

Chapter VI: The Romantic Drama.

Ibsen was a born provincial, with a talent for dramatizing episodes of human weakness and stupidity. He delivered the message of an egoist to the nineteenth century. The deep-dishers have given it a great run, and the muckers have run after them in multitude, but in a few years people will wonder how he ever attained popularity. He was selfish, cold as a fish, hard as nails. It is doubtful if he ever had compassion. There is an appalling solemnity about his work. His followers emulate his owlsh gravity (they call it mysticism), but the Ibsen hypothesis is dwindling away in the sheernonsense of a Bernard Shaw.

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The Romantic Drama, is the antithesis of the Ibsen drama. The apostles of the different "isms" made their way into literature, the poem, the essay, journalism, until they came to the romantic drama. This is the only citadel that has been able to withstand the attacks of the literary heretics. The gallery defends the citadel. Immigrants from socialist regions have weakend the gallery, but it still holds.

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The romantic drama is simply an exaggeration of the picturesque moments of ordinary life, which it throws into high relief. The reason why it withstands these attacks is that it is hemmed in by conventionalities, and the boast of the revolutionists is their unconventionality. The inviolable rules are that the hero and heroine meet, fall in love; at first sight, swear eternal fidelity, are separated by the villain, who attempts to sidetrack their love, and just as the curtain falls the hero stabs the villain down to hell!

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There must be true love between two people that are to be married, right must triumph over wrong, and none of the principles of commonplace life must be outraged, under pain of dismal failure. Charles Frohman said said that no play should ever be put on a stage of his if there was a suspicion of marriage between the hero and the heroine before the last act.

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The boneyard of the theater has heaps of skeletons that went by the boards because they attempted to violate the conventionalities. Think over the plays of recent years and study their runs and you can see just how far the American people are still sound at heart.

It does not take long for all the birth-controllers in New York to see a b.c. play; a divorce run is short; a re-made vamp or Jimmy Valentine strikes a heart-throb; and the commonplace domesticity of Lightnin' appeals for years.

(To be continued)