

Modern Era

Supplementary Notes

Problem Plays

Problem play is a type of drama that developed in the 19th century to deal with controversial social issues in a realistic manner, to expose social ills, and to stimulate thought and discussion on the part of the audience.

Henrik Ibsen, whose works had artistic merit as well as topical relevance. His

first experiment in the genre was *Love's Comedy* (published 1862), a critical

study of contemporary marriage. He went on to expose the hypocrisy, greed, and hidden corruption of his society in a number of masterly plays: *A Doll's*

House portrays a woman's escape from her childish, subservient role as a

bourgeois wife; *Ghosts* attacks the convention that even loveless and unhappy

marriages are sacred; *The Wild Duck* shows the consequences of an egotistical

idealism; *An Enemy of the People* reveals the expedient morality of

respectable provincial towns people.

In England, George Bernard Shaw brought the problem play to

its intellectual peak, both with his plays and with their long and witty prefaces.

In his first play, *Widowers' Houses* (1892), he emphasized social and economic

issues instead of romance, adopting the ironic comedic tone that would

characterize all his work. He described his first plays as "unpleasant" because

they forced the spectator to face unpleasant facts; these plays include *Mrs.*

Warren's Profession (1893), which concerns prostitution and was barred from

performance until 1902. He then wrote four "pleasant" plays, including the

comedies *Arms and the Man* (1894) and *Candida* (1895). His next plays

include *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1899) and *Man and Superman* (1905). He used

high comedy to explore society's foibles in *Major Barbara* (1905), *The Doctor's*

Dilemma (1911), and *Pygmalion* (1913), his comedic masterpiece. Other

notable plays include *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), *Heartbreak House* (1919),

and *Saint Joan* (1923). His other writings and speeches made him a controversial public figure for much of his life. He received the Nobel Prize in 1925.

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1925 was awarded to George Bernard Shaw "for his work which is marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty."

The Auden Group

The Auden Group or the Auden Generation is a group of British and Irish writers active in the 1930s that included W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Cecil Day-Lewis, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, and sometimes Edward Upward and Rex Warner. They were sometimes called simply the Thirties poets

Thomas Hardy

"The Darkling Thrush"

"The Darkling Thrush" is a poem by the English poet and novelist Thomas Hardy. The poem describes a desolate world, which the poem's speaker takes as cause for despair and hopelessness. However, a bird (the "thrush") bursts onto the scene, singing a beautiful and hopeful song—so hopeful that the speaker wonders whether the bird knows something that the speaker doesn't. Written in December 1900, the poem reflects on the end of the 19th century and the state of Western civilization. The desolation of the scene the speaker sees serves as an extended metaphor for the decay of Western civilization, while the thrush is a symbol for its possible rebirth through religious faith.

The Dynasts

The Dynasts, in full *The Dynasts, a Drama of the Napoleonic Wars, in Three Parts, Nineteen Acts, and One Hundred and Thirty Scenes* is a

verse drama by Thomas Hardy, published in three parts in 1903, 1906, and

1908 and together in one volume in 1910. The monumental work, written

mostly in blank verse with some scenes, descriptive connecting sequences, and stage directions written in prose, depicts the career of Napoleon

Bonaparte from 1805 until his defeat at Waterloo in 1815. The work illustrates

Hardy's stoical pessimism and is a clear statement of his belief in "Immanent Will," a blind and indifferent force that determines the fates (and

generally blights the lives) of the privileged and the common people alike

Heroines of Hardy's Novels

➤ Tess Durbeyfield : Tess of the d'Urbervilles

➤ Bathsheba Everdene : Far from the Madding Crowd

➤ Eustacia Vye : The Return of the Native

➤ Sue Bridehead : Jude the Obscure

➤ Elizabeth-Jane : The Mayor of Casterbridge

T.S.Eliot

Murder in the Cathedral

Murder in the Cathedral is a poetic drama in two parts, with a prose sermon

interlude, the most successful play by American English poet T.S. Eliot. The play was performed at Canterbury Cathedral in 1935 and published the same year.

Set in December 1170, it is a modern miracle play on the martyrdom of St.

Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury.

The play's most striking feature is the use of a chorus in the Classical Greek manner. The poor women of Canterbury who make up the chorus nervously

await Thomas's return from his seven-year exile, fretting over his volatile relationship with King Henry II. Thomas arrives and must resist four temptations: worldly pleasures, lasting power as chancellor, recognition as a leader of the barons against the king, and eternal glory as a martyr.

