



DAVID KRASNER

# A HISTORY OF MODERN DRAMA

Volume II

1960–2000



WILEY Blackwell



# A History of Modern Drama

Volume II

## Books by David Krasner

- *A History of Modern Drama, Volume 1* (2012)
- *An Actor's Craft: The Art and Technique of Acting* (2012)
- *Theatre in Theory: An Anthology* (editor, 2008)
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# A History of Modern Drama

Volume II

*1960–2000*

David Krasner

**WILEY** Blackwell

This edition first published 2016  
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*Registered Office*

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex,  
PO19 8SQ, UK

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for*

9781405157582 [hardback]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: A production of *Angels in America*, 1996, directed by David Krasner, and photo by the designer, Patrick Immel. Thom Miller as Louis, Justin DeGiacimo as Prior.

Set in 10.5/13.5pt Galliard by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

*For Emma Bennett*



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# Preface and Acknowledgments

*Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.*

– Karl Marx<sup>1</sup>

*Theatre is the vanishing life of a collective contemporaneity of truths.*

– Alain Badiou<sup>2</sup>

*A people makes a poem, a poem makes a people.*

– Jacques Rancière<sup>3</sup>

*A History of Modern Drama*, Volume II, picks up where Volume I leaves off, providing an analysis of selected dramas and dramatists from 1960 through 2000. My aim is to trace methodologies of modern drama during this period, an era marked, as Rodney Simard observes, by Harold Pinter and Edward Albee “among the first generation of postmoderns, accepting the laurel of Beckett, the last of the moderns.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, I begin with Harold Pinter, who receives the arbitrary but significant mantle from Beckett as the first postmodernist, and end with Sarah Kane. There is symmetry to this arrangement: Pinter begins this volume because he dovetails with Samuel Beckett who concluded Volume I; analyzing Kane is an appropriate end because her innovative and compelling dramas written during the late 1990s bring to a close a modernist/postmodernist movement that, I shall argue, started around 1960. She is, moreover, a link to Georg Büchner, the playwright who began Volume I and whose plays were, serendipitously, directed

by Sarah Kane. Büchner and Kane serve, in many regards, as bookends to this two-volume history of modern drama.

This book is intended for three audiences simultaneously: for the general or undergraduate reader who has some background in the subject and wants to increase their awareness of modern drama's capacious themes and ideas; for graduate students and scholars interested in historiography, dramaturgy, and larger social contexts, issues, and philosophies – perspectives that fall under the rubric of “modern drama”; and for practitioners who wish to consider my particular viewpoint in order to prepare for productions and performances. My objective is to examine the perspectives of the era, to provide close readings of the plays of this period by selecting representative dramas that stand in for others, and to tie themes together. With this in mind, my purpose in analyzing modern drama is not to examine all of the plays written during this period, still less to propose an all-consuming critical reading of the subject. The content of modern drama from 1960 to 2000 is, like Volume I, enormous, discontinuous, and non-teleological. A book many times this size could hardly provide a full account, owing to the diversity, range, and sweep of modern drama throughout the globe. What was once a modernism containing sizable yet relatively manageable contributing dramas and dramatists is now an increasingly unwieldy and turgid condition, encompassing playwrights from multiple nations, ethnicities, and regions. Volume I enjoyed the advantage of plays that have gained recognition, what Pierre Bourdieu calls “*the accumulation of symbolic capital*,” consisting in “making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration implying a power to consecrate objects (with a trademark signature) or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.) and therefore to give value.”<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the plays in this volume, relatively new, have yet to prove by and large their sustainability and “symbolic capital.” Furthermore, modernism itself becomes increasingly dispersed when detached from a solely Anglo-European realm; I intend to examine both Western and non-Western dramas. Finally, dramatists during this 40-year period were more individualistic; while they drew on the foundations of their predecessors, playwrights experimented in ways that dispersed the meaning, form, and content of modern drama. Discerning a comprehensive analysis of modern drama circa 1960 to 2000 isn't a simplistic collation of multiple plays and playwrights; rather, this study should be grasped as a whole with parts and fragments feeding into various meanings and ideas – some in agreement and others contradicting previous meanings of “modern drama.”

