

# EXPRESSIONISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

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Expressionism, as a literary and artistic movement, flourished in Europe, particularly in Germany, between 1914 and 1924. The term, as distinct from Croce's aesthetic theory of art, was first used by the French painter, Herve, in 1901, and was applied to literature by Hermann Bahr in 1914.

There are some remarkable similarities between Expressionism and Romanticism. Romanticism was a revolt and reaction against the limited mechanistic and materialistic world-view of the Age of Reason, It was, in its liberal and radical aspect, a call for freedom both of thought and its content, literary form and its material. Dissatisfied with the sordid reality, it exalted the elemental in human nature and sought the infinite. There is consequently a mystical strain in romantic poetry, a touch of melancholic longing in romantic symbolism. Love dreams, visions and ecstasy seem to be primary media of the Romantic art. Some of these very qualities and characteristics are the heart of Expressionism. Expressionism, like Romantic-ism, was a voice of protest against the whole materialistic and mechanical trend of modern technological and industrial civilization which reduces man to a 'robot', alienates him from his own essential nature and makes him a prey to purposeless, tedious and meaningless

existence like Kaiser's Cashier who attempts to break the cage of modern life of money and profit, and seek love and romance. Rousseau, Blake and Wordsworth had already questioned the benefits of an artificial civilization, they believed that the progress of civilization and the accumulation of earthly goods had made man selfish and had taken him far from the purity and innocence of his real uncorrupted nature. They emphasised the value and importance of feeling as against the calculative intellect. Wordsworth warned his generation and posterity against the dangers of growing wordliness and materialism; Blake turned to poetic and prophetic visions and dreams, elemental feelings and impulses, preferring the world of dreams to the world of brutal fact and seeking to establish a new Jerusalem.

Expressionism is linked with Romanticism in its emphasis upon vision and dream and ecstasy, in its spirit of positive and Vitalist Idealism and Reform, in its longing for eternity, in its sense of a transcendental Reality, in its concern with death as the gate to the Great Unknown: 'Marzynsky indicates that Expressionism has a certain kinship to Romanticism in its turning away from the observed reality.' The romantic longing to pass from the restricted, finite, temporal existence into the infinite and transcendental world of perfection, bliss and ecstasy is shared by the Expressionist.<sup>320</sup> The desire of the Expressionists', writes Richard Samuel, 'to break through the narrowing limits of finite reality, as represented by a world in which even before the war

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<sup>320</sup> Dahlstorm, Strinberg's Dramatic Expressionism, p. 17.

they had begun to lose faith, led them to a craving for death, which they visualised as the gateway to the transcendental life.<sup>321</sup>

As a complex movement, Expressionism both rejected and accepted many elements from previous and contemporary European intellectual and literary movements; and therefore any study of Expressionism inevitably involves a discussion of Naturalism, Realism, Symbolism, Neo-romanticism, and Impressionism. The dominant phenomenon in late nineteenth century European literature, particularly novel and drama, was the emergence of Naturalism, and Realism, associated chiefly with the names of Balzac, Zola, and Ibsen. The great triumph and achievement of these movements was in the French novel and Scandinavian drama. The realistic and naturalistic trends in literature and art were a manifestation of the new faith in science and its objective method. In content the naturalistic-realistic literature is generally concerned with the life of the middle and the lower classes; it does not mind depicting the lowest depths in man, the beast under a thin veneer of civilization, portraying man as a biological and economic animal. In language it made use of the daily slang. Realistic-naturalistic literature became avowedly socioiological and reformist. Some writers, labelled as Decadents dealt in their work with the weird, the dark, and the painful, the abnormally sexual and sensual, linking love and death, pleasure and pain, and showing an obsession with corpses, ghosts, and torture, characteristics which are not absent in the work of some

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<sup>321</sup> Richard Samuel and R. H. Thomas, *Expressionism in German Life*, p. 132

Expressionists. The hero, as in Dostoevsky, is generally gloomy, pessimistic, and ineffectual, more a victim than a hero; he finds no satisfaction and happiness in any earthly activity and suffers from ennui and tedium of a life which finds its only earthly palliatives in opium, sex and woman. The writers of some of these new literary movements sought new shores even if they were shores of utter darkness. Baudlaire expressed the wish "to plunge into the gulf no matter whether hell or heaven, to find, at the bottom of the unknown, something different ". Likening life to a hospital (Baudlaire) and to the deep and eternal wound " (Rimbaud), these writers and their characters sought an escape and release out of this world: Anywhere, anywhere, as long as it be out of this world".

