

THEORISING DRAMA: CORE PRINCIPLES OF DRAMATIC THEORY AND CRITICISM

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Abstract

This paper, which is not confined to a single era, examines the core principles of dramatic theory and criticism from Classical Greece to contemporary postmodern perspectives. It identifies the enduring concepts that shape the study of drama. The paper argues that despite historical shifts in performance, genre, and ideology, certain foundational principles have remained central to the theorization and critique of dramatic texts and performance. Beginning with Classical Greece, the study engages Aristotle's *Poetics* as the bedrock of dramatic theory, focusing on *mimesis*, plot structure, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and *catharsis*. It then traces the Roman codification by Horace, which emphasizes decorum and the dual aims of delight and instruction. Furthermore, the Renaissance and Neoclassical periods are analyzed for their systematization of the "three unities" and their moral-didactic concerns, while modern drama is examined through the lenses of realism, naturalism, and Brechtian epic theatre—movements that shifted critical emphasis from the text itself to its social function and audience alienation. Finally, the paper interrogates contemporary postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist critical perspectives that challenge the universality of these classical principles and instead foreground issues of power, identity, and performance. Across these historical periods, the study identifies enduring concepts—such as representation, structure, audience effect, and the ethical function of drama—as core to dramatic theory. The article concludes that theorizing drama requires a dialogic engagement with these historical principles, adapted to current critical contexts, to foster a more inclusive understanding of drama as both an art form and a social discourse.

Key words: Criticism, Dramatic Theory, Mimesis, Performance, Postmodernism, The Three Unities

Introduction: Definition of Dramatic Theory and Criticism

Dramatic theory comprises a systematic set of principles and concepts that facilitate the understanding, analysis, and creation of theatre. It encompasses the core structural components of drama, including plot, character, theme, and setting. Broadly speaking, the purpose of dramatic theory is twofold: it guides playwrights in crafting cohesive narratives, and it aids critics and audiences in interpreting and evaluating dramatic enactments.

Dramatic criticism, on the other hand, applies these theoretical frameworks to analyze and evaluate specific plays. The techniques of dramatic criticism typically begin with a contextual overview of a chosen text. For instance, a critical approach to Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* necessitates examining cultural adaptation alongside the interplay of Yoruba and Greek theatrical traditions. This is because Rotimi draws his plot and core thematic framework from Sophocles' classical Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, but transposes them into a distinct Yoruba cultural matrix. From this baseline, a critic can branch into specialized frameworks: a feminist critical lens might examine gender roles within the traditional Yoruba societal context, while a structuralist critique would analyze the binary opposition of fate versus free will.

Ultimately, dramatic theory and criticism encompass a diverse range of analytical approaches—including structuralist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and feminist frameworks—to interpret dramatic genres such as tragedy, comedy, and contemporary performance. While approaches dictate the overarching ideological direction of a critique, techniques provide the practical tools needed to execute that analysis. For example, structuralist approaches focus on uncovering underlying textual architectures, such as recurring plot patterns and binary oppositions.

Binary oppositions are critical tools that map the underlying structures and thematic tensions inherent in a text. These are exemplified by universal, contrasting concepts such as good versus evil, life versus death, or male versus female. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, these oppositions manifest as fate versus free will; knowledge versus ignorance, which traces King Odewale's trajectory from blindness to tragic self-awareness; and order versus chaos, typified by the breakdown of societal stability in Kutuje following the commissions of patricide and incest.

These binaries do more than just drive the plot; they structure narratives, enrich character analysis, and reveal the text's deeper ideological undercurrents. While the battle between good and evil is a staple of traditional melodrama, the friction between order and conflict drives the plot forward in serious drama.

Other critical frameworks interrogate these structures differently:

Post-structuralism challenges fixed meanings, highlighting textual instability and the fluidity of language.

Feminist criticism explores gender roles, institutional power dynamics, and the historical representation of women.

Marxist criticism examines systemic conflicts arising from class struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, focusing on the underlying ideology of economic power.

