

## UNIT 2(II)

### **NINETEENTH CENTURY POSTBELLUM THEATER. CHANGES IN THE LAST HALF OF THE CENTURY. JAMES A. HERNE'S *SHORE ACRES*.**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF A NATION**

- America west of Appalachians and Alleghenies peopled & exploited.
- Americans, to Pacific coast, displacing Indians and Spanish settlements.
- Herds of buffalo --> cattle, sheep, farms, villages, and cities.
- Technology = natural resources --> industrial products.
- From rural, agrarian, isolated republic (idealistic, confident, and self-reliant) believed in God --> World War I: world power, industrialized, urbanized, continental nation (Darwin's theory of evolution) & profound social & cultural changes in institutions & values.
- Technological development: transcontinental railroad, 1869; industrial output grew, agricultural productivity increased, electricity, new communications (telephone).
- End of XIX century: imperialist expansion.
- Industrialization: manufacturing centers (Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago). (Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller). --> America's cities grew --> incalculable suffering: independent farmers "under the lion's paw" of land speculators and absentee landlords + danger & discomfort for men, women, and children for scarce jobs.
- No labor organization til 1880s. Legislators served interests of business and industry + scandals of Grant's administration --> "Molly Maguires", terrorism in Pennsylvania, labor organizations "illegal conspiracies" & public enemies.

- Development of national literature of variety & "literature of argument": sociology, philosophy, psychology.
- Translation leading European figures (Tolstoy, Ibsen, Chekhov, Zola, Galdós). (*Harper's Weekly* & *Harper's Monthly*, *North American Review*)
- Writers earn money, fame & change the world.

## II. NATURALISM, REALISM AND LOCAL COLOR

- 1859 of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species & Descent of Man*, 1870.  
--> Émile Zola (*The Experimental Novel*)
- Many American writers pessimistic form of realism --> fertile ground for naturalistic ideas and realistic literary technique.

### II.1. REGIONAL WRITING

- Desire to preserve distinctive ways of life before industrialization & avoid harsh realities ---> "local colorist" (Bret Harte's *The Luck of Roaring Camp*).
- Before Civil War --> Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), bucolic landscape; Harriet Beecher Stowe *Old Town Folks*, 1869, novel, *Pearl of Orr's Island*, 1862.

### II.2. REALISM AS ARGUMENT

- Description, analysis & critique of social, economic, and political institutions & unsolved social problems that were one consequence of the rapid growth and change of the time.
- Women's rights, political corruption, economic inequity, business deceptions, exploitation labor. (Adam's *The Education of Henry Adams*, 1918).
- "Negro problem". (Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 1900, essay on Washington, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903, W. E. B. DuBois).

- Shocked recognition of the human consequences of these radical transformations -->

(a) shock is expressed in recoil and denial: nostalgic poetry, sentimental and melodramatic drama, and swashbuckling historical novels;

(b) come to terms with individual and collective dislocations and discontinuities (closing out frontier, urbanization, secularism, immigration, surge of national wealth unequally distributed, revised conceptions of human nature and destiny, reordering of family and civil life, & pervasive spread of mechanical and organizational technologies).

### **III. THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN DRAMA**

- Variations upon such established traditions as the comedy of eccentric character, domestic melodrama, and the sensational play.

- Changes in "show business" (dramatic authorship).

- No royalty for new American plays ---> Shakespearean revivals or pirated translations.

- After Civil War: traveling company replace old stock companies --> establishment of a new profession of dramatist authorship.

- Older tradition of romantic and heroic tragedy: George Henry Boker (*Calaynos*, 1851, *Francesca da Rimini*, 1855).

- Domestic melodrama increasingly citified, no less conventional, sensational. Bulk of the theatrical fare: tear-jerkers(*comedias lacrimógenas*), side-splitters(*obras cómicas o divertidas*), and hair-raisers(*espeluznantes*).

- James A. Herne & Bronson Howard prepare the way for modern drama.

- Bronson Howard restored social comedy --> prepared way for social comedies of Clyde Fitch, Augustus Thomas, & XX century playwrights.

(*Wives*, 1879, *The Banker's Daughter*, 1878, *One of Our Girls*, 1885, *Shenandoa*, 1888).

#### IV. JAMES A. HERNE (1839-1901)

- Outstanding on the American theater scene throughout all his life.
- His acting influenced by romantic relationships (Western sisters).
- Initial attempts --> adaptation of Charles Lever's novel *Charles O'Malley*, and adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, and a version of *Rip Van Winkle*.
- Collaboration with David Belasco --> (*Hearts of Oak*, 1879).
- Married Katharine Corcoran, April 1878.
- "*Drifting Apart* (1888) --> Critics and audiences not ready for "problematic, polemic, didactic, sociological disquisition" on the fearful consequences of a man's slavery to drink.
- Growing interest in realism & Ibsen and the new realism --> *Margaret Fleming*, 1890, a grim study of the effect of a husband's infidelity on a wife who loved him deeply --> General public not ready for freethinker's psychological realism, inner realism, the new outspoken, imported, Ibsen-like realism.
- *An Unofficial Patriot. Griffith Davenport* (adapted from Helen Gardener's novel) was produced in New York in 1899. --> problem of slavery & complexities of personal and regional allegiances.
- 1899 physical decline (rheumatism & ulcers).
- Died 1901, Augustus Thomas: "He had the courage of truth and an enduring faith in humanity... He saw and knew the sublimity of plain living. He was the apostle of simplicity".

