19TH CENTURY THEATRE

MELODRAMA & THE WELL-MADE PLAY
DRAMATIC ARTS

• 1800-1875- flourishing of dramatic arts
• rise of the middle class
• economic, political, legal reforms
• Industrialization
• rise of Nationalism
• The most influential “3”- Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud
• theory of economics, theory of evolution, theory of psychology/the mind
POPULAR ENTERTAINMENTS

- attraction of the masses - the audience
- American popular entertainment - minstrelsy (minstrel shows), burlesque, variety shows, early vaudeville, circus
- P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) - the American Museum (New York City)
- show of curiosities, oddities, “the freak show”
- 1850s - Barnum worked with circus - a touring version of his museum - “The Greatest Show On Earth”
- Buffalo Bill Cody - wild west show (1880s)
- The Medicine Show - Quack Doctor - peddling remedies - with musical and comical performers - staging “cures” to sell a product
THE AUDIENCE

• 19th century- marked by Audience Riots

• Old Price Riots- London’s Convent Garden Theatre- prices raised.. and box seats rented out… audience disrupted performances

• Riot at The Comédie Française - over Victor Hugo’s play Hernani- because its form deviated from “neoclassicism- Hugo was a Romanticist.

• New York City- Astor Place Theatre- between Charles Macready (English star) & Edwin Forrest (American star) - difference in “acting” style Macready- subtle- more realistic style- vs. Forrest’s melodramatic style- fans (15,000) of Forrest mobbed the building- preventing Macready from performing- 22 people killed, others injured
ROMANTICISM, MELODRAMMA, THE WELL-MADE PLAY

• Romanticism - philosophy, artistic and literary movement

• Melodrama - “song drama” or “music drama”

• Well-Made Play - melodramas, and other plays - structure - builds to a contrived climax, not about a truthful characterization or emotional portrayal - “use” of term changes... initially a criticism... but, becomes a “structural format” used by Ibsen, and others
ROMANTICISM

- romantics rejected neoclassical “rules”
- connected to German movement - Storm and Stress (Sturm und Drang)
- plays - episodic and epic
- romantic hero - social outcast
- independent spirit - connection to liberty - freedom
- interested in creating mood
- quest for knowledge, or truth
- encompasses all subject matter - including the grotesque, supernatural, etc..

Eugène Delacroix, *Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827, taking its Orientalist subject from a play by Lord Byron
source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticism
John William Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott*, 1888, after a poem by Tennyson

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticism
Les Misérables

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42IQ29b8YIU
MELODRAMA

• popularized by the French
• music- background- underneath action
• surface effects- to conjure strong emotions
• heros, villains- clearly defined
• stock characters
• popular in the United States - 19th century, early 20th century
MELODRAMA (CONT.)

- punishment of fallen women, villains, etc.
- those who are virtuous - victorious
- *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* - a stage adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel
- *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleetstreet* - dramatized as a melodrama - 19th century
- Modern day equivalents - domestic melodrama - the soap opera, frontier melodrama - the western, nautical melodrama - swashbuckler films, equestrian melodrama - television & film’s featuring animals

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_dCeS_Qa-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_dCeS_Qa-U)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1HHiAjL4FY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1HHiAjL4FY)
THE WELL MADE PLAY

- first associated with popular melodramas
- in the 20th century - term used to describe a contrived climax/structure
- in the 19th century - the well-made play was used as a positive "structural" format
- careful cause and effect emphasis - "crisis drama"
- opening background information
- dramatic action - foreshadowed
WELL-MADE PLAY (CONT.)

- secret/s known to audience - not characters
- each Act builds to a climactic moment
- obligatory scene - characters confront each other - “showdown”
- plot - usually resolved - no loose ends
- devices - letters, notes used to motivate dramatic action
- causal structure - influences Henrik Ibsen (founder of modern dramatic realism)
Modern use of the “well-made play”
Alan Ayckbourn

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5m7HFgILvs