Psychoanalytic criticism utilizes Freudian and Lacanian theories to investigate the unconscious motivations, repressed desires, and psychological anxieties of characters.

Notably, while both psychoanalytic criticism and surrealist theatre tap into sub-surface psychological realms, they do so in fundamentally different ways. Psychoanalytic criticism operates as an analytical tool for the psychological deconstruction of characters, whereas surrealism utilizes dream-like aesthetics, non-linear structures, and fractured logic directly on the stage to disrupt conventional reality.

Consequently, this research work examines the historical evolution of theatrical thought from classical Greek theatre to modern and postmodern perspectives, identifying the key theories and critical approaches that define, shape, and sustain contemporary performance. In doing so, it highlights theatre as an expansive storehouse of conventions that underpin drama as a distinct art form.

Drama remains unique among the arts due to its immediate method of presentation, which brings text to life through live human performance. Historically, drama is rooted in humanity's primal efforts to grapple with the existential mysteries that threaten or sustain collective survival. As a result, both primitive and modern societies have exhibited instinctive dramatic responses to environmental, social, religious, and cultural dynamics across various geographical contexts. Drama is therefore a natural human phenomenon that was later formalized and codified by the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. In classical Greece, the Dionysian festivals—where drama was famously birthed and contested—were state-sponsored religious celebrations. This institutional origin underscores the deep-seated religious, socio-political, and economic undertones that have been inherent to drama since its inception as an art form.

Middle Ages/Medieval Period-Background Forces

This period in theatre history is divided into three: the dark, middle and medieval ages. The politics of religion in the Roman Empire affected theatre during this period. The Roman theatre like the Greek theatre was dedicated to the goddess, Venus. The Roman Empire suffered civil strifes and collapsed circa, 476 AD. The Roman Catholic Church began a strong political, economic and religious institution and exercised control over every activity. With the emergence of the church as a dominant force, the intermingling of theatrical productions with the Roman goddess, Venus, became barbarous and paganish. The church condemned theatre and regarded it as the work of the devil. Medieval playwrights and critics projected this view and waged war against the theatre. Drama and theatre therefore, suffered setbacks and declined during the middle and medieval periods. The little dramatic and theatrical activities that took place at this period were controlled and censored by the Catholic Church in order to mainly propagate the gospel of faith. Art work was done to glorify God; anonymous authorship dominated the middle ages because art was a collective effort of devotion rather than something done for personal or individual fulfillment. Language and symbols used by the playwrights

were those evolved and approved by the church. Tertullian's treatise, *On The Spectacles*, for instance, is a significant work that fiercely criticises the Roman spectacle culture-referring to the various forms of public entertainment and performances that were popular in ancient Rome, including theatre and gladiatorial games. Tertullian's work is primarily a Christian critique of pagan spectacles; it highlights the tension between Christian values and the excesses of Roman spectacle culture, thereby raising pertinent questions about the role of entertainment in the society. *On The Spectacle* also emphasises the importance of moral and ethical considerations in evaluating dramatic performances, thus encouraging audiences to think critically about the contents and impacts of what they watch, warning the church about the dangers of earthly pleasures and sin that are capable of leading Christians to sin and concludes that the theatre should not exist because it is devilish, barbaric and against God's will. Tertullian's *On The Spectacle* is a reflection of early Christian tensions with pagan cultural practices, shaping discussions on Christian engagement with secular entertainments.

St. Augustine is another companion of Tertullian who attempts to find some kind of mediation between the extremes. The theatre, he says, is something created by God to be used for the propagation of faith. Theatre should therefore, improve the moral standpoint of man. He says that language is what makes a work of art bad or good, adding that the impurities of comedy or poetic arts are redeemed by the sublimity of the poetic language. His thoughts contribute majorly to broader Christian discussions on morality, entertainment and engagement with secular culture.

Aelius Donatus on the other hand, differs from Tertullian and St. Augustine. He says that comedy employs a story involving the various peculiarities of public and private behaviours which teach us what is practical in life and what should be avoided. Comedy deals with public and private affairs without intending dangers to life. Donatus identifies and discusses the types of comedy to include *Fabula Palliata* (Palliata), *Fabula Togata*; and *Fabula Atellana*- a type of farce or satirical comedy originating from Atella.