My efforts in defining the plays and period judder between the individual and the aggregate, illuminating, at the risk of a cliché, a mosaic inside a kaleidoscope. Rather than a chronological survey or an encyclopedic account of modern drama, my design is twofold: first, to analyze representative plays by regions, nationalities, and themes, divided into Parts – United Kingdom and Ireland, the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, and Postcolonial dramas – even if dramatists have little if any commonality with other playwrights in the same regional or national cluster. Drama, like literature and art, often has a national function. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson argues that works of art, literature, music, and drama help to form national communities by their advocacy and broad appeal to spectators, bound together by language, territories, ideas, and communal concerns. Fiction, newspapers, print media (and now social media) in general, and I would add drama, as Anderson notes, seep “quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.”<sup>6</sup> Second, I have selected individual plays and playwrights as representative of larger themes. The latter means that many dramas and dramatists will be excluded. The absence of particular dramas and dramatists will admittedly rub some readers the wrong way. I have made every effort within this volume to be cognizant of dramatists who enjoy a popular but niche following. I have, naturally, mandarin biases, particular tastes, soft spots as well as blind spots. I accept responsibility for the selection, knowing that subjectivity will inform judgment, while attempting to cast as wide a net as possible within the limits of a single volume.

I am interested in “imaginative” dramas containing ideas that provoke and entertain in order to develop a “philosophic-historic overview” of modern and postmodern drama from 1960 to 2000. I define “philosophic-historic overview” as the pursuit of scholarly rigor that observes micro and macro thinking, that applies philosophy, sociology, and politics within the analysis, and that situates the dramas within their respective historic environments. Merely analyzing “big” leads to melodramatic grandiosity associated with Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, historians whose broad sweep suffers from what some critics call their reliance on top-down “meta-narratives”;<sup>7</sup> thinking synchronically and narrowly, however, avoids commitment to the overall landscape, emphasizing individual dramas which are often far removed from the aggregative and diachronic process. The purpose of a philosophic-historic overview is to examine the details yet avoid the thicket of minutia, to view modern drama, in other words, through a microscope

and a telescope. My aim is to understand the larger picture by disassembling big ideas into small gestures and dramatic arcs that comprise the subject. As a result, I hope to illuminate similarities and differences, thematic consistencies and inconsistencies, antipathies, anomalies, and contradictions. By investigating the ways in which representative plays and playwrights define modernism and postmodernism from 1960 to the end of the twentieth century, I hope to provide shape to shared and antithetical features; discern patterns, undercurrents, and cross-purposes; and spotlight cohesion in light of multiple nations, cultures, and perspectives.

This book, like the previous volume, focuses on playwrights and plays rather than actors, directors, designers, or production history, an approach that cuts against the grain of “performance studies,” a field of research that seeks (among other things) to disassemble barriers of written dramatic text and performance event. While I recognize the value of performance studies, to incorporate production history would make this volume unmanageably large. Still, I will pay homage to actors, directors, designers, producers, researchers, theatre companies, and audiences who have broken ground in specific productions by drawing from them as often as possible. Playwrights do not write in a vacuum and never have; they write for actors, directors, theatres, and audiences. Like the previous volume, I will pay particular attention to the historical context and philosophical underpinnings of the plays, noting influences not merely by actors and directors, but also how plays emerged in the framework of societies, cultures, politics, and philosophy. I will also, as before, quote extensively from scholars who have preceded me. To pretend that my thoughts are “original” when I know others before me have offered similar ideas is disingenuous. If this means quoting multiple sources, I accept the criticism.

The artist Lee Krasner, wife of Jackson Pollack and who together with Pollack and others forged the modern art school known as “abstract expressionism” during the 1950s and 1960s, reportedly claimed she once saw her husband throw a book about Picasso across the room while shouting: “Goddamn it! That guy’s done everything. There’s nothing left.”<sup>8</sup> Picasso’s fingerprint on modernism is undeniable; as Pollack suggests, from the mid-century onward, artists have had to overcome his ubiquitous shadow or fall to the label of epigone. The same can be said of modern drama. The root and branch of modernism is originality, shaking off past traditions and existing in a never-ending cycle of, and quest for, originality; yet the overarching influence of Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Brecht, Pirandello,

Shaw, Beckett, and other “classical” modernists looms over playwrights seeking to forge their originality. The dramatists in this volume struggled to unleash the chokehold of these modernist giants by discovering or rediscovering new forms, themes, and ideas. Some were more successful than others; some unabashedly acknowledge the modernist influences while others rebelled. Nonetheless, all were determined to present their plays as manifestos of their times.

Like the previous volume, I will quote from the plays once and then subsequently note the page numbers of the plays in the texts; all secondary quotes will be cited in the endnotes. Likewise with the previous volume, I will use art works, photographs, and theatrical images to help describe the plays. The value of connecting drama to art and photography enhances a visual understanding of drama. By visualizing comparative art works with drama, we can better understand the kinetic energy of movements, dynamism, and restlessness of modernism, the flux of becoming and reimagining that was emblematic of the period.

