



Research Paper

A Through Comparison of Acting Style from Naturalism to Modern Theater

Xuanchen Li
Westtown School

Abstract:

Starting from the late 19th century, people throughout the world were trying to develop new ways of acting and staging, following the trend of Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, and Expressionism in dramatic literature. The great variety of exploration on stage brought competition as well as the incorporation of different styles of playwriting and performance. Multiple artistic movements in dramatic literature that happened during the 19th and 20th centuries in theater not only facilitated the emergence of various great artists and the creation of landmark productions, but also shaped actor training techniques, which were shared globally. This paper will analyze the work of several dramatists and directors, and consider how developments in dramatic literature, including Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, and Expressionism, led to changes in acting style.

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1. Psychological Truth on the Stage: The Dramatic Literature of Realism and Naturalism (1870s-Present)

Dramatic realism emerged as a movement in the last third of the 19th century, with such plays as Ibsen's "A Doll House" (1879), which concerns the "hypocrisies and inequalities of Victorian marriages" (Gainor) through the character of Nora, a woman who is constantly controlled by other people, living like a doll. Prior to the Realist movement, in the mid-19th century, advances in theatrical machinery and design techniques had revolutionized the theater world. Producers tried to add a lot of special effects to their plays or hire celebrities to draw crowds. Dramatists were expected to cater to their audiences to gain fame and popularity. However, the appearance of Dramatic Realism reversed that trend. Realism aimed to reveal some most realistic, and often darkest, sides of people's lives. Realistic dramatists often used their productions to criticize social issues like gender inequalities and social hierarchy. Multiple dramatists contributed to the movement. George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893) discussed prostitution as well as women's emancipation, which was not commonly talked about on the stage in the period. August Strindberg similarly used *Miss Julie* (1888) to explore the battle between the sexes. Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1903) discussed his form of socialism, which was a politically bold move. Because of such topics, the plays were often notorious. However, with the spread of various theories, such as Darwinism and Marxism, and new ways of understanding those social issues, people gradually learned to appreciate those works and reflect on the positive effects they brought to human society.

Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) was among the Realistic dramatists who had a great influence on the development of Realism, creating plays to reveal social issues, and transitioning from the old Greek Theater. In a time when a lot of writers turned to write novels or poetry, Ibsen focused on drama. After the creation of the first two of his plays, he started to shift his attention from historical stories to contemporary concerns—he started to expose the bad and dirty sides of society, showing social situations and moral lessons. Early audiences were shocked by the realism of his plays; people were not ready for this transition. *A Doll House* (1879) is one of his most impactful plays. It challenged common beliefs about women's status and gender relations in the period. People were shocked to see how women were presented as independent and freed souls. In *A Doll House*, he raised questions about credit, inheritance, and 19th-century laws that prevented women from accessing money, including taking loans or writing checks in their own names. All of these themes reflected real situations in people's lives. *A Doll House* became one of the most well-known representatives of dramatic Realism.

This new movement in playwriting called for a new kind of acting. To see what, it is useful to examine the play in greater detail. To do so, let us consider a contemporary production of *A Doll's House* (2012), under the title *A Doll's House*, directed by Carrie Cracknell at the Young Vic Theater in London, with Hattie Morahan as Nora and Dominic Rowan as Torvald.

A Doll's House showed its significance in the Realism movement by revealing women's inferior role both in a family and in society back in the 18th century. This play talks about a typical married couple. Nora, the wife, borrowed loans from the bank in the name of her father in order to afford a trip for her and her husband, Torvald. However, this was considered illegal back then for a woman to have loans. She was threatened by the money lender who was also one of Torvald's employees to get his position in the company back. Finally, with all these tensions and struggles, Nora expresses all her feelings publicly.

