

From *Fin de Siècle*
to Semi-Centennial
Drama of Europe

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Dramatic Texts and
Perspectives

By

Bhawna Vij Arora

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To the Supreme Being
&
To Babaji RSSB

For Rekha Ma'am
&
Anup Sir

(thank you for the initial inspiration)

“There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it”

—Edith Wharton

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FOREWORD

The book *From Fin de Siècle to Semi-Centennial Drama of Europe: Dramatic Texts and Perspectives* offers a unique approach to understanding European drama. It transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, inviting readers to engage with the profound intricacies of human experience and existential inquiry. The wide range of perspectives and insightful analyses presented in this work promises to enrich one's understanding of modernist drama, providing diverse interpretations and shedding light on the deep intricacies that permeate timeless works.

The essays examine the profound impact of the works of Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekov, Federico García Lorca, and Bertolt Brecht on the literary landscape of European drama through the lenses of various contemporary literary theories and conceptual paradigms. They offer fresh and insightful perspectives that enhance the understanding of these playwrights and their seminal works.

It is fascinating to ponder the intricate literary, cultural, and philosophical dichotomies that permeate the chosen pieces. More importantly, this book explores the potential for modernist plays and performances to offer solutions to contemporary challenges, a key focus that will resonate with readers. These include the evolution of dramatic forms, the influence of cultural and political contexts, and the enduring relevance of these works, which will deepen readers' appreciation of the dramatic and theatrical expressions that have shaped the fabric of modern European drama.

This book successfully bridges the past and the present, drawing from established literary research and incorporating novel contemporary ideations such as memory studies, the Anthropocene age, and vulnerability and disability studies. The author has brought out a "well-rounded, integrated understanding of modern ideology, the idiom, the credo of the author, and the dialectics and discourse generated" through the plays discussed. By intertwining these diverse perspectives, a rich, integrated interpretation of these influential texts and their impact within academic circles and the

broader cultural and artistic landscape is developed, making the reader feel connected and involved.

The chapters explore modernism's multifaceted nature and complexities and its enduring impact on literature, art, and culture, highlighting its rebellious nature, engagement with philosophy and aesthetics, and influence on global politics and societal norms. The texts emphasize the need for an engaged audience to comprehend and appreciate the rich cultural narrative through modernist performances. They also discuss the influence of Nietzsche's concepts of modernity and pose thought-provoking questions about the potential of modernist plays and performances to address contemporary global challenges. Furthermore, it touches upon the clashes between the quest for self-actualization and traditional power structures, resulting in tensions and acts of defiance.

The confluence of literary studies in cultural memory and the interaction of cultural codes hidden in the annals of history have unveiled a diverse range of insights. Through the act of remembrance, creative artists delve into the past mediated by temporal configurations and spatial challenges, reconstructing personal experiences. These acts contribute to understanding the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of a nation's or society's cultural memory.

The author demonstrates her impressive navigation of literary studies and cultural memory. Her ability to skillfully maneuver through the intricate layers of the play *The House of Bernarda Alba* intertwines complex concepts such as cultural remembrance, historical context, and societal tensions. The writer thoroughly explores the play's significance as a carrier of Spanish cultural memory, and her adept use of terminology and her insightful interpretations enrich the reader's understanding of its cultural and historical implications.

The transformative power of modernist works transcends temporal boundaries. They invite readers to re-examine their societal constructs and cultural paradigms, enriching their engagement with contemporary discourses and perennial human dilemmas. The author also explores modernism's stages, offering insights into its rebellious nature and the evolution of its self-consciousness through historical moments, and discusses modernist drama's transcultural and transnational dimensions, emphasizing the importance of understanding its political and ideological underpinnings. It

provides a rich and insightful analysis, offering a compelling reflection on the complexities of modern European drama and its continued relevance.

The essays in the book unearth a reservoir of narratives that transcend temporal constraints, embracing the universality of human experiences and aspirations. This exploration yields a bountiful harvest of insights and revelations, nurturing intellectual curiosity and emotional resonance with the profound artistic legacies of the past. Exploring modernist drama unearths the zeitgeist of an era marked by cultural upheavals, artistic innovations, and existential inquiries. Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* is read anew through the Anthropocene lens. It is more than a play about a fading aristocratic estate; it is a poignant metaphor for societal change, loss, and nostalgia.

