author of *The Quare Fellow* (1954), was commissioned by the BBC to write a radio play *The Big House* (1956); prior to this he had written two plays *Moving Outand* and *A Garden Party* for Irish radio.
- ❖ Among the most famous works created for radio, are Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1954), Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall* (1957), Harold Pinter's *A Slight Ache* (1959) and Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* (1954).
- ❖ Samuel Beckett wrote a number of short radio plays in the 1950s and 1960s, and later for television. Beckett's radio play *Embers* was first broadcast on the BBC

Romanticism

- ❖ The earlier dramatists of the 20th century were Realists at the core, but the passage of time brought in, new trend in Modern Drama.
- ❖ [Romanticism](#), which had been very dear to [Elizabethan Dramatists](#) found its way in Modern Drama and it was mainly due to Sir J.M. Barrie's efforts that the new wave of Romanticism swept over Modern Drama for some years of the 20th century.
- ❖ Barrie kept aloof from realities of life and made excursions into [the world of Romance](#).

Expressionism (Drama)

- ❖ Expressionism is a modernist movement in drama and theatre that developed in Europe (principally Germany) in the early decades of the 20th century and later in the United States.
- ❖ There was a concentrated Expressionist movement in early 20th century German theatre of which Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller were the most famous playwrights.
- ❖ In the 1920s, Expressionism enjoyed a brief period of popularity in the theatre of the United States, including plays by Eugene O'Neill (*The Hairy Ape*, *The Emperor Jones* and *The Great God Brown*), Sophie Treadwell (*Machinal*), Lajos Egri (*Rapid Transit*) and Elmer Rice (*The Adding Machine*).

- ❖ The movement which had started early in Germany made its way in England drama and several modern dramatists like **J.B. Priestly, Sean O' Casey, C.K. Munro, Elmer Rice** have made experiments in the expressionistic tendency in modern drama.

Impressionism

- ❖ It is a movement that shows that effects of things and events on the mind of artist and the attempt of the artist to express his expressions.
- ❖ Impressionism constitutes another important feature of modern drama. In the impressionistic plays of W.B. Yeats, the main effort is in the direction of recreating the experience of the artist and his impressions about reality rather than in presenting reality as it is.
- ❖ Impressionistic drama of the modern age seeks to suggest the impressions on the artist rather than making an explicit statement about the objective characteristics of things or objects.

Pantomime and Dumb Show.

- ❖ Pantomime is acting on the stage without speech, using only posture, gesture, bodily movement, and exaggerated facial expression to mime ("mimic") a character's actions and to express a character's feelings.
- ❖ Mimed dramas enjoyed a vogue in eighteenth-century England, and in the present century the silent movies encouraged a brief revival of the art and produced a superlative pantomimist in **Charlie Chaplin**.
- ❖ A dumb show is an episode of pantomime introduced into a spoken play. It was a common device in Elizabethan drama, in imitation of its use by Seneca, the Roman writer of tragedies. Two well-known dumb shows are the preliminary episode, summarizing the action to come, of the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet* (III. ii.), and the miming of the banishment of the Duchess and her family in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (III. iv.).

The Provincetown Players

- ❖ The Provincetown Players was an influential collective of artists, writers, intellectuals, and amateur theater enthusiasts.
- ❖ Under the leadership of the husband and wife team of George Cram "Jig" Cook and Susan Glaspell, the Players produced two seasons in Provincetown, Massachusetts (1915 and 1916) and six seasons in New York City between (1916-1923).
- ❖ The company's founding has been called "the most important innovative moment in American theatre," in part for launching the careers of **Eugene O'Neill** and **Susan Glaspell**, and ushering American theatre into the Modern era.