Carrie Cracknell's 2012 production, which merged elements of contemporary life with elements of the 19th century, surprises me with its natural and realistic feel of life. It is almost like the conjunction of modern and old times. Hattie Morahan's Nora expresses her happiness, confusion, fear, and tension perfectly through body movements and facial expressions. Generally speaking, all of the actors' acting styles are close to life: especially in the scene where Torvald, Nora, Nora's school friend Mrs. Lind, and their family "friend" Dr. Rank are secretly sharing chocolate. In the beginning, everything is just so calm and normal. All four characters are acting normal, and the actors show us their dominant character traits, and their social selves: Torvald embodies aplomb, Nora is playful and childish, Dr. Rank is interactive and polite, Mrs. Linde is caring, and so on. Because this stage production was filmed using both long shots and close-ups, I can see their facial expressions rather clearly. The Young Vic, though a world-famous theater, is very small, with just 70 seats, so the space - like the play - supports an intimate and truthful acting style. We can see the sparkles in Nora's eyes when she talks about money. We can see the care Mrs. Linde has for Nora when she confesses her dilemma. Then, the mood changes when Nora is informed that forging a signature is a crime and she will be hated by Torvald. From that point on then, she is no longer playful anymore. Whenever we see her interacting with other characters, she is cautious about what she says and watchful of how others behave. The turning of her eyes, and the positions of her hands from time to time evoke for us that she is nervous. At almost the end of the show is when they come back home from the party. Torvald is drunk and Nora is panicked. Different characters' actions and how they resemble real life are really interesting in this scene. Mrs. Linde is always elegant and calm. She positioned herself in the frame of what we see to emphasize that the main character in this scene is Torvald and Nora. As for Torvald, the performances of Torvald are so precise and realistic: the controlled movements of his arms and head in the air. He looks just like men after they are drunk. And thanks to the camera, we can see his facial expressions. We can see the "distorted" eyebrows and the way he looks at others. It's just like Jack Sparrow, especially the arm movements. It's almost like he is holding his whole body by his feet. Nora's behaviors are very different from Torvald's—she is constrained and nervous. When she stands beside Torvald talking to Mrs. Linde, her hands are in constant movement. And she just can't standstill. The constant movement is what she usually presents at the beginning of the play, but we can see that here, she just wants this thing to be over soon. And also, when they are kissing, her hands are always in between them, kind of indicating she is trying to push her husband away. As the play comes to the end—the argument between Nora and Torvald - both characters, Nora and Torvald, roar and swing their hands in the air. It is so lively.

This play is constructed in a way so close to life that audiences can almost see clips of their lives on stage. It falls into the category of psychological realism not only because of the feminist idea it transferred but also because of the actors' acting skills. Just like Stanislavsky's way of acting, they become the character—talk like them, move like them, and even think like them, and every small detail they present on stage is intentional. With the same scripts, the production in 2012 combines ideas of Realism with modern technology, bringing people a more comprehensive understanding of both the play itself and Realism. This sarcastic way of telling a story may be offensive to some people back then who were prone to the idea that men were superior to women and they should have more power over women. Accordingly, watching plays like this might make them emotional and obscure their thoughts. However, as people watch this play nowadays, they will be astonished at how accurate it is, a reflection of old-time society.

Naturalism appeared as a completion as well as an advancement over realism that was embodied in the work of various different dramatists mentioned above. Because the Naturalistic playwrights and directors benefited from the more advanced staging systems, leaving more room for creativity and imagination on how to express social issues. Also, some of the Naturalistic plays combined science and art together, which was not a common thing to happen in the theater field back then, because of the discovery of multiple significant theories, including Darwin's evolution theory. All these shifted people's perspectives on how to view things including the social issues they need to reveal through Naturalistic productions—they were more open-minded. In the late nineteenth century, literature and drama finally were tightly connected, and the playwrights continued to try to modernize theater and created many changes. These themes are founded because of the trend of naturalism which is even more scientific than realism. It asks people to depict the most authentic sides of life and people,

which sometimes can be hard to accept. Not only has naturalism changed the themes shown in plays, but it also changed the setting and stage of plays. The setting tends to be more realistic and close to life—even with real furniture or crowds in the written stories. The Naturalism movement was impacted by multiple scientific theories such as Darwin's Revolutionary Theory. It was one of the few times when we started to see the convergence of science and art. Naturalism also allowed new generations of actresses on stage. Just because of the themes those plays presented, they could only be played before small audiences or in private theaters. Indeed, there were lots of confrontations between the audiences who were not ready to or were not pleased by the changes and the playwrights. Some plays were attacked by their audiences because they addressed some of the darkest sides and harshest realities in people's lives.