I highly commend the author for her dedicated scholarship and nuanced analysis, culminating in this exceptional volume. This body of work will aid university faculties in initiating and disseminating knowledge on the given study area. This work will inspire meaningful dialogue, further critical inquiry, and renew appreciation for the transformative power of literature. It will undoubtedly be a valuable resource for students, scholars, and enthusiasts exploring the intricacies of modernist literature and performance art. The timeless relevance of the essays in this book will ensure that they remain a significant resource for scholars and enthusiasts, connecting them to the enduring legacy of European drama.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A note of appreciation goes a long way in the little universe of our surroundings, especially in the academic world, where a long, action-packed, meditative journey of joy can quickly become a dry ordeal of agonizing, tiresome, and tedious writing.

This note of thanks must first begin by thanking my students who have been the prime movers and catalysts behind this book project. Classroom discussions often move beyond conventional and pre-designed pedagogical schemas, mapping their own course of fusions and comparative frameworks in and across texts, authors, and the themes of the subject matter. This project to bring together modern European dramatists and textual impressions in one place was born out of this need and the difficulty of finding, again in one place, diverse observations regarding dynamic, fully toned vantage points displaying unprecedented awareness and a lens of understanding. When we study European drama, we study across the nations of yesteryear, the chronicles of European social, political, and cultural history, and the recreation of narratives. We imagine the lives of creative artists, peeping through their fictional webs of ordinary engagements, going through annals and archives, envisaging them playing, performing, being underplayed or overplayed through student actors, delving into all sorts of possible subtleties, complicacies, and side reactions, all through coeval cognitive apparatuses.

To a commentator or appraiser, a theoretical piece of criticism is no less of a laboratory experiment; the trope of the laboratory has probably been used excessively in the past, but the desire to create new chemicals—elements from the intermingling chemistry of texts, characters, playwrights, and performance—fuse to bloom in new syntheses of opinions, facets, and features. These perspectives do not carry the finality of ideas that cannot be extended or bent; nor do they boast of some extraordinary work, of being extremely clever, or of creating an inventive breakthrough. Rather, this book is a modest attempt at providing insights into the matter at hand in a bid to foster and train the mind for ingenious, vigilant, and attentive reading,

the alert observation of the countless phenomena we experience around, and their mimetic montage on the stage and in the text.

I thank all my mentors, teachers, guides, and academicians who have nurtured my seeking and helped me cross the voids and abysses of ignorance and imbecility.

The guru shapes the destiny; an architect builds it. Dr. S. C. Vats, Chairman VIPS, had been the architect of the academic destiny of this author. VIPS has provided me with institutional facilitation and space to grow at my own idiosyncratic pace. Special thanks are due to Mr Suneet Vats, Vice-Chairman VIPS, for his constant inspiration and dialectical interventions through questioning during the research project sessions. His sane and rational voice runs the show creating the harmonious symphony of this orchestra called VIPS. My arguments in the book have been strengthened because of discussions with Prof. Dr. Siddharth Mishra, Vice-Chairperson, VSJMC, during the project debriefing sessions. The noetic, deep cerebration upon the role of literature in society during the project sessions has improved my learning curve. I am thankful to the head of my department (VSES), Prof. Dr. Salonee Priya, for making the workplace an enabling space to evolve better. I owe a special thanks to Vanshita Tulli, a copywriter and my student, for her last-minute stylistic marshaling of the text.

I wonder whether a book is worth enough to ever thank my parents—literally, my creators, caretakers, guardians, comforters, and countless other solacing agentive suffixes one could add—to express that single emotion of gratefulness. To my partner, Anshul, and my moon-faced daughter, innately mine, Ekshith Arora, whose sight and presence uplifts my waning spirits in moments of disbelief, I am beholden in this lifetime. Special thanks are reserved for my in-laws, whose unending patience, boundless faith, and serene presence has practically taken this project to its completion. Thanks to my kith and kin and to my only sibling, Mayank, Vij, my Rajje. Among other bosom friends, I owe much to my friend Tanvi Sehgal, my colleague and alter ego, as we jokingly call each other, for our meaningful friendship, leisure activities, and thoughtful discussions on the critical walks of our lives.

The book is bred on the labor of the minor project carried out under the aegis of the educational oasis, the Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies (VIPS), and Vivekananda Research Centre (VRC).

A special shout-out to Prof. Achingliu Kamai for her last minute interventions, support, and redemption for my restless demands with her calm and wise suggestions. The love of poetry had connected us as we crossed paths and now we stand as cherubs in the celestial world of poesy.