## Acknowledgments

I owe much to Dean College, where I serve as Dean of the School of the Arts. The support from Dean, especially from the President, Dr. Paula Rooney, has been unequivocal and far exceeds anything I have ever experienced from other institutions or people in those institutions. This is the first place that has welcomed me and which I call home. This embrace is also due to the friendship and support from my colleagues in the theatre department, in particular our incomparable office administrator, Tracy Lane. I am most grateful to the librarians at Dean – Ted Burke, Michele Chapin, Jody Tobey, and especially Karline Wild – who have found obscure and recondite items from interlibrary loan; without their support this book could not have been written. The terrific lighting and set designer Patrick Immel has generously offered images from the show I directed, *Angels in America*, in 1996, and in which he designed. My wife Lynda continues to be my loving foundation. I want to thank Martin Puchner for his unwavering support, as well as the anonymous readers for their critically astute suggestions. Ben Thatcher, Caroline Richards, Deirdre Ilkson, Radjan Lourde Selvanadin, Sashidharran (Sashi) Samsthiram, and Bridget Jennings of Wiley-Blackwell have been terrific in their assistance. This work is dedicated to Emma Bennett; like

LeAnn Fields, to whom I dedicated the first volume, Emma has been my most loyal supporter. If I have had any success career-wise, it is because of Emma, Ben, Bridget, Caroline, Sashi, Radjan, Deirdre, Martin, LeAnn, my wife Lynda, my children, Dean College, and, most significantly, every student I have ever taught.

Part I  
Introduction



# Chapter 1

## Strangers More than Ever

### *Modern Drama and Alternative Modernities*

*Blanche:* Holding tight to his arm.

*Whoever you are – I've always depended on the kindness of strangers.*

– Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*<sup>1</sup>

*Ruth:* *Eddie.*

Teddy turns.

Pause.

*Don't become a stranger.*

– Harold Pinter, *The Homecoming*<sup>2</sup>

By 1960 a multitude of new realities arose, presenting “modernism” with a daunting series of challenges. These “new realities” called into question Euro-American postwar dominance of the world stage. The Cold War and subsequent collapse of communism in 1989; the rapid ascendancy of China, India, Brazil, and other nations as cultural and economic powers; the Vietnam War circa 1964–1974; the spread of AIDS from 1980 to the present; a swiftly changing global and technological landscape; financial bubbles and fiscal free falls; and the emergence of social justice for minorities, women, the poor, and other oppressed peoples (and its reactionary antitheses), created a new “modernism” unlike anything before. The rise of communication by way of computer and the Internet linked the world

in ways never previously experienced. We became more intimate and knowledgeable of each other at a pace and speed previously unimaginable. Our abilities to communicate transformed into action, as the barriers between people dismantled. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, and other works, Jürgen Habermas posits the theory of “communicative action,” whereby he describes a “binding force of intersubjective understanding and reciprocal recognition.” The rational potential for cross-border contact and intersubjective understanding, particularly through technology, informed the possibility of communicating “into dimensions of historical time, social space, and body-centered experiences.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite this formidable communicative apparatus facilitating openness and availability, the idea of “strangers” – the notion that we hardly communicate despite technology – inspires the 40-year period under investigation. Dramatists illuminate the vivid paradox that the more we communicate the less we understand each other, and our technical capacity to extend our communicative reach ironically diminishes empathy. We are “strangers” – as reflected in the quotes beginning this chapter – in ways we have never thought imaginable.

Comparing Tennessee Williams and Harold Pinter illustrates several concerns of this book: how a break between modern drama prior to 1960 (modern drama taken up in Volume I) and post-1960 (postmodern) drama took hold; how a continuance of prior modernism prevailed and evolved during the last 40 years of the twentieth century; and how the relationship of, and differences between, postmodernism and modernism are reciprocal as well as antithetical. As a consequence, there are two modernisms at work here: the continuance of previous modernist ideas and a rebellious “postmodern” drama. Relations between the two ideas are complicated, containing mutuality and antagonism. The genesis of a historical phenomenon is always a challenging topic; one can find forerunners in the near and even distant past. The dramatic dialogues by Williams and Pinter quoted above exemplify thus a “pseudo-split”: both lines of dialogue arrive similarly at the end of their respective plays and both raise the specter of “stranger-ness.” Yet each playwright undertakes separate intentions in their usage of the term “stranger.”

In Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche arrives at her sister Stella’s New Orleans apartment only to find herself unwelcomed by her belligerent and territorially protective brother-in-law Stanley. Throughout the play Stanley and Blanche compete for Stella’s attention and support.

Blanche is disappointed in her sister, expecting more refinement and education from Stella's spouse. Stanley is frustrated as well, his feelings exacerbated by Blanche's intrusive (indeed, threatening) presence and her alcoholism (she consumes his liquor liberally). The conflict between them over the "soul" of Stella amplifies throughout the play, leading to Stanley's "final solution" to her presence by raping her. When she fails to convince her sister and neighbors of Stanley's savagery, Blanche, already frail, succumbs to a nervous breakdown and is dispatched to a sanatorium. Her remark, "I've always depended on the kindness of strangers," is directed to the empathetic psychiatrist who offers his arm to Blanche in lieu of a straitjacket. The statement is poetical as well as political, noting that without family, community, or government intervention via social services, Blanche and other overly sensitive and "useless appendages" – people physically or psychologically challenged and incapable of surviving on their own – are left to depend on "strangers" for charity and kindness.

Williams, like many prototypical pre-1960 modernists, cleaves to the determining defiance of bourgeois values and attacks middle-class security as false paradigms of harmony. Williams scorns capitalism, inculcating its rapacious greed and insensitivity to the helpless (Blanche, for instance, or Laura in Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*). Furthermore, the ability to clarify his critique of society depends largely on the exchange between Blanche and the doctor; between them and the audience reside a mutual understanding or Habermasian "communicative action." Blanche's "speech-act" is immediately understood by the Psychiatrist; he removes the straitjacket and extends his arm in a gesture of empathy. Blanche has "always" depended on strangers for survival, for random acts of "kindness," relying on communal reciprocity and communicative action that echoes Habermasian social theory.

Habermas builds his concept of communicative action on the linguistic "speech-act" theory of J.L. Austin, who asserts a distinction between "performative" and "constative" sentences. Performative "speech-act" utterances, Austin contends, are words or communications that perform "an action" (saying "I do" at a wedding, for instance, transforms the bride-groom relationship), resulting in reciprocal, mutually understood change (we therefore "do things" with words); constative utterances report facts but hardly change reality.<sup>4</sup> Blanche's words "change" the dynamic of her relationship with the Psychiatrist, making her text a "communicative action." Habermas stresses five facets of speech-act-communicative action theory in

order for a rational exchange of ideas to occur – and each facet is germane to the final episode in *Streetcar*:

The speaker must choose a comprehensible [*verständlich*] expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true [*wahr*] proposition (or a propositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intention truthfully [*wahrhaftig*] so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right [*richtig*] so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims that reciprocally raise are justified. [The aim of communicative action is agreement that culminates] in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. Agreement is based on recognition of the corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness.<sup>5</sup>

When Blanche says “I’ve always depended on the kindness of strangers” audiences understand not merely the empathy involved, but its *communicative action*: Blanche’s words “performatively” change the relationship between herself and the Psychiatrist, creating comprehension, validity, rationality, shared values, agreed-upon trust, empathy, and mutual understanding between characters as well as audiences. There is a moral imperative imbedded in the phrase: the consequences of warehousing Blanche to the impersonal institutionalization of a psychiatric ward are not merely social, they are emotional, political, and psychological as well. The play’s aesthetic and moral foundation depends on critiquing alienation and disenfranchisement – that is, her abandonment – while supporting mutuality, trust, and communal bonds. Blanche’s performative relationship with the Psychiatrist forges expressive outrage against a “system” that abandons the helpless while simultaneously defends the empathy between mutually understanding communicators, emphasizing the core of Tennessee Williams’s socialist politics.

For Harold Pinter’s *The Homecoming*, nothing in language is certain and certainly nothing changes. Moral and political issues move through the slipstream of porous, ambiguous, and primarily “ironic” contingencies. Morality is a choice rather than an imperative; if circumstances change, morality changes too. There is no agreed-upon trust, nor immutable morality, but

instead a fungible and nimble set of circumstances and relationships requiring moral relativism and interpretation – or, to quote Friedrich Nietzsche’s assertion that has echoed throughout postmodernism: “There are no facts, only interpretations.”<sup>6</sup> Not only are characters in Pinter’s play ethical free agents and interpreters of meaning, but language barely communicates; words are exchanged, but understanding is obtuse. Like *A Streetcar Named Desire*, in *The Homecoming* a family member (Teddy with his wife, Ruth), returns to the fold. Teddy’s relationship to Ruth is based on a seemingly stable marital relationship. Yet immediately upon their entrance we discover that their filial bonds are (and have always been) miasmic, tenuous, and untrustworthy. Their communicative action is nil because their marriage disowns any “agreed upon truthfulness”; the principles of “character” found in Williams’s plays, where character means a deeply etched, unchangeable moral standard, is now diluted in Pinter. What Teddy thought Ruth was and is, and what Ruth actually was and is, no longer sustains a semblance of “truth” or communicative bond – no signifier–signified relationship, as the semiotician would have it.<sup>7</sup> Our eyes and ears are unreliable; what are said and seen in the play bear little if any resemblance or correspondence to a Habermasian communicative action because, as Richard Gilman asserts about *The Homecoming*, “there is no logic to what has happened, no continuity with the accepted behavior of people.”<sup>8</sup> What we have, instead, is a Pinteresque world where clear-cut relationships are jettisoned, replaced with deliberate situations of discontinuity and miscommunication. Language in Pinter is “deconstructed” – a particular Jacques Derrida coinage that posits a logical or rhetorical incompatibility between the explicit and implicit levels of discourse. As Mark Poster explains, the rise of deconstruction, postmodernism, and poststructuralism (terms that will be defined throughout) mark a turn in the social atmosphere where certainty gives way to a world “constituted in part by simulacra, by copies with no originals, by an unending proliferation of images, by an infinitely regressive mirroring of word and thing, by a simultaneity of events, by an instantaneity of act and observation, by an immediacy and copresence of electronically mediated symbolic instructions, by a language that generates its meaning to a large extent self-referentially.”<sup>9</sup> At the end of the play Ruth calls him “Eddie,” not Teddy, tacitly implying that this diminutive yet ironically intimate imprimatur is a doubling down on indeterminacy and *mis*-communication. The play ends on this new name, Eddie, symbolic of their relationship: Teddy (now Eddie) and Ruth *have always been and always will be strangers*. Their bond is a marital simulacrum, a facsimile of what marriage is supposed to be, devoid of certainty, mired in misjudgments, and lacking truth-claims.

The modern dramatic subject exists in an expansive world as a surrogate for social affairs, while the postmodern subject exists in a contingent quasi-reality that avoids lucidity of meaning and social engagement. Modernism in general, Terry Eagleton observes, “is shot through with a desire for some solid truth while at the same time mourning its elusiveness. Modernist culture of the mid-20th century is by and large a culture of negativity – of absence, lack, void, death, otherness, non-being and non-identity.”<sup>10</sup> The postmodern, by contrast, illustrates the external and immediate rather than the modernist cultivation of social relevancy, putting little if any stock in “truth.” Moreover, if, as literary scholar Paul De Man maintains, “Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure,”<sup>11</sup> postmodernism makes little use of a “presence,” true or otherwise. Modernism, which relied heavily on structural binary conditions (East–West, ruler–ruled, origin–copy, etc.), was challenged by poststructuralism’s claim that structures are unstable, conventional, and bound up with language. In a world of simulacra, origination (the *ur* work of art), to borrow Walter Benjamin’s term, has lost its “aura,” replaced by mechanical re-productivity.<sup>12</sup> Postmodern characters exemplified by *The Homecoming* respond to whatever happens to be presented to them, concerned merely with base desires and longing for little else. While Blanche longs for a “meaningful relationship” that appreciates depth, aesthetics, and a true presence of identity, Pinter’s dysfunctional household has little interest in presence or inner fulfillment. Fredric Jameson clarifies this surface–depth dichotomy by comparing two works that utilize shoes: Vincent van Gogh’s painting, *A Pair of Boots*, with Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes*. Jameson, drawing on Martin Heidegger’s 1936 analysis of van Gogh, claims that *A Pair of Boots* (likewise *A Streetcar Named Desire*, I submit) points to a broader reality of universal truth. Blanche’s homeless condition has social implications; it contains a utopian-socialist message about “humanity.” “Kindness” is a social compact, and when it is exercised amongst strangers it strengthens societal bonds. Warhol’s work, by contrast (and Pinter by extension of this idea), centers on what Jameson calls the “emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms to which we will have occasion to return in a number of other contexts.”<sup>13</sup> Warhol and Pinter renounce the sociohistorical dimension Williams aspired to; in its place is a surface flatness and a nuanced superficiality. Pinter’s later works would turn to the political, but at this juncture of his career he represents the ushering in of postmodernism in drama.

## **The Critical Divide: Defining Modernism and Postmodernism**

The critical and artistic background of the period between 1960 and 2000 is more diversified, both in terms of the subject matter and the interests of the playwrights, than the previous decades. This era witnessed an increasing implementation of interdisciplinary thought, with politics, philosophy, art, literature, and multiculturalism woven into the fabric of drama. Several historical, social, and linguistic factors bear significantly on the shift, or critical divide, between the dramas of Volume I and Volume II. While it is relatively easy to designate 1960 as the beginning of postmodernism and 2000 as roughly its end (though some would argue it hasn't passed), explaining what occurred during the era requires clarification.

I define modernism and postmodernism as falling under the rubric of "modernity." Modernity means the broadly construed historical period beginning with the post-Renaissance Enlightenment (c. eighteenth century) that remains with us.<sup>14</sup> Within this larger frame I situate modernism and postmodernism as theoretical, aesthetic, and cultural practices associated with periods that divide around 1960. For some, postmodernism has been perceived as a "fad" of the 1970s through the 1990s, and has to some degree fallen out of favor because, like most fads, it engendered weariness and because it has been associated with a simplistic version of epistemic skepticism and draconian anti-realism.<sup>15</sup> Still, its influence on the drama of this epoch is, for better or worse, undeniable, and it is worth briefly charting the trajectory of modernism to postmodernism through the rubric of modernity.

One of the distinctions between modernity and classicism is that classicism was a period prior to the eighteenth century in which expressing diversity of opinions or multiple definitions of the world were largely deemed heresy – the product of political descent and moral decay. In Western philosophy, Greek, Roman, and medieval thought generally looked askance at diversity, favoring instead unquestioned systemic religious and moral beliefs. During the Enlightenment, tolerance, pluralism, and diversity emerged, indicating social vitality, freedom of expression, and aesthetic subjectivity.<sup>16</sup> The idea of "freedom" begins with Kant's view of the Enlightenment ("*Sapere aude* – Dare to know!"), Shakespeare's humanism, and the worldview that one is a free agent to decide values, goals, and ethics. Moreover, the Enlightenment ushered in the notion of art's autonomy. In drama this autonomy has roots in Diderot, Lessing, and the rise of humanism as drama looked to the life,

aspirations, and conflicts of the common individual rather than royalty, and to the free agency of individuals to dictate the terms of their lives.

“Modernism” in drama is a narrower period, beginning with Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov and ending with Samuel Beckett, dating from 1879 to 1959 (specifically the plays in Volume I).<sup>17</sup> It is marked by aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness (illuminated by the “isms” of modernism); advocating simultaneity, juxtaposition, or montage (accelerated by the rise of photography, film, Pirandello’s theatricality, and Brecht’s distanciation and estrangement theories); informed by paradox and ambiguity (highlighted by increasing urban life and its ensuing anxiety); the quest for dignity and freedom; discarding previous ideas, traditions, and habits; dedicated to revolutionary change in social and political institutions; and the demise of the integrated individual subject (influenced by Chekhov, Strindberg, Artaud, and others).<sup>18</sup>

The architects of modernity, in particular Enlightenment thinkers, put stock in individual rationalism and the unity of thought rather than unity of religion or hand-me-down ideas. Modernity formulated in the eighteenth century by philosophers of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), writes Jürgen Habermas, “consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic,” utilizing the “accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life – that is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life.”<sup>19</sup> The Enlightenment revolutionized our understanding of law, politics, science, philosophy, morality, art, and literature, by jettisoning religious authority and hierarchical royalty, substituting reasoned argument, democracy, and generating a search for current events and social criticism. In art Immanuel Kant situated knowledge and aesthetics in a unity of what he called apperception, a function of synthesizing forms of perception (observing the phenomena) in combination with the schemata of imagination, culminating in formal categories of understanding.<sup>20</sup> Art and aesthetics can be identified for Kant as a universal comprehension in which judgments are informed by a detached observer who, with unified agreement, can ascertain what is aesthetic, what is not, and what “art” is.

While not necessarily a Romantic, Kant set the stage for Romantic faith in the imagination: the power to stimulate the hidden depths of the soul that addresses the puzzle of humanity’s relationship to nature and the ability to respond to nature through an aesthetic perception. The Romantics, Peter Murphy and David Roberts aver, prioritized “sensibility over functionality, particularity over universality, interiority over externality, mystery over lucidity,

the unconscious over the conscious, expression over construction, literature over technology, myth over science. Romanticism equated enlightenment with mechanism, soulless instrumentalism, and the domination of nature.”<sup>21</sup> Hegel extends this idea of an aesthetic rationality, opening the way for Romanticism by placing demands on the principle of unification through a dialectical synthesis of nature and spirit (or mind, what he called *Geist*), what Fredric Jameson aptly dubs Hegel’s “collective life.”<sup>22</sup> This collectivity or unity was in reaction to the appreciation of diversity during Enlightenment modernity while simultaneously supporting the passionate engagement of Romanticism, providing the metaphysical backdrop of modernity’s need to confront the issue of unity and multiplicity in cultures and aesthetics.

Romanticism, influenced by Kant and Hegel, took issue with Enlightenment universalism and rationalism. Various forms of Romantic Idealism (German and British Romanticism, especially) arose in the early nineteenth century as a break from both Renaissance classicism and Enlightenment’s detailed positivism by distinguishing the differences between spirituality and materiality. The Enlightenment (following the spirit of the Renaissance) celebrated the collapse of the preordained by withdrawing God to be replaced by humanity as the central theme. But in doing so, science, formalism (Aristotelian “rules”), and moral strictures surfaced devoid of creative deviance. Art followed “rules,” in order to collate and organize the appreciation of art through objectivity. The Romantic Idealists wanted to restore unity within humankind’s creative spirit without restoring religious constrictions or Enlightenment objectivity.<sup>23</sup> The Hegelian version of this Romanticism is called “absolute idealism,” as opposed to Descartes’s dualism and Berkeley’s subjectivism, the latter two claiming that material bodies (the senses) do not exist beyond surfaces and that the deeper layer of mental substances are the complete engagement of human consciousness. Hegel believed in a metaphysical position characterized by the idea that the mind and the world share the same categorical structures. Thought and reality are unified insofar as the mind can grasp the totality of existence and subsume it (Hegel calls it “sublation” – *Aufhebung*) into the dialectical give-and-take of worldly relationships (*Weltgeist*, in his words, or world spirit).<sup>24</sup> For Hegel, art is a process of articulating not merely form and the reconstitution of form, but also reforming that which reconstructs our perception. Hegel’s dialectic draws our attention to the complexity of art by highlighting contradictions and oppositions. We therefore undertake a process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis that reconstitutes a new thesis. Thought can attain its highest achievement when it adheres to the linear-progressive movement of the

world, coupled with the dialectical struggle of thesis and antithesis. In art Idealism, which informed Romanticism, was grounded in the notion of beauty and truth, aesthetics and art, and unity of mind and materiality joined in a fount of creativity bursting forth from artistic imagination. The artist's imaginative powers were deified and subjectivism honored over collectivism as long as the subjective artist applies dialectical thinking and is endowed with "creative genius."

During the mid-nineteenth century Romantic Idealism was challenged by Marxist social critics and later by analytic philosophers during the early twentieth, because Idealism was considered detached from reality (Marxist social criticism) or too invested in metaphysics and moralizing (analytic philosophy). Idealism depended on concept over flesh – abstraction over materiality, the artist's *Innerlichkeit*, or inwardness over realism – and therefore avoided life on the ground. Materialists like Marx influenced drama through the rise of realism, the notion that a play can create a "representation" of reality and thereby critique social conditions and injustice objectively by representing these conflicts onstage. The central conflict in the modernist dramas of Ibsen, Chekhov, early Strindberg, and others is the attempt to render the disillusionment of the individual alienated consciousness with the phenomena of a rapidly changing, modernized world that is constantly transforming, encroaching, and displacing that consciousness. These playwrights attempt to provide an "authentic account" of this oscillating consciousness from the perspective of social forces intervening on the individual. This aesthetic condition combined psychology with historicism. Erich Auerbach posits that the nascent development of realism surfaced during the second half of the eighteenth century and "laid the aesthetic foundation of modern realism" that came to its fruition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This early realism, Auerbach contends, is rooted in "Historicism," in which the highest aim of Western literature lies in the representation of a "historical" reality. The past, like the present, is to be "seen as incomparable and unique, as animated by inner forces and in constant state of development," and the present is "a piece of history whose everyday depths and total inner structure lay claim to our interest both in their origins and in the direction taken by their development."<sup>25</sup> The connection of historicism and realism is the root and branch of Marxist social modernism: historical conditions of ordinary people are not the privy of the artist's inner life (as the Romantics would have it) but rather motivated by externally "historicized" incidents and circumstances stimulated by dramatic conflict (an idea coined by Hegel), where what we see onstage is "life-like" conflicts

that lead to an implicit understanding of society's give-and-take. Realism took root amidst the emergence of history as an epistemological field of research and examination. "The great realist writers," Terry Eagleton reminds us, "arise from a history which is visible in the making; the historical novel [or drama], for example, appears as a *genre* at a point of revolutionary turbulence in the early nineteenth century, where it was possible for writers to grasp their own present as *history*."<sup>26</sup>

There are multiple forms of "realism" in philosophy. Fundamentally realism is the claim that the world exists independent of subjectivity and appearances. For modern dramatists, realism works to link real-world experiences with events unfolding onstage without the supposed interference of the artist's subjective manipulation. Realism doesn't mean slavish adherence to linearity or mundane life; a play such as *Death of a Salesman* is "realistic" even as it employs expressionist ideas of rage and inner turmoil and non-chronological features moving back and forth in real time and illusion. Realism stresses the mimetic features of drama; productions largely value portraits of social conditions, illumination and contextualization of periods, and psychological revelations of human behavior. Realism makes use of reportage, apropos of journalism; but it also seeks to convey dialectic struggles of competing forces that transpire objectively. The purpose of realism is to uncover the objective social forces in competition. Brecht was a "realist" in his efforts to convey social conditions while simultaneously employing commentaries on the unfolding events onstage.<sup>27</sup> For Brecht, *actors are acting*, which is more realistic than actors pretending to ignore the audience and creating the illusion of a fourth wall. Well-written realistic dramas are smartly plotted and written with an ear for quotidian dialogue, even if the rhythms are "a-rhythmic" – capturing the halting and stuttering reality of everyday speech.

The modernist vanguard of the early to mid-twentieth century rejected this "reality" concept, finding representation dubious or impossible. Avant-garde modernists critiqued realism's claim to objectivity as a false paradigm; no matter how "objective" the artist claims to be, there is a guiding hand in the creation that influences the art object's intent; to pretend otherwise is disingenuous. Instead of Ibsen or Chekhov photo-journalism, the modernist vanguard (or the avant-garde) took root in Yeats's and Maeterlinck's symbolism, Strindberg's extreme subjectivism and expressionism, Brecht's estrangement, Pirandello's self-reflective realism ("we really are in a theatre"), and even outright anti-theatricalism (rejecting theatre as a value) as some of the many ways modern dramatists sought to dislodge reality and celebrate theatre without the burden of "representation."<sup>28</sup> Vanguard modernists

accused realists of pandering to the audience or manipulating stage events; realists claimed that the avant-garde's radical disassociation of causal events was self-indulgent, tendentious, and pretentious. Realistic dramatists owe much of their structure to Aristotle, whose advocacy of the arrangement of plot (the "action") is the driving force of drama. Vanguard modernists reject Aristotle's prescriptive advice, considering the emphasis on arrangement and neatness as a false template on art. Chaos, the inexpressible, and the opaque are more in line with "reality," or at least art's autonomy, than the realists are willing to admit. The conundrum for the vanguard modernist was how to influence audiences politically without realism's obvious societal template.

Much of vanguard modernism derived its political and aesthetic foundations from "critical theory," a term from the Frankfurt School of social criticism in the 1930s.<sup>29</sup> This school of thought rejected realism's continuity of history, maintaining instead, writes Mark Poster, "an effort to theorize the present as a moment between the past and the future, thus holding up a historicizing mirror to society, one that compels a recognition of the transitory and fallible nature of society, one that insists that what is can be disassembled and improved considerably." He contends (following Adorno and Foucault) that critical theory cuts against the grain "of a legitimating process endemic to power formations, a discursive mechanism through which the finitude of institutions is naturalized and universalized. Critical theory is a disruptive counterforce to the inscription on the face of social practice which says 'Do not tamper with me for I am good, just, and eternal.'"<sup>30</sup> Critical theory challenges realism's reliance on social facts as empirical, stand-alone objects, viewing data as relational to and reinforcing normative episteme of self-conscious enlightenment. Instead of facts critical theorists rely on an ambitious social theory that would dissect reality and its underlying power relations through innuendo, suggestiveness, or linguistic slips (based on Freud). As the doyen of critical theory Max Horkheimer explains, critical theory is not a Hegelian dependence on reason alone, where the isolated individual makes a "personal peace treaty" with the world and its circumstances, but rather critical theory means "a definite individual in his real relation to other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a particular class, and, finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature."<sup>31</sup> This social exchange is interactive, linguistic, and ubiquitous. "Discursive practices" – a postmodern meme popularized by Foucault – maintains that language systems reinforce the status quo, stalling social change by laying claim to representative "truths." In this way, critical theorists revivify and actualize the potential for social engagement that lay dormant in