It is really hard to change how people perceive theater. Even now, people cannot accept the changes in some things that have a fixed appearance in public. It is reminiscent of the controversy over the removal of Civil War memorials and other statues honoring those historical leaders who were involved in the violent oppression of minority populations in the US. But from the change to naturalism, we can see that it is a real success. To be honest, this is what some people understand about theater—to teach audiences lessons or transfer information in our lives.

The great theorist of Naturalism, Emile Zola (1840-1902), made his way in the Naturalism movement by transitioning from a novelist to a playwright, keeping his core belief that literature should be close to nature in both of these fields. The idea of Naturalism was first articulated by Emile Zola in his 1880 essay "Naturalism on the Stage". Though already renowned as a naturalistic novelist, when Zola wrote his first naturalistic play, *Thérèse Raquin*, he was hesitant. *Thérèse Raquin* was first written as a novel. It is hard to transform novels into plays because of ways of presenting information to the crowd. Furthermore, the novel *Thérèse* itself is controversial enough. It would only outrage the audience if anyone brings this to the theater. However, there must be someone to keep doing this, even if it would make people furious. Naturalism had taken its place in some novels, and it was in transformation in the theater field. It was hard to accept at first and the author who supported it might be criticized by the audiences, but people's future is about their life rather than fancy fairy tales. People need to look forward, and those who are unwilling to change will only be smothered by those who look and march forward. Zola thought that he had the burden and the right timing to bring this novel into a play. The characters and plots in the original novel are a perfect fit for her appetite and also for the period of the "theater revolution".

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was one of the great playwrights who played an influential role in the transition between Realism and Naturalism. Chekhov started his career by writing short stories and comic shows. That is just his interest. He graduated from college with a medical degree in 1879 and began writing alongside his work as a doctor. He majored in medicine and kept doing this, treating patients, even while he started to write. He began to write stories when he was little (mostly anecdotes) and published his work after graduating from college. Because of this, he became more and more popular locally. In 1884, he published his first collection of short stories: *Fairy Tales of Melpomene*, which was not that successful. Some of his finest stories include "Ward No.6" (1892), "My Life" (1896), and "Peasants" (1897). In 1887, his play *Ivanov* was produced and helped him gain huge popularity. He continued on the path of the dramatist, writing such dramas as *The Wood Demon* (1889) and *The Seagull* (1895). The reputation of *the Seagull* was not ideal when it was first produced in 1896 because, just like the transformation to Naturalism, people were not ready to accept this huge change and leap in the theater world. However, with the positive reviews earned by the Moscow Art Theater production of 1898, *the Seagull* gained popularity. This production helped to popularize a lot of Chekhov's plays. These plays are innovations in stage design and dramaturge. Unlike most of the plays at that time, Chekhov used to show and transfer information or emotion overtly and directly—rather than using ambiguous words or irony. Konstantin Stanislavsky, founding artistic director of the Moscow Art Theater, would go on and direct three more of Chekhov's plays, *Uncle Vanya* (1899), *The Three Sisters* (1901), and the *Cherry Orchard* (1904); all gained great success.

The Seagull was an important player during the Naturalism movement. The presentation of these topics using the form of theater, correspondingly, requires actors to act more naturally. *The Seagull* tells a fictional story about a young playwright trying to reform the field of theater into a form that allows truth to be revealed on stage. The main character, Treplev, realizes that the theater should be changed. However, he encounters multiple difficulties including discouragement from his mother Arkadina and from his audience. Treplev's desire to reform theater represents what was going on in real life—the exploration and rise of Symbolism in response to Naturalism and Realism across Europe and Russia. Treplev, however, is a symbolist playwright. Chekhov is a naturalist-realist. So while Chekhov himself is a change-maker, his character, Treplev, represents the upcoming generation, who will try to overthrow Naturalism and Realism. Chekhov tried to let audiences see what is actually happening in real life, instead of creating a utopia on stage, which only illustrates an ideal.

Artistic conflicts are not the only difficulties Treplev encounters. One of the most obvious struggles for all characters in this play is their complicated relationships, especially romantic relationships. Masha loves

Treplev; Treplev loves Nina; Nina has feelings toward Trigorin; Trigorin is in an affair with Arkadina. In other words, there are multiple complicated love triangles in this play. Indeed, there are so many things going on in this play at the same time that it resembles real life. The intricate relationships among characters create the psychological realism of this play. Chekhov tried to let audiences see what actually happens in life, instead of creating a utopia on stage, which only illustrates an ideal. This psychological realism would be imitated by a lot of playwrights later.