My commissioning editors, Allison Duffy and Adam Rummens, have gone over and above in their consideration and grace in coming to grips with my desired configuration of the postscript of the book. I am moved by your care and assiduous dispensation of work during the submission stages.

The more one beholds in gratitude, the better it multiplies in manifold directions; I am beholden to all those people who have inadvertently or consciously, arbitrarily or fortuitously, inspired or troubled me to strive for better and better.

Bhawna Vij Arora

INTRODUCTION

Modernism as a literary trend has produced a profusion of dignified poetic, dramatic, and prose compositions, and in due course a torrent of research and scholastic productions have followed. In its exertions over a quondam age in transition, essentially at a crossroads, drama and theater practices, amid other genres, have assumed a unique and almost unfathomable comportment reflecting deeply on the system under examination.

It is ever-reductionist to pigeonhole the *fin-de-siècle* age and the dramatic texts produced under a number of characteristics or glaring features. This characteristic compartmentalization not only leaves the apertures and the crevices deficient and unresolved but also leads to an incoherent understanding of the text, leading to a deficient outlook on the text and context. This book is a modest attempt to analyze theoretically four representative playwrights, using their works for a lionized depiction of modernism, its nature and demeanor, its creed and scruples. The four playwrights and theater practitioners are Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekov, Federico García Lorca, and Bertolt Brecht, the seminal works of whom are considered against the literary landscape of European drama. The thought and expressions of these dramatists have not only radicalized the opus of modern dramatic theories but also augmented the scope of a number of movements that emerged after modernism. By and large, these dramatists arrest and speculate the dramaturgic and veritable shifts in the cogitative and habitable materiality of *fin-de-siècle* experience.

Taking the vantage points of the philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Wagner, each chapter traces the march of a number of literary movements and stations these dramatists and their texts under consideration in the alcove space of the modern *Weltanschauung*. Within the apparatus of contemporary theoretical and conceptual paradigms, a renewed and deeper analysis of these luminaries and their works provides a well-rounded, integrated understanding of modern ideology, the idiom and credo of the author, and the dialectics and discourse generated through these plays.

The strands and facets of modern European drama are at once immersed in the local yet appeal globally. To examine these features from a number of standpoints is crucial as the selection of these playwrights is based on the premise that they were literal literary game-changers—the iconoclasts of modern dramaturgy—whose work became the bedrock of the emerging trends in contemporary modern drama across Europe. Dialogues, dramaturgy, and denouement are as much needed as dress, diction, and dramatic irony, and deft decisions, design, and direction equally influence the politics of plays, performance, and plot.

These ideologues under deliberation (creative writers set out to illustrate ideologies too) represent the fundamental shifts and junctures of the modern dramatic cosmogony with radical and starkly different approaches and techniques to build a holistic dramatic and theatrical expression system. The whole corpus of modern European drama shifted while the meaning that these texts bespeak was continuously deferred. Any contribution thus made to the study of its ever-expanding contours should be desirable and welcoming. A post-truth, postmodernist, and post-Covid approach to these texts renders them hermeneutically challenging and polemical while an unanticipated, unimagined interpretation augments the perimeter of their study. Using the critical lens of a number of contemporary literary theories, such as new geological shifts, studies in memory/cultural memory, the ontology and deontology of traditional concepts, commentaries on vulnerability as a phenomenological position, and so on, the book offers new insights to gauge classical dramatic texts of the period from the *fin de siècle* to the semi-centennial years of the twentieth century. Although there are several studies available on the authors and dramatists, there is not an inclusive study of the critical and literary gaze based on the foundations of past research and novel contemporary ideations such as the fields of memory studies, the Anthropocene age, vulnerability and disability studies, and so on. Mere encyclopedic accounts or conventional interpretative readings of the texts and dramatists are often redundant and platitudinous, leaving a lot of room for repeated interpretations of familiar dimensionalities. Such texts need to be viewed in the light of current theories and the new developments of our co-eval times.

The selection of texts is based on the current formulated curriculum of literature-based degree courses in India and abroad, rather than the

command these plays have due to their global popularity; as the dichotomies offered by these texts never die down, they never cease to amaze the reader of their everlasting, sempiternal relevance. Even in the peripheries of the distant lands of Europe, these playwrights have surpassed their reputation for being frequently performed; in particular, *A Doll's House*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, translated from the provincial regions, almost at the fringes compared with the mainstream, artsy spirit of Paris, New York, London, Vienna, and other world class cities, are the apogee of the performances of their time.