Two additional influences on twentieth century literature were the Marxist socialist-radical movement, and the Freudian. A large number of modern writers, including some Expressionists, consciously or unconsciously presented Marxian concepts such as the conflict of social classes, and a critique of the whole bourgeois-capitalistic system of values centering round need for money, profit and power, ending in wars. Next to Marxism, Freudianism was another important current of thought that found expression in Expressionist literature. Freud publicised the importance of the subconscious life in determining human motivation and action; and, even more important, by his revelation of the repressed sexual element in man he paved the way for a more frank and more revealing treatment of erotic themes in literature. The theme of the repression of the sexual

instinct is the favourite theme of Wedekind and of good many other twentieth century writers.

## II

Influenced by Dostoevsky's and Strinberg's exploration of the deep and dark corners of the human soul. reinforced by Freud's exploration and interpretation of the subconscious forces in man, the Expressionists set out to break through the barriers of the surface reality find the deeper reality that lies beneath and beyond it. In Expressionist drama, therefore reality and super—reality are freely mixed; it dispenses with individual characterization and creates types expressing the basic problems and issues peculiar to the modern society, such as bourgeois morality, sex, war, and the social problems resulting from mechanization and industrialization. The dramatic scene is symbolic and not defined in terms of place and time, the actor is the representative of ideas, emotions, fate, social and economic forces. The twentieth century demand for freedom from old established but outworn modes of thought and feeling, from intellectual, moral, religious, economic, social and political formulations of the age had already been witnessed in the work of almost all important European writers, including the English ones, such as Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, and D. H. Lawrence. All these authors were profoundly aware of the issues and problems resulting from the triumph of science and industry and from man's acquisitive instincts. Expressionism was one such manifestation of this new awareness.

Three main influences, literary and intellectual, contributed to the emergence of expressionism. The first of these was the work of August Strindberg (1849-1912), a brilliant Swedish dramatist and novelist who actually wrote expressionistic works a generation before the formation of the expressionistic school of play-wrights. His fantastic dramas, especially *The Dream Play* (1902), were widely staged in Germany and caused a sensation almost equal to that created by Ibsen a generation before. The second influence was that of psychoanalysis, especially the work of Freud and Jung. The existence of the sub-conscious and unconscious life under the appearance of reason and logic provided the Expressionists with fertile material for their work. Last, Marxism, which viewed social strife not in terms of the individual but in terms of the amorphous and homogeneous masses, had its impact on some of the Expressionists. Most of the Expressionists used the concept of class solidarity to create a literature in which masses, not individuals, were the protagonists. The protagonists are often given such labels as 'Father', 'Cashier', 'Nameless', 'Billionaire', 'Daughter', rather than specific names. *Toiler's Man* and *the Masses* has only one distinguishable individual character, Sonia, and even she is submerged by the mass before the drama ends. In practice the most striking characteristic of expressionistic drama is its weird, fantastic or unreal setting and atmosphere. Everything is distorted or oversimplified; the elements of conflict are presented in their bare essence rather than encumbered with detail. The dialogue is often spoken in a sort of telegraphic style.

Expressionism in drama is found in its purest form in the plays of Wedekind, Sorge, Toiler, Kaiser and Karl Capek.

The effects and results of the first World War, particularly for the Germans, were disastrous, giving birth to a mood of pessimism regarding man and his civilization. The world and human society instead of presenting a picture of order and reason, appeared chaotic and irrational, the picture of a world gone mad: "The provocation to storm high heaven and thresh one's arms against a mad world with commensurate madness was too strong to be resisted"<sup>322</sup> Corpses and ghosts were introduced by some of the post-war Expressionist playwrights. This Expressionist drama definitely subjective embodying as it did the personal disillusionment and revolt of some sensitive and idealistic souls among the German writers, These writers strove to represent the anarchic state of the world by a corresponding anarchy of rapidly shifting scenes, by an alternation of fantasy and reality, and by characters who are fantastic either in themselves or in their visions and moods. If the world is unreal to a character, as to the embezzling Cashier of Kaiser, the play makes the world look commensurately unreal by means of extravagant and fugitive scenes and by the devices of masks and wooden legs. No single dramatic formula and pattern can cover the dramas of the Expressionist school: the plays range from furious melodramas and fantasies to carefully constructed dramas of social protest. Wedekind, Toiler, Kaiser, and Karl Capek addressed themselves