The Seagull is not the only play that can represent Naturalism, but was one of the most famous and had great influence, in part due to the 1898 production by the Moscow Art Theater. It would in turn influence the further development of the acting and directing methods of the Art Theater, and of the theater's artistic director, Konstantin Stanislavsky.

To better understand the changes brought about by Naturalism - in particular, the new demands on the actor - let us consider the opening of *The Seagull* in detail. In the opening scene, a group of main characters in this play, including Treplev, Arkadina, Sorin, Trigorin, and so on, are watching Nina perform Treplev's new production. Nina is so into the character. However, the audience within the play is not treating Treplev's play seriously. Arkadina at one point stands up and complains that she doesn't understand Treplev's play. Treplev is so furious that he too stands up and starts to argue with Arkadina in the middle of the performance. Treplev in *The Seagull* is representing those people who tried to revolutionize the theater world through a new style, Symbolism. As the scene makes clear, there are tons of obstacles to their progress. The interruption from Arkadina and the neglect from the rest of the audience show the lack of interest and respect in the changes Treplev tries to make and they even doubt whether it is a good thing to change dramatic tradition. It is normal to be cautious about unknown things. However, there must be people like Treplev who are willing to risk failure and social condemnation so that the development of theater can advance.

The group dynamics of the character interactions in this scene and throughout the play are really interesting. When all of the characters are on stage, instead of letting the audience follow one single conversation, Chekhov depicts multiple conversations. People talk in pairs and small groups and even interrupt each other. This disruptive interaction is representative of real life. Talking over each other is a really common behavior and it was embodied by Chekhov on stage. This behavioral realism in *The Seagull* is typical of naturalistic plays.

The realistic style of *the Seagull* required the actors to perform in a life-like way. Instead of the declamatory and melodramatic style of speech and action that typified earlier 19th-century European drama, actors during the era of Realism and Naturalism were natural about what they said and how they spoke since they needed to get accurate representations of their actors, which mimic what people in real life usually do. The *Seagull*'s players apply their daily observations to acting and make sure that the character doesn't seem fake and made up. It was a huge change in how actors performed.

The Lower Depths (1902) by Russian playwright Maxim Gorky is a play that shows the continued evolution of naturalism into greater levels of social concern. Like the two plays discussed above, this play served to reveal (in this case, heart-breaking) social problems of the period, specifically the extreme social hierarchy and the oppression faced by the "lower class." The characters in the play are those of the lowest classes in Russia, those who were ignored by the government and suffered from poor living conditions. Gorky's play exemplifies the strong relationship between theater production and real life that characterized early twentieth-century Naturalism.

The emancipation of the serfs in 1864 freed Russian peasants from cruel oppression, but it also caused severe problems like famine and agricultural failure. The lower class people who are the main characters in the play were suffering from this result. Gorki staged the reality of his times. Even though Gorki didn't experience all of this himself, he showed sympathy for people who were suffering. Naturalism was a perfect vehicle for Gorky to depict reality and show his sympathy.

In the opening scene of *The Lower Depths*, we see people of different walks of life, including a landlord, homeless men and women, shop owners, and former government officers, gathered in a flop house, depicted in the Moscow Art Theater as one shabby room with a giant table in the middle and beds that are as dirty as trash cans - an environment not for humans to live in. Just a few pages into the play, we can already see famine, physiological dysfunction, lack of money to pay rent, complicated relationships between people, and poor living conditions. It is a direct portrait of lower-class people's lives in Russia. The revelation of dirty truths and the use of advanced and accurate settings on stage exemplify naturalism. And while the social environment of *The Lower Depths* is radically different from the wealthy estate life depicted in *The Seagull*, the dynamic character interactions are similar to those in Chekhov's drama: characters in the opening scene are constantly talking over each other, having multiple conversations at once. It is life-like and brings the essence of Naturalistic acting on stage. *The Lower Depths* is a great example of naturalistic elements intertwining together, showing the issues of poverty and hierarchy in early twentieth-century Russia through a realistic depiction of human behavior in daily life.