Generally, he says comedy is divided into four parts: the Prologue, Protasis (introduction), Epitasis (climax) and Catastrophe or catastasis (resolution). Tragedy, Donatus says, is a serious drama, a stately art involving the physical and the metaphysical.

Aelius Donatus' work's significant contributions to dramatic theory and criticism are in his commentaries on the plays of Terence, providing insights into Roman comedy, dramatic structure and character analysis. His commentaries on understanding Roman drama are valuable for appreciating and understanding Roman dramatic techniques, conventions and the context of Terence's works.

Modern Africa: Background Forces:

The African theatre boasts a vibrant triple heritage, blending traditional, popular and literary (modern) forms. However, the rise of post-traditional theatre has sparked intense discussions among scholars and practitioners, questioning the nature and definition of African theatre. This discourse is deeply intertwined with the continent's decolonisation struggles, the quest for independence and the pursuit of cultural identity, pride and self-expression. These forces have contributed to the development of conceptual criticism in African theatre which seeks to challenge Western-centric perspectives; explore African aesthetics and epistemologies and define African theatre's unique characteristics and values.

The seminal seeds of African theatre criticism were planted by Anthropologists who argued that African myths, rituals and festivals should be regarded as drama and theatre. They also highlighted the significance of indigenous cultural practices in understanding African performance traditions. By doing so, they have helped in laying the groundwork for African theatre criticism which focuses on appreciating African cultural contexts; challenging Eurocentric perspectives and developing frameworks for analysing African performance forms. However, the argument at this stage was embryonic because with the publication of *Palm Wine Drinkers* by Amos Tutuola in 1951, full literary criticism on African theatre started. Consequently, three schools of thought grouped along distinct literary and ideological interests and viewpoints emerged. These schools of thought are the evolutionists, the referentialists and the relativists.

The argument of evolutionists is that African performances are not drama because they lack plot, textual tradition, dialogue, interaction of several characters, the concept of imitation and suspense. The conclusion of referentialists is that African performances are quasi-drama while relativists insist that African performances are drama and theatre in their own right since they satisfy the entertainment and recreational needs of the African.

Ruth Finnegan, an evolutionist argues that African rituals, festivals and dance cannot be called drama because they lack specialised scenario, plot and characterisation, noting that these aspects of African drama and performance do not possess the characteristics of European drama. She states that even though “the performances possess certain of the elements we associate with drama, the emphasis is very different from that of modern European drama”. (500-501)

Ola Rotimi, a referentialist, in his *The Drama in African Ritual Display* analyses African festivals and rituals from the Aristotelian point of view. He says, as cited in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: Critical Source book*, that: “these criteria (Aristotelian conventions) would rule out any classification of the gelede masquerade display as drama. Gelede masquerades who dance only to appease the witches portray the make-believe externals of drama. Excitingly rhythmic as their dance movements are: more so under the accent and grandeur of costume and mask, there, however is hardly any suggestion of “mimesis” directed at specific human experience or at some supernatural habit”. (78)

Wole Soyinka, a relativist, in his *Myth, Literature and The African World* insists that African drama and theatre must portray African worldview which derives from belief in gods, ancestral worship and kinship as manifested in African ritual display; festival celebration, sacrifice for propitiation and cleansing, burial and initiation ceremonies. Like the Greeks therefore, the ontological essence of the African is aligned with the world of the gods. This means therefore, that like the Greek tragedians, African playwrights emphasise African cosmology in their plays.

Wole Soyinka plays a pioneering role in African literary criticism. He uses African thematic materials and has consistently explored the physical and metaphysical worlds of the Yoruba. His concept of Yoruba tragedy therefore, derives from Yoruba traditional religion and mythologies and has gained wide acceptance as the African concept of tragedy. This shows that Africans have a culture based on common ontological conceptions like kinship systems, the concept of reincarnation, observance of rites of passage, pre-disposition to rituals, festival celebrations and ancestral worship, indicating that the gods need humans and humans need the

gods hence there is an interplay between the world of the living, the world of the unborn and the world of ancestors in the context of Yoruba cosmology and drama.