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<sup>322</sup> John Gassner, *Masters of Drama*, (New York, 1945), p. 484.

to tangible realities of sexual repression, militarism, social injustice and inequality, war and revolution, industrialism and capitalism. One characteristic note in the Expressionist drama, particularly that of Strindberg, Sorge, Kaiser, and Wedekind, is that of pessimism. A sense of the hollowness and meaninglessness of life. of ennui and tedium, underlies Expressionist drama; from morning to midnight there is same eternal round of mechanical activities, of 'the eternal mating, the eternal round of sex', as says the Professor in Capek's *Insect World*. Life appears like a cage of horrors, monstrocities, corruption, greed and lust. The Daughter of the Godess Indra in Strindberg's *The Dream Play* believes that humanity is to be pitied; the world is a dream, a nightmare. In these plays there is the sense of man's dilemma, of his anguish and agony, caught between the claims of the irresistible forces of his nature and the demands of rational and civilized life. Once the facade of reason, logic, moral will are re-moved, the irrational in man comes to the surface. The pressure of the conflict between the irrational, and the rational, between reason and impulse, between law and discipline was acutely felt by some of these writers. This demand for complete freedom from rational and social control is voiced by an Expressionist painter and writer, Kokoschka: we must harken closely to our inner voice. ... All that is required of us is to release control. ... All laws are left behind. One's soul is a reverberation of the universe".<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Edith Hoffman, Kokoschka: *Life and Work* (London 1947), p. 286.



The new generation in Europe, particularly in Germany, that was born before the first World War and lived through it, was dissatisfied with the bourgeois attitude to life that it found around it; the vision of a ruined and distressful world occupied their imagination, and they were deeply concerned with the social and political realities of the modern world. But this generation, which hated war, also had the hope that after the war a new and better world would be built up. Thus, in German Expressionist drama there is both a pessimistic and optimistic note. The aims and objectives of the Expressionists were realistic and practical, but their artistic methods were unreal and fantastic. Wedekind tore the mask from the hypocrisy and prudery of the bourgeois attitude to life and presented the reality of sex and of adolescence. Here Expressionism joins hands with Naturalism and shares with it the desire boldly to face and unmask reality, even in its unpleasant aspects. The difference lies in the fact that while the aim of the Naturalists is to describe in detail the manifold elements of the milieu and expose evils of modern industrial society the Expressionists avoided abundance of details and just gave glimpses of evil. Expressionists do not work as photographers, they present visions. They are not concerned with descriptions but with inner experience and reality. The Expressionists, in spite of the various shades of religious-mystical and socio-political-activist, are all united in their search for a new world, a new society and a new man. They rejected the Neo-Romanticist surrender to impressions, its preoccupation with legend and fairy-tale and its lack of a positive outlook and

programme for the future. But the Expressionists accepted from Neo-Romanticism the cult of the irrational, the representation of the dream world, the use of symbolism, and the heightening of emotional effect to the point of ecstasy. From Naturalism the Expressionists inherited the emphasis on the social ills and evils of the contemporary socio-economic order. By minimizing the role of reasons ", and moral will "in human life, naturalism prepared the ground for the excesses of expressionists and surrealists".<sup>324</sup>

The emergence of modern drama can be equated with the rise of realistic drama and stage production under the influence of Zola Ibsen, and Bernard Shaw. The idea of freedom of form and thought in modern drama, as in all modern literature, can be traced to the Romantic revolt against neo-classic restraint and discipline. Lessing in Germany and Victor Hugo in France were the pioneers of new ideas in drama. Romanticism was again, like Expressionism, a complex movement ; it had elements which were both creative constructive and realistic, and also subjective, purely romantic, dreamy and visionary. The opposition and reconciliation between the purely romantic, idealistic, visionary aspect of romanticism on the one hand and the realistic, creative and constructive aspect on the other, has led some critics to apply the label of ' vitalist idealism ' to the creative impulse of the major romantic poets. The Romanticists attempted to penetrate to the depths of human experience and to discover the real human core

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<sup>324</sup>John Gassner, *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre* (N. Y., 1956), p. 70.