2. A New Actor for a New Drama: Konstantin Stanislavsky and the art of psychological realism after 1912

All of these changes in writing style directly led to new approaches to directing, which in turn required actors to master acting techniques differently than before. One of the major figures in developing a new approach to the art of acting, rooted in psychological realism, a search for truth on the stage, and ensemble performance, was the Russian director and teacher, Konstantin Stanislavsky.

Konstantin Stanislavski was a world-renowned director. During his early life, his family opposed him to studying acting, directing, and drama. Actors were considered lower-class citizens in this period, and his family didn't want his future to be ruined. However, he believed he was chosen to reconstruct the theater, from the approach to acting to the preparation of the director, to the structure of the rehearsal process. With his determination to change the field of theater, he founded multiple institutions, including Moscow Art Theater in 1912.

In his lifetime, Stanislavskys witnessed three great revolutions in art and society: the rise of realism and naturalism in the visual arts and literature; realism overturned by the rise of the avant-garde; and Russia's political movement from monarchy to communism. In such a time of change, Stanislavski believed that the theater must also change, and that made it his mission to stage plays in a more realistic way. He wanted his productions to accurately represent what is going on in society. He wanted to stage the scene as realistically as possible and the rehearsal process was crucial to this. He thought that rehearsing for a play should not be superficial. It should also let actors feel the character and build their behavior habits. He emphasized using theater to reveal the truth as well as explore the inner world of a character. The connection built between actors and their corresponding characters is essential. He created a "Grammar of Acting," a way of training actors, and he founded the first studio of Moscow Art Theater in 1912 to develop his theory in practice.

In the Moscow Art Theater Studio, he developed one of his most famous achievements in the theater field – the Stanislavski system. A lot of people believe that writing about acting is harder than practicing it, and so did Stanislavski. "Emotion never exists without physical consequence", said Stanislavski. In his opinion, the body should be extremely relaxed during play because the tension in the body blocks the way to imagination and creativity. Also, he advocates improvising. He believed this is a good way to open actors' minds and not be restricted in any way. It is more about the experience instead of knowledge and he designed systems to foster this "experiencing", which is the concentration on the five senses. Starting in 1907 and till 1908, he turned to the inner world of characters instead of the motions. Concentration; imagination, and communication are equally important during acting and rehearsal. Actors should be and fully understand the characters. They should be able to get the subtexts and actions from actual texts.

Stanislavsky's encounter with the plays of Anton Chekhov drove the process. He staged *the Seagull* in the 1st year of Art Theater in 1898, at a time when Stanislavsky was just a director. But *Seagull*, with its psychological depth and, like Gorky's *Lower Depths*, complex ensemble scenes, demanded a new kind of acting. He started his journey of seeking new ways to perform. After directing some of Chekhov's plays including *The Seagull* (1895), he gained an artistic reputation and fame. Soon after that, Moscow Art theater became one of the leaders in the Realist Movement. With such success in directing several of both Chekhov and Gorky's plays, as well as realist and naturalist works by European playwrights, in 1907 Stanislavsky began to theorize a new approach to acting.

Nevertheless, his theatrical experiments were considered eccentric and opposed by several actors who were successful in some of Chekhov's plays without Stanislavsky's way of rehearsal. It agitated Stanislavsky and he only gained reluctant approval from the Art Theater. He felt that this might not be a good place for him to develop and revolutionize theater, so he moved out and created his First Studio. Additionally, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, which was the civil war in Russia, brought chaos to his peaceful life. Stanislavsky lost his wealth and privileges. Fewer people paid attention to theater production, dimming the light on his achievements. In such a turbulent society and with lessened attention from people to the theater, a lot of dramatists, including Stanislavsky, found it hard to implement new ideas on theater development.

3. The Avant-Garde

Naturalism and Realism were not the only theatrical movements that appeared in this period bringing change to the conventional theater. There were also other movements in the western theater, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which aimed at bringing change, such as Symbolism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Expressionism. Symbolism brought together the traditional performing arts with the visual arts, working in harmony to represent humanistic and spiritual themes and metaphors "beneath" the obvious issues raised by the plot (such as social issues). Unlike the naturalists, who focused on concrete situations which exemplified and criticized social problems, and psychologically distinctive characters, the Symbolists leaned toward abstraction and typical characters in everyday life. Symbolism was championed in Paris and also in England.