After Thomas delivers his Christmas morning sermon, four knights in the service of the king accost him and order him to leave the kingdom. When he refuses, they return to slay him in the cathedral.

The Cocktail Party

The Cocktail Party is a verse drama in three acts by T.S. Eliot, produced at the Edinburgh Festival in August in 1949 and published in 1950. Based on *Alceste* by Euripides, it is a morality play presented as a comedy of manners. Eliot's most commercially successful play, it was more conventional and less poetic than his earlier dramatic works.

The marital problems of Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne are of special interest to an unidentified guest at their dismal cocktail party. The guest is later identified as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, a prescient psychiatrist who helps heal the Chamberlaynes' marriage. He also counsels Celia Coplestone, Edward's mistress and the main moral figure of the piece, to work out her salvation.

The Waste Land

The Waste Land is a long poem by T.S. Eliot, published in 1922, first in London in *The Criterion* (October), next in New York City in *The Dial* (November), and finally in book form, with footnotes by Eliot. The 433-line, five-part poem was dedicated to fellow poet Ezra Pound, who helped condense the original manuscript to nearly half its size. It was one of the most influential works of the 20th century.

The five parts of *The Waste Land* are entitled:

1. The Burial of the Dead

2. A Game of Chess
3. The Fire Sermon
4. Death by Water
5. What the Thunder Said

The Waste Land expresses with great power the disillusionment and disgust of the period after World War I. In a series of fragmentary vignettes, loosely linked by the legend of the search for the Grail, it portrays a sterile world of panicky fears and barren lusts and of human beings waiting for some sign or promise of redemption. The depiction of spiritual emptiness in the secularized city—the decay of urbs aeterna (the “eternal city”)—is not a simple contrast of the heroic past with the degraded present; it is rather a timeless, simultaneous awareness of moral grandeur and moral evil.

Tradition and the Individual Talent

T.S. Eliot's best-known essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” was first published in 1919 and soon after included in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (1920). Eliot attempts to do two things in this essay: he first redefines “tradition” by emphasizing the importance of history to writing and understanding poetry, and he then argues that poetry should be essentially “impersonal,” that is separate and distinct from the personality of its writer. Eliot's idea of tradition is complex and unusual, involving something he describes as “the historical sense” which is a perception of “the pastness of the past” but also of its “presence.” For Eliot, past works of art form an order or “tradition”; however, that order is always being altered by a new work which modifies the “tradition” to make room for itself. This view, in which “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past,” requires that a poet be familiar with almost all literary history—not just the immediate past but the distant past and not just the literature of his or her own country but the whole “mind of Europe.”

Eliot's second point is one of his most famous and contentious. A poet, Eliot maintains, must "self-sacrifice" to this special awareness of the past; once this awareness is achieved, it will erase any trace of personality from the poetry because the poet has become a mere medium for expression. Using the analogy of a chemical reaction, Eliot explains that a "mature" poet's mind works by being a passive "receptacle" of images, phrases and feelings which are combined, under immense concentration, into a new "art emotion." For Eliot, true art has nothing to do with the personal life of the artist but is merely the result of a greater ability to synthesize and combine, an ability which comes from deep study and comprehensive knowledge. Though Eliot's belief that "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" sprang from what he viewed as the excesses of Romanticism, many scholars have noted how continuous Eliot's thought—and the whole of Modernism—is with that of the Romantics'; his "impersonal poet" even has links with John Keats, who proposed a similar figure in "the chameleon poet." But Eliot's belief that critical study should be "diverted" from the poet to the poetry shaped the study of poetry for half a century, and while "Tradition and the Individual Talent" has had many detractors, especially those who question Eliot's insistence on canonical works as standards of greatness, it is difficult to overemphasize the essay's influence. It has shaped generations of poets, critics and theorists and is a key text in modern literary criticism.

Kate Millet on D.H. Lawrence's works

Millett identified literature as a tool for political ideology because it recreated sexual inequalities and reinforced patriarchal values of society. To expose the depth of this insidious indoctrination, Millett examined the work of four 20th century male authors, including D.H. Lawrence (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in which Millett exposes a sustained celebration of masculine sexuality and a misogynistic presumption of female passivity). Millett's analyses rocked the foundations of literary canon by castigating classics — D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* for their use of sex to denigrate women. In contrast, she applauds the gender politics of homosexual writer Jean Genet.