This is going to be an essential work contributing to the vital research on modern dramatists and theater practitioners by scholars. The work will also aid faculties across universities to initiate and disseminate knowledge about the subject at hand. It is situated within the traditional body of epistemological studies available on dramatists and different literary movements amid the extensive research and scholarship existing on the subject matter. The work is not a substitute for reading the original texts, but will add perspective on the incongruities and dissonances of events and people and the oddities in writing, including the paradoxes of the times. The moral cultural and philosophical dichotomies find a cultural net through these plays, which in their way amplify the crescendo of such contradictions. These interpretations on the critical field of argument, counter-argument, disquisition, reciprocity, and exchange of free conceptualization establish an interplay of critical correspondence not only with the texts but also with readers in a triptych of "literary beingness."

The *fin de siècle* was an age of extensive preparation, awaiting crystallization and materialization, which assumed new forms, faces, shapes, sizes, and utilities. These appeared as miscellanea in literary writing, sciences, and disciplines of objective or pragmatic visions and futures that demanded a rethinking and rewriting of human histories, placing man's self-liberated individuated spirit at the centre. The cross-fertilization and cross-pollination of the extant and extinct theoretical frameworks of diverse disciplines is not new. Sociologists, psychoanalysts, and structuralists have persistently augmented, bolstered, untangled, disentangled, speculated, and decoded the immense possible intricacies of literary texts, to discover the molecular arrangement of the semantics of the text. The more one cleaves a literary text, the better it grows, making its innate rhythmical patterns

indispensable. Between the material substance and matter of the “word,” to the dis-incarnated and ethereal world of annotation the cosmos of the literary text is fantastical and mysterious, inviting the reader to plunge into the complex and ordinary system of interpretation: from multi-dimensional associativity to the co-relativity of the structural composition. Crafted by the creator, the text is a semiotic embodiment of a living progeny of the creator, which under various birth cycles of revivification is born every time it encounters a reader for participation, involvement, and understanding, using the reader’s own lens for adventure, escapades, action, and ordeals.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO MODERNISM: NEGOTIATING ITS NATURE AND CONFIGURATION

The ever-changing theoretical physiognomy of modernism as a phenomenon has intrigued literary critics for its inclusive phraseology, the literati for its unsuspected and uncharted attributes, and readers for its Janus-faced perspective. In the cultural domain, it refuses to end, even though we are now in the twenty-first century. The common laity, to date, largely associate and identify themselves as “modern” beings, though “beingness” has been constantly interpolated with conservative tradition, the added affectations of global post-truth politics, the principles of egalitarianism, the demand for equity, the metaphysical objectivity of phenomena, and things drawn by the saber of perspectivism. At the microcosmic level, in the everyday conduct of life, it left its indelible traces through persistent interrogation, and in the broader zeitgeist, deeply embedded material changes through constant ontological self-doubt and hesitancy. In the body of art, its impact equally metastasized into various art forms, while in some forms, it has refused even to die down at all. It has become that quintessential pre-fixated encomium that is almost carelessly attached to every creative outburst in public as well as private performances: as an adverb to new-fangled and avant-gardist practices ranging from cuisine and technology to practices in diverse sectors and nations, and as a noun to its specific taxonomy of texts and classification of its attributes. Eagleton suggests that, “all historical epochs are modern to themselves but not all live their experience in this ideological mode” (139). On the other hand, Anderson who regards modernism as “the emptiest of all cultural categories,” reveals an almost derogatory dismissal of “one void chasing in a serial regression of self-congratulatory chronology.”

In the *fin-de-siècle* and semi-centennial century, the term, much like other literary shifts, was given a cultural rehash, a reconfiguration from a