Because of industrialization, instead of focusing on people and their daily lives, a lot of theater productions focused on the domination and facilitation brought by machines. In addition, some actors and workers backstage were replaced by machines. For example, machines can control the curtains instead of people themselves. Many people critiqued the period of industrialization as well as the productions during that time as dehumanizing. However, these modernist playwrights tried to make use of the heavy industrialization and add machine elements to their plays. All these playwrights adapting to the change during the industrialization era were considered Avant-garde: a group of radical and advanced artists seeking social change.

I think all these different movements happened in the theater field because people were oppressed by something or someone. And we can see that for different countries, there were different movements that responded to political situations specifically in those countries. All these different “isms” represent the diversity of human beings and contribute to our understanding of the various contemporary theater productions.

4. Symbolism (late 19th Century-present):

A movement that followed closely with Naturalism, symbolism also gained great attention from the theater-going public. Symbolist dramatists tried to reach beyond the direct meaning of acts. For example, a quarrel between two characters might not only represent that they had a bad relationship but something more than that, just like a metaphor. Symbolist playwrights tried to remove all traces of naturalistic or imitative acting, and all romance and melodrama, in order to create a distinctive way of acting as well as transporting knowledge. France was the leading country in the Symbolism movement and its playwrights created multiple valuable plays.

However, as a stylistic movement after Naturalism, both Naturalism and Symbolism share in common an interest in social portraiture. In the *Seagull*, for instance, Madame Ranevskaya is at once a distinctive individualized character, and a representative of her social class, of her profession (theater artist), and of a particularly problematic relationship to motherhood. In symbolism, however, even those social attributes (class, profession) are stripped away. The focus is not on people in society, but on people in the universe, facing the existential horror of our human vulnerability, and the omnipresence of death. Symbolist plays, moreover, are poetic, meant to be performed almost musically, with an emphasis on the tones of speech, on rhythm, on atmosphere - and an absence of the kind of particularity and detail that characterized naturalist staging.

4.1. Maurice Maeterlinck (Belgium, 1862-1949):

Maurice Maeterlinck was a Belgian playwright, poet, and essayist, who made great contributions to the development of symbolist drama and the dissemination of symbolist ideas. He spent his early years writing poems and stories but later dedicated his life into writing plays. Significant works included *L'Intruse* (*The Intruder*, 1890), first performed on 21 May 1891; *Les Aveugles* (*The Blind*, 1890), first performed on 7 December 1891; *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1892), first performed 17 May 1893; and *La Mort de Tintagiles* (*The Death of Tintagiles*, 1894). Such works had a great impact on dramatists such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, W.B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, and Eugene O'Neill. After going to Paris, he met Villiers de l'Isle Adam who was a member of the symbolist movement and had a great influence on his later productions. Villiers de l'Isle Adam's ideas inspired him and directed him to the path and symbolist playwriting.

He had some distinct aspects to his plays. For instance, the integration of poetic skills into his plays also makes them distinct and inspiring. The impact of his plays was also shown in the creation of a new type of concise and spare dialogues for a theater production, which makes people focus more on the theme of symbolism (Static Drama). Many of Maeterlinck's plays drew their material from medieval legends. Even plays in a more realistic setting, such as *The Intruder* (in which a family awaits the arrival of death) are populated by characters without distinguishing characteristics, and without names: the Grandfather, the sisters, the baby, and so forth.

4.2. The Intruder (1890, Maurice Maeterlinck(Belgium, 1862-1949))

The Intruder by Maeterlinck exemplifies symbolism by building a fictional world that symbolizes some deep-rooted truth about family structure in society. In the first few scenes of *The Intruder*, we are introduced to multiple characters: a grandfather, an uncle, and a father. They all sit in a room waiting for the priest and a trio of women referred to only as The Sisters. Since the Grandfather is blind, he shows great insecurity about any noise outside. Only the three children are able to comfort him; he displays distrust toward the Uncle and the Father. He says to them that he can feel something is off with the weak mother but no one seems to believe in him until they actually go into the room and find out that the mother is dead.