Modern Theatre 19th - 20th Century Revolts: The Motivating Factors:

This is a continuation of the study of the theories and plays from the 18th Century modern theatre to the post modern period. The important factors that motivated the 19th and 20th century revolts include scientific inventions, industrialisation, problematic activities of unscrupulous businessmen, prostitution, outbreak of diseases, the devastating effects of the first and second world wars on the environment which reduced man to the status of a machine. All these changed the nature and face of drama and conditioned dramatic theory and criticism.

Drama and theatre evolved to become deeply rooted in the playwright's environment, culture and social context with plays tackling pressing issues, struggles and experiences specific to the playwright's community, thereby reflecting a strong connection to their own society. In African theatre, this shift led to the creation of works that explored post-colonial experiences, cultural identities and social issues unique to African communities and resonating with their specific contexts and concerns. Hence it can be said that drama and theatre began to respond to the needs, values or challenges of the playwright's particular milieu, thereby mirroring the society. These forces interplayed to produce theorists like August Comte, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche and many others, whose writings capture the prevalent trend in dramatic theory and criticism.

Friedrich Nietzsche on *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872):

Nietzsche attempts to give a scientific interpretation to the origin of tragedy. The use of the word **BIRTH** demystifies the tragic essence and situates it within the characters. He says tragedy owes its evolution to the union of Apollonian-Dionysian duality since the propagation of species depends on the duality of the sexes, their constant conflicts and periodic acts of reconciliation. He says that by the union of a Hellenic act of will, the pair, Apollo and Dionysus, accepted the yoke of marriage. In this condition begot Attic Theory-kind of tragedy that is higher than the classic tragedy which its essence departs from metaphysical essence of tragedy exemplified for instance, by Arthur Miller's *Death of A Salesman*.

The modern tragic essence contrasts with the classical tragic essence. Modern tragic essence is secular and physical while the classical tragic essence is divine and metaphysical-Sophocles is a perfect example of the metaphysical tragedy. Nietzsche's ideas influenced dramatic theory and criticism, particularly in understanding the role of myth, ritual and the emotional impact of tragedy on the audience.

Sigmund Freud's *Theory of Arts*:

Freud's theory of arts emphasises the primacy of the unconscious to theories of creativity, culture, aesthetic pleasure, theory interpretation, relationship between the artiste and his work, the psyche and the production of sublimation-suppressed feeling. An in-depth study of Freud's theory of arts reveals that it can adequately serve as substitute gratification. Freud in his theory, emphasises the use of dream as model for arts, interpretation of dream as royal road to a knowledge of unconscious activities. He stressed the primacy of the unconscious in aesthetic

production since the unconscious can instigate the creation of cultural phenomenon by sublimation. Freud sees arts as a link between fantasy and reality. Freud's ideas on the unconscious mind and repressed desires can be used to analyse characters' motivations and behaviours in plays. Additionally, Freud's ideas on the unconscious can help critics understand how audiences respond to dramatic works in addition to the emotional resonance of certain themes or characters.

Carl Jung- *The Relation of Analytical Psychology to Arts:*

Carl Jung holds that art by its very nature is not science and science by its own nature is not art. But when we speak of the relation of psychology to art, we shall speak only of that aspect of arts which can be submitted for psychological scrutiny without violating its nature. But in order to do justice to a work of art, analytical psychology must rid itself entirely of medical prejudice because a work of art is not a disease.

The greatest criterion for judging a work of art is its mode of creation. The psychologist will call sentimental art "introverted art" and the naïve art "extroverted art". So these two modes affect a work of art either as a conscious product, shaped and designed to have the intended effect. But in the other, we are dealing with an event originating in unconscious nature and therefore, achieves its aim without the assistance of human consciousness. It defies it by willfully insisting on its own form and effect. Jung's concept or ideas on the collective unconscious and archetypes can be used to analyse themes and character types in dramatic works.

