

9.1 An Overview of Non-Realistic Theatre

Read The Development of Non-Realistic Theatre

Non-Realistic Theatre developed in reaction to the style of Realism (see Unit 4.3, pp. 64–70). Non-Realistic Theatre is not confined to recreating life on stage. It also seeks to explore the more elusive and intangible qualities of human existence. As well as heightened use of movement and voice, Non-Realistic Theatre experiments with non-realistic sets, sound effects and coloured lighting to create effect. Some of the major developments of Non-Realistic Theatre are listed below:

- During the 1890s, artists, poets and theatre practitioners reacted against Realism and developed a style known as Symbolism. A Belgian, Maurice Maeterlink, wrote plays that included the use of non-realistic characters; sounds interspersed with long, static silences; and dreamlike colour combinations of lighting.
- In 1896, Alfred Jarry wrote *Ubu Roi*, a highly comic and physical play that explores the abuse of power. The production of this play caused great scandal for its unconventional performance style and use of vulgarity.
- The development of the study of psychology and an increasing interest in the power of dreams and the subconscious inspired artists, musicians, poets and theatre practitioners to explore human experience beyond day-to-day living.
- Vsevolod Meyerhold, a Russian director and a collaborator with Stanislavski, broke from the Moscow Art Theatre to create a non-realistic acting style known as biomechanic acting. This style was highly theatrical and incorporated abstract design and innovative use of the performance space.
- In 1911, Strindberg wrote *A Dream Play*, which incorporated memory, fantasy, absurdity and improvisation.
- Scenic designers, lighting designers and musicians designed sets, lighting and music to help create fantasy worlds.
- Increased use of machines in the workplace and the introduction of automated machinery were seen as a threat to the human spirit. Artists in Germany reacted to this change in society with a movement known as Expressionism.
- Antonin Artaud developed the Theatre of Cruelty between 1926 and 1933. Theatre of Cruelty is an often misunderstood term for performance work that abolished traditional actor–audience boundaries. He was greatly influenced by the ritualistic and disciplined dance–drama work of Cambodia and Bali. Artaud promoted a theatre of the senses. The audience



Although Stanislavski is remembered for his contribution to the development of Realism, he also experimented with non-realistic forms of theatre later in his career.



Changes in theatre at the turn of the century closely mirrored changes in visual arts, music and literature.



was to be shocked and moved by images of great power and beauty.

- Bertolt Brecht, affected by the futility of World War I, wrote plays that not only reflected the world but also attempted to change it. He developed Epic Theatre, which is a non-realistic style of performance that seeks to provoke the audience to reflect on and consider political issues.
- In the late 1940s, the impact of two World Wars and increasing questioning about the philosophy of human existence encouraged the development of Absurdism. Samuel Beckett's absurdist play *Waiting for Godot* caused outrage when it was first performed in 1953.

Write and Discuss

- Research one of the following Non-Realistic Theatre practitioners: Antonin Artaud, Jersey Grotowski, Vsevolod Meyerhold or Gordon Craig. Make point form notes on the distinctive conventions of their performance styles. Present your findings to the class.

9.2 Dreams and the Subconscious

Read Dreams and Interpretation

In this unit you will undertake exercises that help create theatrical representations of dreams and the subconscious. There are many theories regarding dreams and the subconscious. Some theorists have suggested that dreams are an expression of our subconscious and are a process of 'sorting out' our issues and concerns. Others believe that dreams hold symbolic significance and that we need to interpret our dreams to understand their meaning. Another group of theorists believe that dreams are merely erratic electrical activity in the brain that triggers