In this confined and mysterious environment, the interactions between characters build a clear image of their relationships with each other and their sense of security. While waiting in the dark night for the aunt, all of them are anxious about the situation of the mother and the child. However, The Grandfather shows huge

insecurity toward the Dad and the Uncle. All these are direct reflections on the reality of family structures. In real life, situations like a grandfather showing distrust toward his daughter's husband often happen.

5. Expressionism (Early 20th-present)

Expressionism was a movement that originated in Germany that finally got spread all over the world at the start of the 20th century. Expressionists in theater tried to use exaggerations and even distortions to emphasize the strong feelings they want to transfer. People often saw extreme use of body language and high contrasts in staging. One of the most famous films is Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928). Because of the distinct way of acting and staging, it coexisted with other movements such as naturalism and realism for a while and got adopted by different dramatists.

5.1. Sophie Treadwell (1885-1970, United States)

Sophie Anita Treadwell was an American playwright and journalist. She has contributed to the Symbolism Movement through some of her plays such as *Machinal* in 1928. Reviewers thought that *Machinal* was not an expansion of modernism but an imitation of *The Adding Machine* (the use of the expressionist technique). The theme of *Machinal* and its creative innovation in theater brought it a great commercial success. However, *Machinal*'s popularity went down because of the disconnection between this play and Treadwell's later productions. Even by the time of her death, her productions were "virtually unknown". Later efforts to identify forgotten women writers made people notice Sophie Treadwell and *Machinal* and their interest in this blossom.

5.2. Machinal (1928, Sophie Treadwell(playwright), Arthur Hopkins(Director))

Machinal is a play about how a woman is persecuted by social norms and gradually commits murder against her own husband. At the beginning of this play, we learn about the working environment of the young woman. It is a really robotic environment where people are repeating the same action over and over again. This, as it says in the biography of Sophie Treadwell, is used to create office background noise. People are constantly talking over each other and focusing only on their own work. It depicts this scene in a dehumanized way: people are trained to be working robots instead of people with different characteristics. It is in this scene that we first meet the young woman. She is different from most of them,—she doesn't commit to norms that exist in the office environment.

As the young woman comes back to her home, we encounter her mom. From the conversation we have, we learn that her mom doesn't really care about every aspect of her life. When she is talking about something to her mom, her mom is thinking or talking to another person: the garbage man, neighbors, and so on. The use of offstage voices is also brilliant. Whenever the young woman and mom are talking about something important, regarding family, marriage, and married life, there will be some offstage voice discussing the corresponding topics. That not only helps the audience catch what is going on, but it also deepens the topic and provides comparisons to the young woman and her mom's opinions. When she tells her mom she is getting married, her mom is concerned at first. However, when she knows the husband is a powerful and rich man, she asks her to get married soon. From here, we can learn that her mom is a money-driven person and doesn't care what her daughter is thinking about this relationship. The scene in the office suggests that those pressures are already there. In the next few scenes, we get to learn about their life after marriage. Her husband is super excited since they finally get married. When they are in the hotel, he is really proactive and tries to do things married couples usually do. However, the young woman is reluctant. She clearly doesn't love her husband and doesn't want to do anything with him. However, in order not to let her husband realize that she tries to perform normally. As the scene transfers to the hospital, she gives birth to a child. However, we see nothing but revulsion toward her own child. When she is asked to hold him or milk him, she is really resistant. Later, in the bar, we see a different version of a young woman. There are four people talking and from their behaviors, we can see that the young woman has a crush on the man mentioned in the scene. She shows interest in every aspect of his life and tries to go hiking with him. However, based on the man, he doesn't love the young woman. In the bar, the young woman gets to herself and has the taste of freedom from social norms. Their conversation about how the man kills two guards in order to be freed foreshadows the woman's murder of her husband. Before, there were no rights for women. She is merely a possession of her husband. That is also why the woman feels chained and unfree. Under this mindset, she is eager to seek every chance to be freed, especially after experiencing a little freedom with the man. The magazines she is reading when she is in the hotel also foreshadow that killing is a good way to get freedom.

The court scene is really interesting. First of all, the reason why people said this real trial is dramatic is first because of the use of a microphone, which gives people a sense that they are in a theater, and secondly because of how messy and hilarious the court is. The conversation between the lawyer of the defense and the

young woman is worth considering. “You always did everything Mr. Jone likes” reinforces the point that the young woman is always constrained. This is the motive of the murder.