Vladimir Lenin on *Party Organisation and Literature:*

Lenin had distinct views on party organisation and literature, shaped or defined by his experiences in the Russian Revolution. The Russian revolution brought party literature as a response to the autocratic rule of the Tsar and various social and economic issues. Aesopian language was a tool used by writers to critique the system indirectly under censorship. Aesopian language refers to a style of writing using allegory or indirect expression to avoid censorship or convey subversive ideas without explicit statements.

Lenin advocated for a vanguard party consisting of the most conscious and militant workers. This party would lead the working class in revolution, guided by the Marxist theory. In his essay, *Party Organisation and Party Literature*, published in 1905, Lenin argues that literature should become part of organised, planned Social-Democratic Party work. Lenin also desired a free press, free from bourgeois-shopkeeper literary relations, integrated into the Social-Democratic movement.

Party literature is for the common cause of the proletariat with absolute commitment to the party. It should not be a means for individual enrichment but part of a common cause of the proletariat. Lenin's ideas on the role of the party in shaping literary production can trigger discussions about artistic freedom and the relationship between art and politics.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) on the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy:*

According to Marx, dialectics as a science of universal connection and development finds its expression in a definite system of scientific categories and laws. The law of dialectics as put together with Friedrich Engels, include the law of unity and struggle of opposites, the law of the transition from quantity to quality and the law of the negation of the negation.

The law of unity and struggle of opposites holds that contradictions (opposites) are inherent in all things. The interaction (unity and struggle) of these opposites drives change and development. The law of transition from quantity to quality posits that gradual quantitative changes can lead to sudden qualitative transformations. This explains how accumulation of changes leads to significant shifts while the law of negation to negation describes a process where a thing is negated, and then that negation is itself negated, often leading to a high level of development. It is a pattern of development through contradiction and resolution.

Marx applied dialectical materialism to analyse economic systems, like capitalism. He observed contradictions within capitalism such as the kind between labour and capital as driving forces of change. Dialectics aided Marx's understanding of historical development and the potential for revolutionary change.

The ideas of Marx as expressed in his introduction to the critique of political economy greatly and broadly influence cultural and literary theory. Marx's concepts can inform critical analyses of how drama reflects, challenges or reinforces dominant ideologies. His emphasis on class struggle and economic power relations shape interpretations of themes, characters or conflicts in plays.

Victor Hugo, (1802-1885) on *Preface to Cromwell* (1827):

Hugo says in his *Preface to Cromwell* that upon the foundation of a new religion and a new civilisation will a new school of poetry inevitably spring. A type magnificent in the beginning but towards the close, becomes false, paltry and conventional as always happens with that which is governed by a fixed system.

Christianity leads poetry into the part of truth. Like Christianity, modern theatre will look at things with greater breath of vision. It will feel that everything in creation is not beautiful from the standpoint of mankind, that the ugly exists besides the beautiful, the misshapen beside the graceful, the grotesque beside the sublime, evil beside good, darkness with light.

For greater clarity, Victor Hugo's evolution of drama and poetry spans three epochs: first epoch: Lyric poetry (primitive times); second epoch: Epic poetry while the third epoch: Drama, where tragedy and comedy are significant. Hugo's preface to *Cromwell* is a landmark in the development of Romantic theory of drama advocating for freedom in dramatic form.

Emile Zola (1840-1902) on *Naturalism on Stage*:

Emile Zola points out that naturalism dates from the first line ever written by man. From that day, truth was laid down as the necessary foundation of all arts. Zola's naturalism advocates for a scientific, objective approach to literature and theatre, focusing on observation and documentation of reality. Zola's naturalism emphasises the influence of environment, heredity and social conditions on characters. His works therefore, often focuses on depicting ordinary people and their struggles in a realistic manner. Zola rejects and has moved away from romanticised portrayals of life, and seeks to show life as it is. Naturalism is therefore, a return to nature and man, direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depicting of what is.