#### IV.1. *SHORE ACRES* (1892), BY JAMES A. HERNE

## IV.2. ART FOR TRUTH'S SAKE IN THE DRAMA (1897)

- "Art is a personal expression of life".
- "Art is universal".
- "Art for art's sake and art for truth's sake, in the last analysis, it seems to me, are identical....Art for truth's sake is the higher art, because it contains a larger degree of the vital principles of fertilization. Its race quality is its supreme quality, and therefore it will be better serve the race and the art to come".

## V. THE TRANSITION TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY DRAMA: OTHER IMPORTANT PLAYWRIGHTS

- David Belasco --> New York in 1882 (after West).
- His plays "smash hits" few of them are literature. Exceptions --> *The Darling of the Gods* (1902), *Adrea* (1904), and *Madame Butterfly* (1900), *The Return of Peter Grimm* (1911).
- Augustus Thomas reared in the Midwest. *Mizzoura* (1893).  
Social comedies: *The Earl of Pawtucket* (1903) and *Mrs. Leffingwell's Boots* (1905).
- Realistic dramas: *The Witching Hour* (1907), *The Harvest Moon* (1909), and *As a Man Thinks* (1911).
- Clyde Fitch began to write under the spell of the romantic theater. Romantic comedies, melodramas, and period plays gave Fitch international eminence: *Beau Brummell* (1890), *His Grace de Grammont*.
- Character problem plays: *The Climbers* (1901), *The City* (1900), *Lover's Lane*, *Her Great Match*.

- Social comedy: Fitch's best plays: *The Girl with the Green Eyes* (1903) and *The Truth* (1907).

- William Vaughn Moody (*Masque of Judgment*).

Philosophical significance more than practical merits on the stage: *The Great Divide* (1906), and *The Faith Healer* (1909).

- Story of development of American drama from Boker to Moody --> formative stage of an art.

- Stimulated by native forces & experimental European theater --> American drama acquired social responsibility and seriousness, psychological and spiritual realities.

## QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS (UNIT 2/II):

- 1.- Which are the economic, political and cultural conditions which lead to the development of Realism in American drama?
- 2.- Is there any difference between 'Realism', 'Naturalism' and 'Regionalism' in literature?
- 3.- Which do you think are the main reasons of the emergence of Realism in the American stage?
- 4.- What is the plot of James A. Herne's *Shore Acres*?
- 5.- Name the main and secondary themes in the play *Shore Acres*?
- 6.- Can you describe the realistic technique in literature and, particularly, in James A. Herne's *Shore Acres*?
- 7.- How would you describe the different characters in *Shore Acres*?
- 8.- Can you describe the play *Shore Acres* in literary and linguistic terms?
- 9.- Which are the main achievements of James A. Herne with his play *Shore Acres*?
10. Give your personal opinion about this play.

### ANSWER TO QUESTIONS (UNIT 3):

1.- Which are the economic, political and cultural conditions which lead to the development of Realism in American drama?

- American continent west of Appalachians and Alleghenies peopled & exploited. (Americans, westward to Pacific coast, displacing Indians and Spanish settlements). (Herds of buffalo --> cattle, sheep, farms, villages, and cities).
- Technology = natural resources --> industrial products.
- From rural, agrarian, isolated republic (idealistic, confident, and self-reliant) believed in God --> World War I: a world power, industrialized, urbanized, continental nation
- Industrialization: manufacturing centers (Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago). (Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and John D. Rockefeller). --> America's cities grew --> incalculable suffering: independent farmers "under the lion's paw" of land speculators and absentee landlords + danger & discomfort for men, women, and children for scarce jobs.
- Darwin's theory of evolution) & profound social & cultural changes in institutions & values.
- Marxist theories. (Emergence of a growing urban bourgeoisie).(Neither farmers nor urban laborers effectively organized til 1880s. Legislators served interests of business and industry + scandals of Grant's administration --> "Molly Maguires", terrorism in Pennsylvania, labor organizations "illegal conspiracies" & public enemies).
- Technological development: transcontinental railroad, 1869; industrial output grew, agricultural productivity increased, electricity, new communications (telephone).
- End of XIX century: imperialist expansion.
- Development of national literature of variety (characters, themes, settings, etc.) & "literature of argument": sociology, philosophy, psychology.
- Translation of leading European figures( Tolstoy, Ibsen, Chekhov, Zola, Galdós). (*Harper's Weekly* and *Harper's Monthly*, the *North American Review*)
- Comte's Positivism --> motives for human behaviour. (Freudian theories)
- Writers earn money, fame & change the world.