and vital origins covered under the artificial trapping of convention and civilization; they wanted to reconstruct the world and human society. This side of romanticism relates it to the naturalism and realism of the later nineteenth century. ., It was this freedom of expression ", writes Gassner, " that sparked the naturalism of Zola, the critical realism of Ibsen, and the expressionism of Strindberg, during the last two decades of his life ".<sup>325</sup>

The new realistic drama had certain technical characteristics, such as the attempt to create the illusion of reality on the stage, use of natural language, compression and oompactness of structure, an inner unity of atmosphere and idea. The characters are representatives of ideas and class, leading to discussion and debate rather than action. Zola's naturalism exhibited man as the product and victim of heredity, environment, and instinct; and naturalistic drama presented environment, and instinct on the stage, the beast in man, degradation, disease, poverty, and sexual licence. Naturalism was succeeded by anti-naturalistic and anti-realistic movements, such as Neo-Romanticism, Impressionism, Expressionism, and Sur-realism. These movements were still realistic to the extent that they attempted to reflect the confusion, the disintegration, the ennuui, the loneliness and isolation of modren man's life in mechanical, industrial, acquisitive society. But the Realists, as against the anti-Realists, felt at home in their world which they certainly wanted to reform; the anti-Realists

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<sup>325</sup> Gassner. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

were psychologically alienated and isolated lonely souls with a morbid grievance against the real life, against all observed reality, and seeking Novalis's " blue flower " or Maeterlinck's " blue bird ". Indefinite, vague longing and vision, allegedly more real than physical reality, became the province of the new anti realists. " Expressionism followed ", writes Gassner, " a view of life and art that required the destruction of the external shape of reality ".<sup>326</sup> For the Expressionists the stage became the means of projecting the disintegration of modern man and society. The Expressionists claimed to express reality and truth better than the Realists. A chaotic and even nihilistic view of life and reality informs some expressionist plays, particularly the plays of Strindberg. The characters are depersonalized, stark symbols or allegorical types, deprived of individuality and of a personal name. A sense of the vanity, shallowness and weariness of the age is present in expressionism; the last scene in some Expressionist plays is laid in cemetery. And yet, ecstasy spirit of revolt and reform, the longing for eternity and the sense of God's presence link some of the Expressionists to the romanticists, with whom they share the hatred of materialism and the search for a spiritual principle in the universe.

Expressionism was not a completely unified school and movement but consisted of several groups. The attempt has been made to trace two independent tendencies during the years 1910-1925, pure Expressionism and Activism. The Activists form but a

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<sup>326</sup> Gassner, *Ibid.*, p, 109.

special branch of Expressionism, concerned mainly with social and political issues and reform, their outlook clearly including towards rationalism or scepticism. To this group belong writers like Toiler and Kaiser. Another group is more mystical and religious in its quest; to this group belong Sorge, Unruh, Werfel, and Kafka, who are particularly concerned with the problems of man and God; in their work the irrational predominates; they are more interested in the liberation of the soul from the prison of the body and the world than in the reform of society. But they all shared the dissatisfaction with the external reality, and turned inward. The essence of Expressionist literature seems to be the depiction of man's predicament, of sorrow and suffering, and the purification that sorrow and suffering bring. Most of the Expressionists are idealists, possessed by the idea of the New Man, New Society, and New Humanity, rising above the barrower loyalties to state, nation, class, social conventions, and governed by love, goodness and peace. The birth of the New Man is opposed by the forces of violence and evil, greed and egotism, tradition and convention, deception and wickedness. The expressionist, like the romanticist, wants to transform and reshape the observed reality in the light of his ideal aspirations and nearer to the heart's desire; he is subjective, lyrical, ecstatic, " The expressionist seeks to give meaning to all that happens within the ego ", writes Dahlstrom, " to grasp into the chaos of the

unconscious and bring to the light of consciousness whatsoever meaning there is to this existence of ours ".<sup>327</sup>

In all Expressionist drama there is a stress on mankind, on human values, on the spiritual brotherhood of man; there is the desire to restate all human values in all human relationships: "Expressionist drama may be said to begin and end with emphasis on human values, on love on a spiritual brotherhood. It is perhaps an esoteric socialism of the soul, a means of realizing essential reality in man himself."<sup>328</sup>

The implied values of these plays are love, humility, and a victorious meekness; dehumanizing forces of the industrial age are opposed by a humanistic idealism which pins faith and hope in the birth of the New Man and the New World.