Naturalism in the Novel and Naturalism on the Stage:

The novel is the domain of naturalism; its field of battle and victory but today, it has taken over the stage, transforming the theatre which is the last forest of conventionality. The novel is impersonal, the novelist is a recorder of events who is forbidden to judge and to conclude. The stage captures reality, judges and evaluates societal events. The classical and medieval plays were products of their time. But tragedy must disappear, its death knell had sounded; for it was no longer the product of social surroundings.

The romantic drama killed the expiring tragedy. Victor Hugo gave it its death blow and reaped the benefits of a victory for which many others had laboured (for proposing the third epoch of poetry rooted in Shakespearean drama). Emile Zola's work on naturalism challenged romanticised portrayals and introduced a starkly realistic approach to storytelling, emphasising the importance of scientific precision in depicting life on stage.

Alexandre Dumas Fils (1824-1895)-How to write a Play:

A renowned French playwright, Fils is best known for the successful adaptation of his novel, *The Lady of Camellias* into a play. He emphasised the moral purpose of literature in his writings. His childhood experiences as an illegitimate child influenced and shaped the themes and characters of his play such as *The Illegitimate Son*.

Fils explains that the major difference between drama and other arts is that in drama, the public is an interested party to the proceedings and appears for the prosecution in the case, as we are told in legal parlance. He says the language that we use in our play is the language used by spectators themselves in instantly recognised passions and familiar situations. To judge the play therefore, what members of the audience need are eyes to see and ears to hear. Therefore, the moment we depart, a member of the audience will not say from the truth but from what another member of the audience thinks is the truth. Fils identifies two kinds of truth: absolute truth and superficial (false) truth.

Absolute truth always prevails in the end. The superficial truth consists of customs, manners, social conventions. The spectators, like all sovereigns-kings, nations and women, do not like to be told the truth, the whole truth. They therefore, wish to be flattered, pitied, consoled and taken away from their pre-occupations and their worries. Fils' focus on realism and audience engagement reflects the shift towards more realistic and relatable storytelling in 19th century theatre. His views on the playwright's role highlight the tension between artistic vision and commercial appeal, a recurring theme in dramatic theory and criticism.

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980)-Literature of Imprisonment:

Jean Paul Sartre is a key figure in existentialism. His works often explore the themes of freedom, responsibility and the human condition. He emphasises human freedom and choice, arguing that humans are condemned to be free. His *No Exit* for instance, explores the themes of existentialism, relationships and the human conditions in confined settings.

Jean Paul Sartre's central concern in his literature is man's freedom. Man's metaphysical freedom is for him, the frightening secrets of the gods. That secret which Zeus in the *Flies* was reluctant to share with Orestes. The function of the writer much like the compulsion of Orestes, is to proclaim this terrifically exhilarating truth-freedom.

Sartre sets forth this function of the writer in explicit terms: the writer, a freeman, writing for freemen has only subject-freedom. Sartre also calls for a new dramaturgy of situation which he

conceives as a theatre of entrapment (imprisonment). Each situation is a trap; there are imaginary walls everywhere. Sartre depicts this metaphorically in the titles of his plays by presenting images of confinement, enclosure and entrapment. Thus we find these metaphoric portrayal of imprisonment and confinement in such titles of his plays as *No Exit*, *The Room*, *Prisoners of Attoua*. These plays communicate a sense of walled-in quality of human consciousness and human existence bounded by external contingencies or by the imperatives of a dilemma. To Sartre, literature does not describe the situation, it is the situation and of course, every situation is a trap. *Oedipus Rex* is an example.

Sartre's existentialist ideas have influenced modern theatre, encouraging playwrights to explore complex themes and moral ambiguities. His works, along with those of Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett, have shaped the absurdist and existentialist drama movements, characterised by illogical or unconventional situations and themes.

Albert Camus on *The Myth Of Sisyphus*:

The *Myth of Sisyphus* is a philosophical essay by Albert Camus. It was originally published in 1942 in French as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Camus dwells on man's futile search for meaning, unity and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world that is devoid of god and eternity. Does the realisation of the absurd require suicide? Camus' answer is "no."