Joseph Conrad

He is noted for tales in rich prose of dangerous life at sea and in exotic places, settings he used to reveal his real concern, his deeply pessimistic vision of the human struggle. Of his many novels, which include *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), several are regarded as masterpieces. He also published seven story collections; the novella "*Heart of Darkness*" (1902) is his most famous shorter work.

Heart of Darkness

Heart of Darkness examines the horrors of Western colonialism, depicting it as a phenomenon that tarnishes not only the lands and peoples it exploits but also those in the West who advance it. Critics have not always treated *Heart of Darkness* favourably, rebuking its dehumanizing representation of colonized peoples and its dismissive treatment of women.

Lord Jim

Lord Jim, novel by Joseph Conrad, published in 1900. In this Conrad explores in great depth the perplexing, ambiguous problem of lost honour and guilt, expiation and heroism.

The title character is a man haunted by guilt over an act of cowardice. He becomes an agent at an isolated East Indian trading post. There his feelings of inadequacy and responsibility are played out to their logical and inevitable end.

Henry James

The Art of Fiction

The Art of Fiction is a critical essay by Henry James, published in 1884 in Longman's Magazine. It was written as a rebuttal to "Fiction as One of the Fine Arts," a lecture given by Sir Walter Besant in 1884, and is a manifesto of literary realism that decries the popular demand for novels that are saturated with sentimentality or pessimism. It was published separately in 1885.

In The Art of Fiction, James disagrees with Besant's assertions that plot is more important than characterization, that fiction must have a "conscious moral purpose," and that experience and observation outweigh imagination as creative tools. James argues against these restrictive rules for writing fiction, responding that "no good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind."

The Art of the Novel : Critical Prefaces

This collection of prefaces, originally written for the 1909 multi-volume New York Edition of Henry James's fiction, first appeared in book form in 1934 with an introduction by poet and critic R. P. Blackmur. In his prefaces, James tackles the great problems of fiction writing :character, plot, point of view, inspiration; and explains how he came to write novels such as The Portrait of a Lady and The American.

E.M Forster

Aspects of the Novel

Aspects of the Novel is a collection of literary lectures by E.M. Forster, published in 1927. For the purposes of his study, Forster defines the novel as "any fictitious prose work over 50,000 words." He employs the

term aspects because its vague, unscientific nature suits what he calls the “spongy” form in question. The seven aspects offered for discussion are the story, people, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern, and rhythm. The author compares the form and texture of the novel to those of a symphony. As for subject, he expects the work “to reveal the hidden life at its source.” Human nature, he concludes, is the novelist’s necessary preoccupation.

Flat And Round Characters

Both flat and round characters are characters as described by the course of their development in a work of literature. Flat characters are two-dimensional in that they are relatively uncomplicated and do not change throughout the course of a work. By contrast, round characters are complex and undergo development, sometimes sufficiently to surprise the reader.

The two types are described by E.M. Forster in his book Aspects of the Novel (1927). The example he gives of a flat character is Mrs. Micawber in Charles Dickens’s David Copperfield (1849–50), of a round character Becky Sharp in William Thackeray’s Vanity Fair (1847–48).

J.M. Barrie

Scottish dramatist and novelist J.M. Barrie is best known as the creator of Peter Pan, the boy who refused to grow up. Barrie was born and educated in Scotland and then moved to London, where he wrote a number of successful novels and plays. There he met the Llewelyn Davies boys, who inspired him to write about a baby boy who has magical adventures in Kensington Gardens (first included in Barrie's 1902 adult novel The Little White Bird), then to write Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up, a 1904 West End "fairy play" about an ageless boy and an ordinary girl named Wendy who have adventures in the fantasy setting of Neverland.

Kailyard school

Kailyard school was late 19th-century movement in Scottish fiction characterized by a sentimental idealization of humble village life. Its name derives from the Scottish "kail-yard," a small cabbage patch usually adjacent to a cottage. The Kailyard novels of prominent writers such as Sir James Barrie, author of *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888) and *A Window in Thrums* (1889), Ian Maclaren (pseudonym of John Watson), and S.R. Crockett were widely read throughout Scotland, England, and the United States and inspired many imitators. The natural and unsophisticated style and parochial viewpoint quickly degenerated into mawkish sentimentality, which provoked a hostile reaction among contemporary Scottish realists and later writers of the 20th century.