The dramatic aims and methods of the Expressionists are well indicated by words of Toiler: " The plays collected in this volume are social dramas and tragedies. They witness to human suffering and to fine yet vain struggles to vanquish this suffering "<sup>329</sup> Again: " These pictures of ' reality' are not realism, are not local color; the protagonists (except for Sonia) are not individual characters. Such a play can only nave a spiritual, never a concrete, reality".<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> C. E. W. L. Dahlstrom, /bid, 52,

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>329</sup> Ernst Toiler, Introduction to Seven Plays, (New York).

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

### III

Coming to the individual dramatists of the Expressionist school and selecting four of them as representatives, the first name that must be mentioned is that of August Strindberg (1849-1912), who was Swedish by birth. He was the child of an aristocratic father and a bar-maid who were married a few months before the birth of Strindberg. He had an unhappy childhood and the circumstances of his early and later life left their impress on his literary work. He married three times and all his marriages ended in unhappiness and failure. His attitude towards woman was very abnormal; he was both attracted by woman and repelled by her.

Strindberg began as a Naturalist, and in his naturalistic works he belongs to the Naturalistic literary movement of his time. But later he turned from naturalism toward an embryonic form of expressionism, and he is regarded as the precursor of the symbolist and expressionist drama of the early twentieth century. In fact, his dramatic work combines all the three techniques and strains, the naturalistic, the symbolist, and the expressionist. Out of life's despair and disappointment arose his desire to express himself in literature; in fact, one can say that he shed his mental and emotional sickness in literature. Having himself undergone psychological conflicts and the storms of passion, he became the master of the drama of psychological conflict, and he portrayed realities which the Realists and Naturalists had often confined to

the surface of life and experience. He avoided the commonplace and the normal in everyday reality. His plays possess the incisive symbolizations of both the external and the inner world of modern man. Strindberg's expressionist influence proceeds chiefly from his three plays, *To Damascus* (1898-1904), *The Dance of Death* (1901), and *The Dream Play* (1902). These plays mark the beginning of the expressionistic technique, later to be utilized by Wedekind, Toiler, Sorge, Kaiser, Capek, and O'Neill. The chief characteristic of Strindberg's work is its brooding pessimism and its revelation of hitherto unemarked dark forces of human nature, the dark powers of the unconscious. His work is dominated by emotion, instinct, and passion. Sexual themes are predominant in his work, but this view of sexuality is abnormal, even pathological. He presents sexual passion as a cruel struggle between the male and the female in which each seeks to overwhelm and dominate the other; its twin poles are a blind and bestial desire and a hatred toward the object which arouses such an enslaving passion. Strindberg's personal experience of sexual life was dark and chaotic. His attitude towards women is different from Ibsen's feminism; he views woman as Dionysian power of nature which attempts to stifle the freedom-loving intellectualism and spirituality of the Appollonian male.

In the prologue to *The Dream Play*, Strindberg explains that his purpose is to imitate the disconnect but seemingly logical form of the dream. The background is ostensibly of reality, but on this surface the dramatist's subconscious embroiders an intricate pattern of memory, experience, fancy, fantasy and the grotesque.



The characters take on a dreamlike quality; they become allegorical or symbolical figures, embodying traits and forces and ideas. Strindberg transmuted much of his personal experiences and suffering into his expressionist plays. After having undergone various emotional, intellectual and religious revolutions, socialism, pacifism, Deism, even perhaps Buddhism, he was converted to a mystical form of Christianity of the Swedenborgian variety. This personal religious conversion and suffering he embodied in his dramatic trilogy: *To Damascus*, a sort of autobiographical allegory which also marks the inception of his expressionistic period in dramatic technique. *The Dream Play* is the most expressionistic of Strindberg's works. It anticipates later attempts to incorporate the Freudian concept of the dream into literature. Beyond and under the apparent beauty of life Strindberg perceived an under-current of wailing, a silent sad music ; this dark and pessimistic attitude passed on to some of the later Expressionists. Strindberg plumbs the depths of the tortured and tormented soul of modern man and gives expression to this hopelessness in dramas in which there is no vestige of form in the traditional sense; the whole play is dissolved into a series of incidents, each contributing to the moral that Strindberg wishes to draw, namely, the hopeless situation of mankind caught in the grip of forces of the irrational. He is aware of the pain of joy and the joy of suffering and sorrow; he finds no remedy for man's wretched earthly lot except in human pity and resignation. Strindberg opened up new depths of the unconscious and the subconscious, new horizons beyond the pale of observed reality. His doctrine of suffering was given an active turn by the

Expressionists who proclaimed suffering as essential for the birth and victory of the New Man. He mingled reality and super reality, and used the stage to reveal strange visions, ecstasies, agonies, dreams and nightmares.