multitude of shifts and attitudes, and almost opened a number of critical gazes to the world of literature and a stream of genres under it with almost kaleidoscopic-like reflections into one another. Of modernism too, there have been alternative and parallel worlds of modernisms—from good modernisms of the postcolonial, urban, and transcultural to contextually and relatively bad modernisms. To some, “This bad outsider to far-too-good insiders” saw “Modernism as rebellion; sometimes ‘make-it-new’; sometimes modernism was “resistance, rupture . . . modernism was the antidote to the poison of tradition” (Mao 9). Under the rubric of modernist writing, art has clad itself in the substance-based optics of epistemology and ontology, metaphysics, transnationalism and historicism, and so on, finally to reach a number of compounding and co-mingled intersections with theories of philosophy and aesthetics. Critics have divaricated modernism on the grounds of its whys and wherefores, positioning certain key attributes and customary features as defining it; certain others have underlined its dimensional or causal relationship, while others have made contextual studies establishing its dialectical relationship to other ideologies and schools of thought. But for this reason, modernism can be seen as undergoing transformations of various stages. For dramaturgy, Krasner notes, “Eagleton viewed modernism as the rebellious adolescence of modernism,” “defined by a definitive rupture with its parentage” and implying that “renewal” must always be present and evolving (2). Probing the metaphor further, modernism emerged as an adolescent revolt from the generations of the past and its heritage—a sudden revulsion of a pubescent, a breakthrough from all things Victorian, immaterial, or Romantic—later to become an astute youth that now could produce and reproduce the mimetic simulacrum of life, ultimately to reach stages of senescence and its galvanizing turn towards aestheticism, a mere break or distinction from every naive belief that was formed in the previous rebellion; finally, the material body of modern drama and its odyssey arrived at its Buddha-field in its quinquagenarian stage.

In *Against the Grain*, Eagleton writes, “Modernism as a term at once expresses and mystifies a sense of one’s particular historical conjuncture as being somehow peculiarly pregnant with crisis and change. It signifies a portentous, confused yet curiously heightened self-consciousness of one’s own historical moment, at once self-doubting and self-congratulatory,

anxious and triumphalist together” (139). Aubrey, in his study of theological tendencies in modernism states that modernism must be taken as an “attitude more than a creed” (429), an attitude that built and nourished the litterateur’s credo.

Drama, which excelled as a genre, in the coming of the age took a hybrid form, being read as well as performed and observed minutely for its word-by-word rendition and, broadly, for its mimetic discursiveness. And this hybrid dimension also now went transcultural—transnational at times—globally to the third-world colonies of the empire. Thus, an eagle-like political or ideological standing became quintessential to the understanding of the play and its performance. This political and ideological element needed a subscriber, an absorber, which largely became the fairly literate audience, conspicuously present to consume the culture of performance. From ancient nobility, knights, the court audience, and the kingship of kings and queens, it moved to the highly sophisticated and elitist Renaissance audience and then to a mass audience of diversified tastes in genre and culture, thereby confirming the scope of modern times, the audiences of which embody the differing physiognomic features of the human with their disparate ethnicities and characters.

Nietzsche’s role in sublimating the modernist ethos and its wave of subjective reality in a nihilistic vision of an absent objective morality, with the popular surcharged slogan “God is Dead,” was another important materialist landmark to the emergence of different stages of modernity to a different degree. A lot of epistemological and ontological breaches were initiated with Nietzsche’s *A Birth of Tragedy* where the contextual difference of Apollonian and Dionysian forces were extended to creative and emotive representations.

As Douglas Kellner, in his analysis “Modernity and Its Discontents: Nietzsche’s Critique” asserts: “Nietzsche’s concept of *Amor Fati*, his affirmation that ‘every man is himself a piece of fate’ and his arguments for determinism and fatalism . . . reveal the lasting influence of certain Greek ideas on Nietzsche. And his celebration of Dionysus as a figure of liberation shows his proclivities to premodern thought” (31).

Nietzsche’s call for an experimental “gay science,” his emphasis on the aesthetic and cultural dimension, and his critiques of rationality and domination provide an imaginative counterforce to the tendencies toward

formalism, abstraction, quantification, and specialization that would undermine the power of much later social theory (35). “‘Literature is a human project, its meaning and significance bound up with the human community and its structure of values’ (Swingewood, Alan).”

No study can also undermine or overlook the role of drama and theatre in the fruition of modernism or modernist thought and practices, although drama and theatrical performances might not be central to or the only focus of literary studies in its role to ascend the modernist spirit. Modern man became intensely personal; the art forms, critical theories, and schools of dramatic criticism that propagated private reading, being oneself in an up-close and personal encounter with the text, almost became a denationalized closeted, privileged, and sequestered engagement with the written play. On the other hand, drama came a long way from Aristotle, Euripides, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Menander, and Seneca or Greco-Roman state control to the coagulation of independent performers, directors, production members, and costume designers. From the means to control the masses under political subjugation and hegemony, to catering to tastes for supplying moral entertainment, dramatic performances have come a long way. The practice of theatre and of watching drama unfold appeared as a shared communal practice of witnessing/attending to performances with like-minded cahoots of observers. Theatre and dramatic texts have cohesively captured the aesthetics and spirit of the modernist ethos, while perhaps poetry or prose could not reveal itself to the fullest without performative enactments. We can read of the underground man’s rejection of society, embracing the underground existence inherently, but we witness it better when the angst of the marginalized subject of Genet or Zola depicts the sterility of civilization or Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon wait for some imperceptible, faceless Godot. Martin Puchner asserts, “. . . theorists of the performativity of literature and of performance studies bespeak a new priority of masks over essence and theatricality over ontology” (521). The present essays are a modest attempt in the contrary direction to bring about representations, the dialectical interactions of the essence of the written drama with its performative masks and the ontological roots of its theatricality.