As it says in the Norton Anthology of Drama, *Machinal* is a feminist play. The setting and characters of this play—depersonalizing society, cultural diversity, wrenching portrait of a young woman, and so on— were strongly related to everyone back at that time. Her feelings and critiques about the world were not unique. All the details of the play exemplified the modernists’ notions of *gesamtkunstwerk* and her connections with expressionism were shown in the introductory part of the play as well as the use of soundscape. She used background music and also used music for scene transitions. She would always tell audiences what is about to happen so that they can have more time to consider deeper ideas like why and how things like this will happen. *Machinal* not only resisted the traditional well-made theater, but they also showed the negative impact of the media on the murder case.

Actors in *Machinal* used Stanislavsky’s system of training, providing them the ability to truly decipher a character. Treadwell’s ability to connect scripts to actors also gives enough subtext which is important to fully understand characters to actors.

Sophie Treadwell used music a lot while working with the stage and play. She believed that music can connect scenes and foster an environment. The arrangement of speech style was also close-to-life: some were colloquial and some were formal. There was even background noise created when it was in the office scene. She arranged a few pieces of furniture and props on stage.

Machinal gained commercial success while losing some popularity as time passed. In the late 20s, Sophie was noticed again. It had also become an important source for American theater. *Machinal* can be referred to as any woman (the behaviors and emotions) and the generalized and nameless characters can be referred to our world. Treadwell used her play to criticize the case as well as the depersonalization of society. She emphasized subtext which is important for actors to fully understand the character. Music is also an important tool for expressing emotions. Other than the commercial success *Machinal* gained, it also created great influence in supporting the Symbolism Movement. The choices of settings and what actors say were bold and imaginative to show the theme of feminism: women’s power and rights in society.

5.3. Vsevolod Meyerhold

Meyerhold’s early life was in constant situations of refusing common perceptions of theater. His system was considered equal to Stanislavsky’s system. Artistic principle: bring things that are not originally considered together. As he mentioned his Biomechanics theory, his career went down. It took a while to recover.

Stanislavsky defined the word “Theatricality” as direct understanding and comprehensiveness of the characters while Meyerhold tried to cope with every genre (requiring actors to be a little omnipotent) Actors don’t need to feel, they just need to play. He asked actors to experiment with masks. Also, actors need to move “with” music. He emphasized self-admiration, self-awareness, and flexibility. What he tried to practice is highly related to physics or engineering. There were a lot of derivatives — small changes—to the original system while maintaining the same essence. When he found some smart exercises, he would often use them in actual plays.

Based on Meyerhold, plays are more than surface truth, which is a common symbolist belief. He believes that audiences need to explore more than the simple movements of the actors—what are some deeper meanings? He uses his plays to criticize social situations such as power dynamics, social classifications, works, and the economy. His interests in his early life had a great influence on how he thought about training actors and the styles of his plays. He was fond of French Clowning, the 17th and 18th “*commedia dell'arte*”, pantomime, Chinese Theater, and Japanese Theater. He always tried and succeeded in developing his ways of training based on these.

In his early life, he used etudes which are semi-improvised and physical ways of training. His first company opened from 1903 to 1905, which was called *The New Drama*. One of the great difficulties for this company to develop is Stanislavsky’s *Moscow Art Theater* which had already gained a huge amount of fame. Meyerhold lived in the same era as Stanislavsky, but his way of thinking about theater was really different from Stanislavsky’s way of thinking—more of a symbolist and expressionist than a naturalist. In 1905, Stanislavsky invited Meyerhold to the *Moscow Art Theater* to work together on a symbolistic play. However, both of them found out soon that they believe in different things about theater and ended up splitting. Divergences between them were created after that experience working together: Meyerhold’s belief in theater is stylization while Stanislavsky believes in psychological realism; because of Meyerhold’s interests in martial arts, he favors repetition in actors’ behaviors, which people cannot see in real life; Meyerhold wants actors to be led by bodies while Stanislavsky wants actors to be led by their minds. In 1912-13, Meyerhold founded his own studio on *Borodinskaya St.* to experiment with his way of actor training.

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