Next important Expressionist is Ernst Toller (1893-1939). He is one of the most impassioned and forceful of the German Expressionists. His play *Masses and Man* carries the technique of mass dramatic action to its absolute ultimate; the characters are devoid of any individual personality at all, except Sonia, and seem to act like a swarm of ants. Toller is not only a forceful champion of expressionism but also a social revolutionist. He was too independent and individualistic to integrate himself with any ideological party or school. His personal attitude and outlook is one of a universal and mystical human brotherhood, cutting across racial and national divisions and uniting all mankind in a common struggle against poverty, sorrow, suffering, and war. The merit of Toller's dramatic work lies in the idealism of his inspiration, in the impassioned arguments of his characters, and in the effective portrayal of mass action.

Toller was the son of a Jewish merchant. He was born in former German Poland in 1893. He was twenty-one when the first World War broke out. His first experience of life was horrifying and disgusting, and as soon as he was discharged on medical ground he became an active pacifist. He was thrown into jail, released at the time of the 1918 revolution in Germany, and was imprisoned again in 1919. He remained in prison until 1924,

and emerged broken in spirit and bitter in temper. In 1932, fleeing the Nazis, he came to America; in 1939, depressed by the War and by personal domestic troubles, he committed suicide.

Like several other Expressionists, Toiler turned first to the tragedy and insanity of war. With a romantic confidence in man he celebrated a spiritual conversion to pacifism in his *Transfiguration*, written in 1918. In both realistic and dream pictures a sculptor, who had enlisted for military service, becomes a pacifist. Toiler envisaged a bloodless-revolution and transformation of society, a conversion to reason and love, to peace, and to creative and constructive action. During his imprisonment Toiler produced two of his most famous works, *Masses and Man* and *The Machine Wreckers*. Neither play relinquished any faith in the ultimate triumph of humanity and love. Both works expressed socialist idealism without countenancing violent methods. Both plays were consequently poems of suffering and aspiration rather than mere representation of reality. In *Masses and Man* an upper class woman, Sonia, deserts her husband and supports the common people in an anti-war strike. But when the masses get out of hand and commit deeds of violence she makes an impassioned effort to restrain them. Sonia is mocked and over-ruled by the mob, represented by the Nameless, and the revolt is crushed. But it is she who is dragged to prison and forced to suffer for the people. Refusing to be saved by the Nameless, proponent of mob violence, and awaiting execution, she endures visions in her cell that fortify her instead of crushing her spirit. Sonia represents the dilemma of all

radical idealists who want change without violence and hatred. The Nameless insists that evil and oppression can be destroyed only by violence, but Sonia cannot countenance murder from any source and in any cause. The change to a better world should not come through violence and hatred. Sonia is the incarnation of all the ideal dreams of liberal and humanist radicals.

Masses and Man is a bitter but moving study of revolution and its failure to solve the problems of the masses. From a dramatic point of view it is an experiment in the use of mass humanity as the protagonist of a drama. The play brings out the deterioration that comes with power; the masses, having tasted power, release their irrational violent impulses resulting in tragedy. The play is directed both against capitalism and against violent revolution. The world is in misery not merely because of mob rule or state despotism, but because both mob and state are driven by violence and force: the state oppresses the disinherited. Sonia declares that factories may no longer conquer and enslave the souls of men. At the same time, she insists that masses should be bound together by love, and she opposes their resort to revenge and cruelty.