The idea of theatricality has met with its own set of questions and challenges to its validity, of which Plato and the Platonic tradition has perhaps inquired and investigated the most. Plato’s fundamental unsettling

of the aspect had been within the framework or the mode in which performance is represented—the artificiality and duplicate reality, almost an extended mimesis, ergo, a character-based private play-reading set-up without the stageability or viscosity of actor's bodies and other performativities. It was this material and corporeal mimesis that was never assimilated that later was also revealed in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (1671) and the work of Goethe, Byron, Shelley, and Robert Browning, even in Pushkin's craft, as well as in other avant-garde theatrical practices in the early twentieth century, in writing for a wider readership and anti-textual unconventionality. Modern dramaturgy and theatre performance studies have seen a classical disputation between the closet drama, verse writing, or prose-based theatre of avant-gardist practices of stagecraft and the disputes of "Plato vs the Greek tragedy, Deleuze vs Artaud, Nietzsche vs Wagner, Derrida vs Mallarmé" (Puchner, 529) upon the negotiations on the theory of drama and dramatic performances of theatre.

Dramatic criticism has also traced theatrical and literary elements in the thespian art as being independent or often in complex entanglements of written utterances and its consequent control, confinement, and finality of representation that has caught up the crucial eye of many practitioners of theatre to the present day. Transmitting the word to performance has commanded a whole new system of inquiry of performance studies under theatre/dramatic criticism and has seen paradigmatic shifts in its innovatory theoretical practices of performance. Gassner observes, that the "relationship of the modern drama and the theatre has been a fluctuating one" (129). David Belasco, Richard Wagner, Thomas Wignell, Henry Irving, Stanislavsky, Oscar Wilde, Victor Hugo, George Bernard Shaw, Antoine Artaud, and Gordon Craig journeyed from play writing to production and developing dramaturgical theories of performance and drama. The *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century witnessed a number of ideological and epistemological mutations towards making paradigmatic changes to the conceptualization and execution or enactment of drama for its optimal dimensional development from realism and naturalism to decadence and avant-gardish styles. The ethos of the *fin de siècle* has rested primarily on the collision with the ideal and the perversion of the conservative determination to pronounce what and how public behavior must be exhibited: the limits/limitlessness of private comportment, divorce law

controversies, diseases, heteronormative practices of sexuality, homosexuality, and homophobia, hereditary sickness, the bawd and the libertine, the coquette or hysterical woman, and many other anomalous deviations in the experimental forms of expression through movements of decadence and symbolism across European nations. The melodramatic traditions with their emphasis on sensationalism, and spectacle, paved the way for much of the anti-theatre ideations that rejected the overt illusion of representation of the backdrop and the histrionics on the stage. Notwithstanding the anti-theatre mood of schmaltsy and exaggerated stagecraft and settings, dramatists such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Pirandello, Chekhov, Pinter, Zola, Genet, Shaw, Beckett and others did not compromise on raised tensions, contradictions, and ambivalence in order to build a layered dialectical structure of institutional and systemic impingement of or with individuals alongside the consequent apprehension and anxiety faced by character-individuals. This conscious attempt at de-theatricalization and the desire to “distinguish from pseudo-realism” (Gassner, 131) involved the rejection of the formulaic elements of conventional dramatic ventures traditionally with the “tranche de vie” (Gassner, 131) troupe as the answer to the forced dramaturgy. The four plays thus are crucial for the groundbreaking influence they carried at the time of their reception, good or bad, for the plays asked questions about some of the irrefutable and uncomfortable reservations we have to human existence, still holding contestable viewpoints in a jest of argument and counter-argument. These plays moved from realism, high realism, and anti-realism to an essential philosophical examination to discover the ontic realities of truth. As Gassner underlines, “in one respect, indeed, realism and naturalism actually enlarged the theater’s humanist orientation, for modern realism added individuality and attributed dignity to commons to whom the older drama had generally afforded only secondary and comic roles” (133). Thus, despite the kaleidoscopic additions to the varieties of form added to the canvas of modern drama, “humanism,” human vulnerabilities, a beacon or prognostication of the times to come, using modes of memory to wield resistances into systemic structures of injustices, and discrimination and inequity were made available due to the imaginative elasticity and stretch of criticism that the underbelly of the plays made possible.