The Greek mythology presents Sisyphus as condemned and punished. His punishment is to repeat forever, the meaningless task of pushing a stone up a mountain and then getting to the top of the mountain, the stone rolls down and he will start all over again. Camus outlines the legend of Sisyphus who defies the gods and puts death in chains so that no human needed to die. In other words, just as Prometheus gave life to man, Sisyphus made a failed attempt to remove death from mankind. When death was eventually liberated, and time came for Sisyphus to die, he concocted a deceit which enabled him to escape from the underworld. He was finally captured by the gods and eternally punished. Camus presents Sisyphus' ceaseless and pointless toil as a metaphor for modern lives spent working at futile jobs in factories and offices. The workman, the civil servant of the modern times works everyday in his life at the same task and this fate is no less absurd. Camus is interested in Sisyphus' thoughts when marching down the mountain only to start anew. This is the tragic moment when the tragic hero becomes conscious of his wretched situation. He does not have hope but he also figures out the truth and Sisyphus like all men in absurd situations, keeps pushing. Camus' concept of absurdity as expressed in *The Myth of Sisyphus* has had a profound impact on dramatic theory and criticism, influencing the development of absurdist and existentialist drama and shaping the understanding of the meaninglessness of the human condition.

Bettolt Brecht –*The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre*:

Brecht uses the word, "Epic" to distinguish his theatre from the dramatic theatre. Three words: Epic, Historification and Alienation sum up Brecht's Epic Theatre. He calls his theatre Epic because he argues that it resembles the Epic theory of Homer. Thus he borrows the narrative techniques of Homeric Poetry. Historification, according to Brecht, makes strange materials from history, theatricalise them and make such materials spectacular so that they can appeal to the audience. Alienation implies audience detachment from the dramatic action. Brecht is

against the audience empathising with the protagonist. He says that the spectator should stand afar from the action to enable him or her carry out an independent judgment.

The Epic Theatre is narrative, turns the spectator into an observer but arouses his capacity for action-forces him to take decisions and picture the world. He is made to face something that arouses argument and brings him to the point of recognition. The spectator stands outside, studies the situation and uses his conclusion to reform the society. The Epic Theatre challenges traditional notions of drama and encourages a more critical and engaged approach to storytelling.

Patrice Pavis (1947-) on *Analysing Performance*:

The focuses of Pavis in his extensive writings are on semiology and interculturalism. He explores the analysis of performances across various theatrical forms. He also contributed to discussions on theatre analysis as seen in his article entitled *Theatre Analysis: Some Questions and Questionnaire* (1985).

Analysing performance venue provides conceptual tools for understanding a range of performances, including theatre, dance, other audio-visual media and mime. Analysis of performances starts from the gestures and facial expressions of an actor to the broader social context or network in which the theatre is embedded. It explores the importance of every aspect of a performance including actor, costume, space, time, music, lighting, and sound, thus highlighting awareness of the roles of socio-cultural context in the interpretation of performances. Pavis takes the reader on a journey from a straightforward analysis of a performance to examining it through the lenses of semiology and anthropology. Semiology is the study of signs and symbols while anthropology is concerned with cultural and social aspects of the performance.

Segmentation is part of the natural approach and also part of the traditional approach. The tradition of dramaturgical analysis goes back to Diderot (1713-1784), in whose work we find remarkable descriptions acting and stage effects. In France this same approach is found in critical theorists such as Roland Barthes or Bernard Dort. Their analyses are always based on ideological and aesthetic mechanisms found in the production. Until the 1960s, this mode of analysis dominated all others due to its breadth of vision, its precision and the compromise it managed to find between meticulous observation and interpretation.

There are two types of analysis; the reporting and reconstruction analyses. Reporting analysis is similar to live radio and television sports broadcasting and comments on ongoing performances like in a soccer game. Reconstruction analysis, on the other hand, is a specialty of the west which is inclined to conserve and store documents and to maintain historical monuments. Pavis' work focuses on the interplay between different sign systems in performance, highlighting the importance of understanding the relationships between text, body, space and other elements.