Technically, especially effective are certain scenes in which life seems to be reduced to mechanical action. Bankers appear trading on the stock exchange, talking of war as their mighty instrument to control kings, ministers, parliaments, and the press, while their dividends roll in, and a recorder chronicles their winnings. When a chorus of lamentation from the Masses is heard, the bankers

suggest an entertainment for their benefit and dance to the music of clinking coins. Toiler, like his Sonia retains his faith in human nature to the last ; when the priest pronounces mankind to be evil, Sonia declares her belief that "Mankind gropes toward goodness". Toiler's sympathy goes out to the victims of an industrial civilization, controlled by capital, and driven to retahate with violence.

Another, and one of the most typical and representative of the Expressionist school in Germany, was George Kaiser (1878-1945). He was an original force among Germany playwrights. " An idealist of fecund imagination ", writes F. W. Chandler, " a Socialist exposing flaws in the present order, an innovator in technique, he creates a new, free drama, designed to make his audiences think ".<sup>331</sup> The dramas of Kaiser are complex experiments which have been called everything from ' allegorical ' to ' cubistic '. Kaiser himself applied the term ' Thought-plays ' to his dramas, contrasting them with mere spectacles. Kaiser was greatly influenced by Strindberg and Wedekind, and wrote in the tradition of expressionism and is considered one of the leading exponents of this school. His favourite dramatic devices are the impersonal allegorical character labelled only with a profession, the formless masses who chant their emotions in a sort of chorus, and the animizing of machinery and power. Kaiser is antagonistic toward industrialism; the modren factory or office is to him a vast mechanism contrived to grind down human beings into senseless

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<sup>331</sup> F. W. Chandler, *Modern Continental Playwrights* (New York, 1931), P. 407

and lifeless robots. Like *Toiler*, Kaiser gives artificial limbs to his characters to emphasise the artificial character of modern man; he reduces the factory worker to a leg, an arm. or an eye; the machine and the factory is not interested in the worker's emotional and mental life. Kaiser is bitterly opposed to the mechanical spirit of the age; for him the basic element of the universe is energy. Energy appears as a protagonist, in one way or another, in many of his plays, -in the Gas trilogy as the artificial energy of the gas, and in such plays as *Europa* as the reproductive energies of the human race.

Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* is a fantasy the break-down of a bank cashier in a brief twelve-hour period. The hero, labelled only as Bank Cashier, is a man who has been crushed down by the bureaucratic system until he is only an automation. One day, seeing an Italian lady in the Bank, the cashier tries to free himself from his mechanical and dull existence and seek the wider world of love and romance. He mistakes the lady's friendly overtures for coquetry and tries to court her, and for this purpose he embezzles money from his Bank. When the lady rejects his advances, he is stupified; he cannot return to the bank and has no idea how to make use of his stolen fortune. He squanders the money on frivolities, including monstrous prizes to racers, and is eventually betrayed to the police by a callous Salvation Army lass. The play demonstrates the impossibility of escaping from the monotony of modern business life: life becomes a crucifixion.

The master-work of Kaiser's career is the radically expressionistic Gas trilogy. In this play he created a symbolic history of modern civilization rushing headlong toward destruction by profit-motivated industrialism. The play is a fantastic nightmare of warfare and technology in a scientific age. The first Act, with its premonition of disaster, shows the dramatist's skill in dramatic exposition. The conflicting forces are power of man and the superhuman power which triumphs in the explosion. The hero, Billionaire's Son, begins to fight for a new principle suggested to him by the explosion. He wishes to stop the production of gas and to settle his workmen as farmers in the grounds of the factory. In the second Act he is confronted with the Engineer who represents the 'old' idea of unceasing labour. In the third Act the capitalistic forces, who need gas, resist him from materialistic and selfish reasons. These opposing forces are symbolised by a chorus consisting of the Five Gentlemen in Black, the masters of the earth. The idealistic Billionaire's Son ultimately yields to the forces of industrialism, but in a vision he foresees the coming of the New Man, although he has not been able fully to overcome the 'old' forces. The play ends with the pledge of his Daughter: "I will give him birth". In this play Kaiser constructs his plot with great precision. With its technique of figures and types, Gas attains in the fourth Act one of the high points of Expressionist drama. Here two ideals of equal value clash, that of work for its own sake and that of the full human life of a farmer. For Kaiser the mind and spirit are all important

centres of energy threatened by the machinery of industry, gold-getting, and warfare.