2.- Is there any difference between 'Realism', 'Naturalism' and 'Regionalism' in literature?

- Realism was at the beginning (middle years of the nineteenth century) the portrayal of human life as truthful as possible.(Galdós, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Stendhal...). 'Art for truth's sake': Art imitates life.

- Naturalism refers to the development of Realism (second half of nineteenth century), showing the worst aspects of human behaviour and motives. (Zola)
- Regionalism was an early development of Realism, in vogue in America from the middle years of the nineteenth century, with the first realistic works and plays and refers to the 'local colorism' and differences between diverse areas, landscapes and customs of the country. Comparison to painters of so-called 'genre' scenes. (Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*). Desire to preserve distinctive ways of life before industrialization & avoid harsh realities
- All of them are developed through a realistic technique.

3.- Which do you think are the main reasons of the emergence of Realism in the American stage?

- Due to the rapid changes in the American society, many non-fictional prose was devoted to the description, analysis, and critique of social, economic, cultural, and political conditions & to the unsolved problems caused by this rapid changes: Negro problem, capitalist pressures, frontier, urbanization, immigration, and even religious matters. Also as a response to the older tradition of domestic melodrama, social comedy, romantic and heroic tragedies and the poetic plays. Also due to the rapid cultural transmission of ideas from the old continent.

4.- What is the plot of James A. Herne's *Shore Acres*?

- Struggle of a hard-headed father to control his daughter's life, while his brother, Uncle Nat, quietly brings about her freedom, her marriage, and her ultimate reconciliation with his father.

5.- Name the main and secondary themes in the play *Shore Acres*?

- Conflicts between a real-estate man (land speculator) and several rural families of New England.
- Survival of the fittest. (Darwinian idea)
- Change in familiar relationships. Also 717.
- Rural setting and the 'old homestead'.
- The Civil War (675, 676).
- Speculation of land (677).
- Religion (679).
- Darwinism (679).
- West (681, 717).
- Yankee girl (682).

- Woman's rebellion (683).
- Typical American housewife (684).
- The dead (687).
- Critic to the immigration to cities (688).
- Traditions (Silver wedding) (688): Santa Claus (707).
- Descriptions of New England house (688-692).
- Highest emotions (703).
- Lighthouse depiction (706).
- Chicago's World's Fair (720).

6.- Can you describe the realistic technique in literature and, particularly, in James A. Herne's *Shore Acres*?

- Depiction of true life in new England, describing minutely the different landscapes and way of life (land labors), as well as the human relationships between the characters. (Although the social life it depicts is already passed from the American scene).
- Solution 'in the nick of time': at the end. (718)

7.- How would you describe the different characters in *Shore Acres*?

- Uncle Nat symbolizes the development of the Yankee (New England) character, though more clever and witty. He is the old Man, who remains from the old times of rural New England. Sincere, hard-worker and good citizen, a veteran of the Civil War.
- Martin Berry is a hard-headed man, who still thinks he can control the clan. He is an innocent rural worker, who thinks he can lead his family to modernity, through the sale of his land and become rich through speculation.
- Sam Warren is Helen's lover, and he symbolizes the modern & educated man of the *fin de siècle*. (Biological & Darwinist readings).
- Ann Berry is the perfect housekeeper, who wants to have peace at home and tries unsuccessfully to mediate between father and daughter generation conflicts.
- Helen Berry belongs to the modern generation of women, who want to take the reins of their lives.
- Blake wants to marry Helen and, at the same time, become rich by the speculation of Berry's lands. He stands for the 'old villain' of the play.

8.- Can you describe the play *Shore Acres* in literary and linguistic terms?

- Comedy in four acts.
- New England accent.

- Essential qualities of man are conspicuously apparent.
- A satisfactory domestic comedy. Herne brought realism to the theater.
- The most striking scene is the final gentle pantomime. For a full five minutes Uncle Nat (Herne) was alone on stage, slowly making sure that everything was safe and sound for the night. As the audience was closing, Herne and the audience heard: 'Good night, old man, God bless you'. (Parallel to his final career as a patriarch of the American theater).

9.- Which are the main achievements of James A. Herne with his play *Shore Acres*?

- Herne adapted the new realism (Ibsenian) to American tastes.
- Herne appealed to the popular affection of the 'old homestead', but without the sentimentality, which usually contained this type of play.
- *Shore Acres* is filled with love for humanity, a firm faith in man's essential goodness, and also impregnated with the real life, simple, direct and artful, yet without artifice.
- For Herne art is a personal expression of life, art is universal.
- Herne claimed that the province of drama was to interest and instruct, not preach objectively, but teach subjectively.
- Truth in the drama strikes at unequal standards and unjust systems.

10. Give your personal opinion about this play.