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) on *The Artwork of The Future* (1849):

Wagner discusses his idea of the total artwork where music, drama, visual arts and other elements unite to create a comprehensive work of art. He argues that art must tread the path of science which lies from error to knowledge, fancy to reality, religion to nature. Science takes

over the arbitrary concepts of the human brain in their totality while by her side life follows in its totality the instinctive evolution of necessity. Science thus bears the burden of the sins of life using direct anti thesis. It is true that the artist does not at first proceed directly, he certainly sets about his work in an arbitrary, selective and mediating mood. But while he plays the go-between and picks and chooses, the product of his energy is not as yet the work of art nay his procedure is rather that of a scientist who seeks and probes and therefore errs in her caprice only when his choice is made and is born from pure necessity. The artwork thus conceived as an immediate vital art is therewith the perfect reconciliation of science with life. Wagner's ideas have had a profound impact on numerous artists, including composers like Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss, thus shaping the development of opera, musical theatre as well as modern and contemporary theatre.

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) on *What is Art* (1897):

Tolstoy wrote plays like *The Power of Darkness*. In his works he addresses and explores moral and psychological themes. *What is Art* is an essay which was written in 1897 in which Tolstoy discusses his views on art and contends that art should communicate feelings in a way that promotes moral unity and empathy among people. He emphasises the importance of sincerity and the transmission of feelings in art. He also distinguishes between art and counterfeit art. He says the infectiousness of art differentiates art from counterfeit arts, otherwise, bad arts, which are exemplified by lack of sincerity, failure to transmit genuine feelings and aim at pleasing or impressing rather than communicating authentic emotions. Tolstoy therefore, views overly ornate, pretentious, or art for art's sake and without genuine emotional transmission as counterfeit. He argues that infectious art is that art which conveys real feelings and connects people emotionally and morally. Conversely, Tolstoy argues against art that prioritises beauty or aesthetic pleasure over the transmission of genuine feelings and moral connection. His emphasis is that art must convey feelings in a way that promotes unity and empathy rather than merely pursuing aesthetic values.

Tolstoy also discusses the idea of "infectious" art and argues that true art is "infectious" in that it transmits feelings from the artist to the audience thereby evoking similar emotions in others. He stresses that art should be a channel of communicating emotions in a manner that others get "infected" with feelings that create a shared emotional experience, arguing that this infectious quality is a key criterion for evaluating the value and authenticity of art. Tolstoy's *What is Art* has shaped discussions about the nature and purpose of art, the role of the artist and the importance of authenticity and moral purposes in creative works.

Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) on *Towards a Poor Theatre*:

Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* is a seminal work in dramatic theory and criticism. Grotowski's concept of poor theatre focuses on the relationship between actor and audience. It emphasises stripping the theatre of excesses like elaborate sets, costumes and technical effects, thus focusing on the actor's body and voice as primary tools of expression. He places the actor at the centre of the theatrical experience, developing rigorous training methods to enable actors use their bodies and voices expressively. He developed a training philosophy known as Via Negativa which involves eliminating personal habits, blocks and social masks to achieve authentic expression. His productions feature non-traditional seating arrangements, creating a sense of equality and shared vulnerability between actors and audience. Grotowski's work continues to impact theatre practitioners, scholars and audiences across the globe. His emphasis

on intimacy, authenticity, and actor-audience relationship has greatly shaped the development of modern and contemporary theatre.

Conclusion

Dramatic theory and criticism encompass a robust and dynamic field that continues to evolve as a response to changing artistic, social and cultural landscapes. By examining the diverse perspectives and approaches that have shaped this field, the society gains a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between theatre, performance and the society. Dramatic theory and criticism will remain essential tools for analysing, interpreting and creating meaningful theatrical experiences that reflect, challenge and inspire the society. Through its ongoing development, this field ensures that theatre and performance remain vibrant, relevant and powerful forms of human expression.

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