From the *fin de siècle* to the semi-centennial frame, modern drama had undergone transformative experimentation divorcing, merging, marrying, and isolating theatre within the form and style of performance and writing. On the spectrum of morality, it had seen on the one hand, the centrality of ethics that took a self-righteous stance on degeneracy and explicit suggestive sexuality. A myriad of opinions, sensibilities, and coded criticism is available on the depictions of realist and anti-realist theatrical practices within the typified period of sixty to seventy years. Various conventions were revived or discovered. Zola's insistence on the popular *nouvelle formulae*—which was born out of inheritance, environment, eugenics, and flesh and blood, and was subject to scientific determinism and devoid of free will—in *Le Naturalism au theatre* (1881) argued for the theoretical bedrock that became a source for many following dramatists, such as the Théâtre Libre of Andre Antoine, whose dedicated fidelity to the methods of Zola, the Goncourt brothers, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Léon Hennique, Tolstoy, and others, endowed the characters with optimum reality until the theater's closure in 1896. Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, in *The Tragedy in Daily Life* (1896) initiated static drama, speaking of external forces that move invincibly in the face of human will and control. Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de L'Œuvre in Paris produced new French symbolist works beyond the productions of Strindberg, Hofmannsthal, Wilde, and Hauptmann. An important playwright who made deep remarks about the modernist tryst that were exceptionally axiomatic of the starkly modern times that he recorded and witnessed, Maeterlinck writes:

What have we here but life that is almost motionless? In most cases, indeed, you will find that psychological action—ininitely loftier in itself than mere material action, and truly, one might think, well-nigh indispensable—that psychological action even has been suppressed, or at least vastly diminished, in a truly marvellous fashion, with the result that the interest centres solely and entirely in the individual, face to face with the universe. Here we are no longer with the barbarians, nor is man now fretting, himself in the midst of elementary passions, as though, forsooth, these were the only things worthy of note: he is at rest, and we have time to observe him. It is no longer a violent, exceptional moment of life that passes before our eyes—it is life itself. Thousands and thousands of laws there are, mightier and more venerable than those of passion; but, in common with all that is endowed

with resistless force, these laws are silent, and discreet, and slow-moving; and hence it is only in the twilight that they can be seen and heard, in the meditation that comes to us at the tranquil moments of life. (108–9)

Similarly, the Russian playwright Leonid Andreyev's in his static plays and symbolist dramas and their conventionalities wrote his dramatic conjectures upon human thought and will in "A Letter in the Theatre" (1981). Andreyev had been associated with quiet expressionism and symbolism at the turn of the century with his plays and stories depicting hysterical, anxious, and volatile elements in the anti-realist tradition. Avant-garde techniques were scattered and disjointed in many parts of Europe but found in elements of expressionism and surrealism featuring episodic scenes, scenic designs, and contrasting elements placed together, such as distortion and idealism, and soft feelings and exaggerated strong displays of emotional outrage set apart from the problematic apparatuses of the society. Gassner's observations sum up expressionism as follows:

The expressionists reintroduced the soliloquy and the aside, the tirade, and the histrionic prose and verse which the realists and naturalists had banished from their stage as inconsistent with verisimilitude or naturalness and especially with the "fourth-wall" principle of scenic illusion. In endeavoring to *express* reality rather than to *represent* it, they inevitably moved toward theatricalism, and their view of life itself tended to be theatrical as well as generally subjective. For this reason as well as because environment for them was subjectively volatile or in a state of actual transition (if not, indeed, disintegration), the expressionists brought back into vogue the multiscened type of play structure as well. (138)

As a polemicist and theatre director, Richard Wagner's libretto elements of dramatic musicality and orchestral symphony were unprecedented—Nietzsche called them a Dionysian "rebirth" (1872) of his division of tragedies into Dionysian and Apollonian elements. Barry Millington called him a "mystic hierophant for the Symbolists, as he was held in high veneration even from Baudelaire, and Mallarmé." Gordon Craig's stage innovations born from the desire for pure emotional demonstration in the *mise en scène*, with stage ceiling lights and other technical features, insisted on restoring the art of theatre. His views, detailed in "On the Art of the