Kaiser's distinctive contribution to drama is contained in his expressionist plays in which the thought is more important than dramatic realism and verisimilitude. Such plays are abstract and symbolic. Scenes follow one another without the nice organization of the well-made play. The action is carried by characters who are types rather than individuals; depersonalized, mechanical characters are intended to convey the disorder of contemporary society and the disorientation of the individual. The style alternates between passionate speeches and telegraphic phrases. There is no probing of motives and analysis of emotions. In the words of F. W. Chandler, " Experience is simply shattered into its elements and then reshaped in form strongly stylized to enforce some concept ".<sup>332</sup> Kaiser's sympathy with the poor and the oppressed and his belief that money is the root of all evil appear in all his expressionist plays, particularly the Gas trilogy. The Billionaire's Son and Daughters believe, along with Kaiser, that upon each of us weighs a responsibility for the wrongs and injustices of the social order. This sense of the social responsibility of each for all and of all for each is expressed by the Billionaire's Son when a stoker is brought fainting on deck: " You must save him, doctor; otherwise I am his murderer !". The Bank's Cashier is the victim of the deadening effects of modern business and industrial routine; the freedom and happiness he is in search of

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<sup>332</sup> . Ibid., p. 412.



eludes his grasp: " From morn to midnight I have wandered round and round in a circle ! Now I see the way out, but where does it lead?" To death and to the beyond; the cashier shoots himself. Kaiser dreams of social solidarity and asserts faith in the spirit of man as opposed to faith in mere money and machinery.

Another important playwright of the Expressionist school was Karl Capek (1890-1938). He is perhaps the most famous Czech writer and dramatist of the twentieth century. He was influenced by the German expressionist movement, but in his literary work he retains his thoroughly Czech spirit and attitude. He wrote a memorable play in R. U. R. which is fantasy of the future of mechanical civilization. Observing the growing mechanization of modern life and society Capek was apprehensive of a future in which all the workers would be robots or automata. In this play Capek develops a notion implicit in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, namely, that machines of any kind are in danger of mastering man and destroying his human nature and individuality. Rossum's Universal Robots are mechanical workers, the invention of a professor and his son. The professor has sought to prove that God can be dispensed with, and the son sought to provide a cheap substitute for human labour. The Robots symbolise mechanical efficiency; they are like men but divested of all essential human attributes of feeling and passion. The Robots ultimately outnumber human beings and rise in revolt against the human world. The last human survivor declares: "It was a crime to make Robots at all. For our own selfish ends, for profit, for progress, we have destroyed mankind". The moral of the play is

that mechanical efficiency is not an end in itself, labour and toil are not a curse and what constitutes civilization is not machinery, but rather its human values. Alquist, the lone survivor, utters the word of wisdom: "There was something good in service and something great in humility; there was a kind of virtue in toil and weariness". Two super-Robots, a male and a female, have at last evolved souls; they can laugh and weep and love, and each is ready to sacrifice life for the other; they are Helena and Primus, who begin the foundation of a new race of human beings.

Another well-known play of Capek and his brother Joseph Capek is the *Insect World* or *The World We Live In*. This play is a compound of fantasy, dream and reality. In portraying the insect world of beetles, ants and moths and butterflies, the Capek brothers have satirized the world of man which, as a result of mechanization, industry and commerce has become an insect world; the life of man like the life of the insects in the play, has become a round of vain gossip, sex, mating, and a brute struggle for mere survival. The fly says: "If you want to keep alive, you've got to fight your way". Man piles and hoards goods as do the flies, the ants and the crickets. Capeks also attack modern militarism and war as resulting from man's lust for material things, for territory, for markets. When the tramp asks "Why war?", he is told: "Because we have a new war machine. Because we still need a bit of the world from the birch tree to the pine tree, the road between two blades of grass . . . a question of prestige and trade and rights of nationality". The play is poetic in conception, powerful in satire, and significant in meaning. Without being

didactic, the playwrights parody the world of modern man which is made up either of light-hearted love-making and philandering, or drudgery of work, of piling and hoarding, of parasitism, of struggle and war, greed and lust family selfishness, militarism, worship of the state.

To conclude, Expressionism sought to introduce a new epoch in the history of European literature though it felt the link with the earlier literary movements such as Naturalism and Neo-Romanticism. The Expressionist drama was both a descendant of Naturalism and a revival and development of the Romantic tradition. The general tendency of the Expressionist drama was the destruction of external form and mirroring the inner reality. depiction of sorrow, suffering and defeat, and yet discovering some positive values in life. