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Engaged Drama of Everyday Life

(Socially Engaged French Drama of the late 19th and 20th Century)

Abstract

This thesis describes the fundamental ontological change in the character of the French drama of the 19th and 20th century which became the basis for the modern French drama of the 20th century. The thesis is based on the analysis of the selected plays with the focus on socially engaged and socio-critical themes. This thesis defines the basic line of development of the socially engaged drama that begins with the work of naturalistic writers Émile Zola and the Goncourt brothers, continues in the form of Henry Becque's playwrights and the authors grouped around Andre Antoine's Théâtre Libre, especially Jean Jullien and his theory of "*live theatre*", and results in the definition of Eugène Brieux's, François de Curel's and partly Octava Mirbeau's drama. The opposite character of French theatre and drama at the turn of the 19th and 20th century is described as the counterpart to this line. The thesis provides comparison with the contemporary influences of commercial and subsidized theatres, refers to the symbolist theatre and to the work of late Parnassians. It also closely describes Neo-Romanticism Drama in verse represented by the works of Edmond Rostand, Jean Richepina and, partially, Theodore de Banvillea.

At the same, the thesis places the socially committed drama into the context of modern ideas in contrast to the definition of the nature of art in the postmodern discourse. The concept of everyday life and everyday then serves as the connecting element of the socially engaged authors. Moreover, this concept allows the overlap to the theatre and drama of the 20th century. Socially engaged drama is given a contemporary framework of the Second Empire and Third Republic and the overall atmosphere of Belle Époque. The social and cultural aspects of the newly formed capitalist society that influence the creation of contemporary playwrights can also be traced in this thesis. The emphasis is then placed on the differentiation of the nature of theatre arts within the concept of artistic avant-garde on one hand, and the rising commercialization of theatre on the other hand. Following its main thesis of the socially engaged drama of everyday life, this thesis presents a combination of a broader general interpretation and a closer analysis of several plays written by the key dramatists of

that period. Socially committed drama provides a solid framework for the variety of genres and styles that were present in the studied period and its broad horizon also allows drawing connections to the French drama of the 20th century.

Keywords

socially engaged drama, socio-critical drama, naturalistic drama, realistic drama, a play on the idea, the theatre of ideas, "cruel play", "live theatre", commercial theatre, verse drama, neo-romanticism, everyday life, theatre industry, commercialization of art, Belle Époque, the Théâtre Libre, André Antoine, Emile Zola, Edmond Rostand, Jena Richepin, Edmond de Goncourt, Henry Becque, Jean Jullien, Eugène Brieux, Francois de Curel, Octave Mirbeau