Theatre" (1911), were contrary to the idea of textual primacy or the role of the dramatist; however, his insistence upon the relevance of witnessing, watching, and consuming the performance with ravenous eyes was instrumental in shifting the stark realism and dark activities of naturalistic and quasi-realist plays. He made a foray into the world of suggestions, myths, metaphors, allusions, and allegory in a state of dream and reverie; trance states and euphoric rapture were amply loaded on the canvas of this creator of symbolism and symbolic art with portraits of Bocklin, Oskar, Zwischter, Franz von Stuck representing a hybrid of the non-visible expression of profundity in transcendental terms and projections. Baudelaire, Paul Claudel, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Rimbaud commanded genres: Parnassus poetry, naturalistic novels. Symbolic plays were a synthesis of nascent attempts at practices in the theatre. Many of the playwrights of the decade from 1890 to 1900 were influenced by Rimbaud and his poetics. The symbolists' theatricality and dramaturgy, compared with those of the Dadaists and surrealists, were distinctive in their parameters and approach to expression on stage. While the symbolists attempted experience presented technological, scientific, hi-tech and scenic facets on stage, those of the Dadaists and surrealists were largely predicated upon dramatic elements that were intentionally absurd and obscure, involving disconnected and disjointed themes, structureless plots, and so on, which were a precursor to epic theatre and absurdist drama in later years. The Dadaists and surrealists were similar in their quest and artistic renditions but advocated a complete breakdown, the violation of logical unities, and anarchy to combat the normative principle of how societies organized and functioned through rationalized and pragmatic procedures, customs, and routines. The protocols were consciously smashed, with the bizarre, irrational, and meaningless upheld at the expense of delivering meaning. Voltaire in 1916, Hans Arp, André Breton, even Antonin Artaud envisioned praxis to be incorporated through distortion, disgust, and dissuasion. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty emerged out of the need to engage man's instinctual impulses, creating a space for shock and the deep truths of the subconscious mind. Theatre, ergo, geared itself towards the repudiation of depicting and demonstrating reality per se, revealed through the pessimism of the available forms in general. Brecht's and Piscator's epic theatre prescriptions in the 1940s demolished all kinds of illusions on stage

that previous generation of experimentation had fused, un-caging the reality of its spectacular, phantasmagorical visions. This was the time when performances would suddenly “erupt” in the beer bars, streets, or other unorthodox precincts or sites. Effects were now made to involve the audience on the spot, catch them off-guard for an instantaneous or prompt rebound. Sartre and Martin Esslin provided a modern dramatic theory for semi-centennial dramatic counter-responses to investigate human existence, alienation, and meaninglessness in everyday human life.

Global political shifts—from the abolition of slavery, the emancipation reform of serfs in 1861 in Russia, Darwin’s theory of the origin of species, global suffrage movements, trade unions, Comte’s positivism, Marx’s *Das Kapital*, and Freud’s psychoanalysis and theory of dreams, to the aggressive pursuit of yielding power through movements, protests, revolts, and revolution—became a bedrock for the spirit of the times, up until the two world wars. As Puchner writes, it were “the ramifications of what one could call the theatrical turn as ‘performance,’ ‘performativity,’ ‘theatricality,’ ‘dramatism,’ as well as in a fascination with theatrical topoi such as ‘masks,’ ‘enactment’ that characterizes the twentieth century” (524).

An important dimension of modernism had been the idea of liberality: beyond free nations, free trade, free colonies, the self-run state, and striking at oppressive regimes, there was demand for inward-looking, self-seeking, often self-serving subjectivities even at the cost of being uncaring or mercenary. This largesse and tolerance for laxity opened the portals for many on the path of actualization, discovery, and the exploration of the self, while for others it led to hedonistic self-pursuit, and for many others more, an avaricious greed of material acquisition. This search came with the challenges of its social environment, as the zeitgeist of the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century was also a high point of liminality, which fundamentally stood on the bedrock of traditionally guarded and shielded institutions that wielded unequal power at spots of hierarchical divisions. The clash of self-seeking modalities with these epistemic systems brought deeper tensions, confusions, dilemmas, and ambivalence, which would find an interface either in disobedience or non-conformity, or even in utter rejection through acts of defiance, mutiny, or apostasy.

Despite the large quantity of knowledge of the historical or, rather, cultural movement, modernism and the drama produced under it require