William Empson

Seven Types of Ambiguity

Seven Types of Ambiguity, in full *Seven Types of Ambiguity: A Study of Its Effects on English Verse*, is a critical work by William Empson, published in 1930 and revised in 1947 and 1953. The book was influential as one of the foundations of the school of literary theory known as New Criticism.

In *Seven Types of Ambiguity* Empson sought to enhance the reader's understanding of a poem by isolating the linguistic properties of the text. He suggested that words or references in poems are often ambiguous and, if presented coherently, carry multiple meanings that can enrich the reader's appreciation of the work. He argued that the complexities of cognitive and tonal meanings in poetry form the basis of the reader's emotional response.

In general usage, a word or reference is deemed ambiguous if it has more than one possible meaning. In *Seven Types*, Empson wrote, "I propose to use the word in an extended sense, and shall think relevant to my subject any verbal

nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language.” Empson’s seven types are briefly defined in the table of contents: “First-type ambiguities arise when a detail is effective in several ways at once ... In second-type ambiguities two or more alternative meanings are fully resolved into one The condition for the third type ambiguity is that two apparently unconnected meanings are given simultaneously. ... In the fourth type the alternative meanings combine to make clear a complicated state of mind in the author. ... The fifth type is a fortunate confusion, as when the author is discovering his idea in the act of writing ... or not holding it in mind all at once. ... In the sixth type what is said is contradictory or irrelevant and the reader is forced to invent interpretations. ... The seventh type is that of full contradiction, marking a division in the author’s mind.”

Various Literary Movements

Imagism

The Imagists wrote succinct verse of dry clarity and hard outline in which an exact visual image made a total poetic statement. Imagism was a successor to the French Symbolist movement, but, whereas Symbolism had an affinity with music, Imagism sought analogy with sculpture. In 1914 Pound turned to Vorticism, and Amy Lowell largely took over leadership of the group. Among others who wrote Imagist poetry were John Gould Fletcher and Harriet Monroe; and Conrad Aiken, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, D.H. Lawrence, and T.S. Eliot were influenced by it in their own poetry.

The four Imagist anthologies (Des Imagistes, 1914; Some Imagists, 1915, 1916, 1917), and the magazines Poetry (from 1912) and The Egoist (from 1914), in the United States and England, respectively, published the work of a dozen Imagist poets.

Cubism

Cubism was a highly influential visual arts style of the 20th century that was created principally by the artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914. The Cubist style emphasized the flat, two-dimensional surface of the picture plane, rejecting the traditional techniques of perspective, foreshortening, modeling, and chiaroscuro and refuting time-honoured theories that art should imitate nature. Cubist painters were not bound to copying form, texture, colour, and space. Instead, they presented a new reality in paintings that depicted radically fragmented objects.

Impressionism

Impressionism is a major movement, first in painting and later in music, that developed chiefly in France during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Impressionist painting comprises the work produced between about 1867 and 1886 by a group of artists who shared a set of related approaches and techniques. The most conspicuous characteristic of Impressionism in painting was an attempt to accurately and objectively record visual reality in terms of transient effects of light and colour. In music, it was to convey an idea or affect through a wash of sound rather than a strict formal structure.

Surrealism

Surrealism was a movement in the visual arts and literature that flourished in Europe between World Wars I and II. Surrealism grew principally out of the earlier Dada movement, which before World War I produced works of anti-art that deliberately defied reason; Surrealism developed in reaction against the "rationalism" that had led to World War I. The movement was founded in 1924 by André Breton as a means of joining dream and fantasy to everyday reality to form "an absolute reality, a surreality." Drawing on the theories of Sigmund Freud, he concluded that the unconscious was the wellspring of the imagination. Breton was a poet, but Surrealism's major achievements were in painting. Some artists practiced organic, emblematic, or absolute Surrealism,

expressing the unconscious through suggestive yet indefinite biomorphic images (e.g., Jean Arp, Max Ernst, André Masson, Joan Miró). Others created realistically painted images, removed from their context and reassembled within a paradoxical or shocking framework (Salvador Dalí, René Magritte). With its emphasis on content and free form, Surrealism provided a major alternative to the contemporary, highly formalistic Cubist movement and was largely responsible for perpetuating in modern painting the traditional emphasis on content.

Symbolism

Symbolism was a literary and artistic movement that originated with a group of French poets in the late 19th century, spread to painting and the theatre, and influenced the European and American literatures of the 20th century to varying degrees. Symbolist artists sought to express individual emotional experience through the subtle and suggestive use of highly symbolized language.

Symbolism originated in the revolt of certain French poets against the rigid conventions governing both technique and theme in traditional French poetry, as evidenced in the precise description of Parnassian poetry. The Symbolists wished to liberate poetry from its expository functions and its formalized oratory in order to describe instead the fleeting, immediate sensations of man's inner life and experience. They attempted to evoke the ineffable intuitions and sense impressions of man's inner life and to communicate the underlying mystery of existence through a free and highly personal use of metaphors and images that, though lacking in precise meaning, would nevertheless convey the state of the poet's mind and hint at the "dark and confused unity" of an inexpressible reality.

Principal Symbolist poets included the Frenchmen Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud, and the Belgian poet Émile Verhaeren. Many Symbolists were also identified with the Decadent movement. Just as Symbolist painters avoided concrete representation in favour of fantasy and

imagination, Symbolist dramatists relied on myth, mood, and atmosphere to reveal only indirectly the deeper truths of existence.

The Symbolist movement in poetry reached its peak around 1890 and began to enter a precipitous decline in popularity about 1900. The atmospheric, unfocused imagery of Symbolist poetry eventually came to be seen as overrefined and affected, and the term *décadent*, which the Symbolists had once proudly flaunted, became with others a term of derision denoting mere *fin-de-siècle* preciousness. Symbolist works had a strong and lasting influence on much British and American literature in the 20th century, however. Their experimental techniques greatly enriched the technical repertoire of modern poetry, and Symbolist theories bore fruit both in the poetry of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot and in the modern novel as represented by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in which word harmonies and patterns of images often take preeminence over the narrative.

Futurism

Futurism was an early 20th-century artistic movement centred in Italy that emphasized the dynamism, speed, energy, and power of the machine and the vitality, change, and restlessness of modern life. During the second decade of the 20th century, the movement's influence radiated outward across most of Europe, most significantly to the Russian avant-garde. The most-significant results of the movement were in the visual arts and poetry.

Futurism was first announced on February 20, 1909, when the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* published a manifesto by the Italian poet and editor Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Marinetti coined the word Futurism to reflect his goal of discarding the art of the past and celebrating change, originality, and innovation in culture and society.

Marinetti's manifesto glorified the new technology of the automobile and the beauty of its speed, power, and movement. Exalting violence and conflict, he called for the sweeping repudiation of traditional values and the destruction of cultural institutions such as museums and libraries. The

manifesto's rhetoric was passionately bombastic; its aggressive tone was purposely intended to inspire public anger and arouse controversy.

Not content with merely taking over the urban and modernist themes of Futurist painting, the writers who embraced Italian literary Futurism sought to develop a language appropriate for what they perceived to be the speed and ruthlessness of the early 20th century. They established new genres, the most significant being parole in libertà ("words-in-freedom"), also referred to as free-word poetry. It was poetry liberated from the constraints of linear typography and conventional syntax and spelling. A brief extract from Marinetti's war poem "Battaglia peso + odore" (1912; "Battle Weight + Smell") was appended to one of the Futurists' manifestos as an example of words-in-freedom:

Arterial-roads bulging heat fermenting hair armpits drum blinding
blondness breathing + rucksack 18 kilograms common sense = seesaw
metal moneybox weakness: 3 shudders commands stones anger enemy
magnet lightness glory heroism Vanguard: 100 meters machine guns
rifle-fire explosion violins brass pim pum pac pac tim tum machine guns
tataratatarata

"Designed analogies" (pictograms where shape analogically mimics meaning), dipinti paroliberi (literary collages combining graphic elements with free-word poetry), and sintesi (minimalist plays) were among other new genres. New forms of dissemination were favoured, including Futurist evenings, mixed-media events, and the use of manifesto leaflets, poster poems, and broadsheet-format journals containing a mixture of literature, painting, and theoretical pronouncements. Until 1914, however, output fell far short of the movement's declared program, and Futurist poets—in contrast to Marinetti—remained largely traditionalist in their subject matter and idiom, as was demonstrated by the movement's debut anthology *I poeti futuristi* (1912; "The Futurist Poets").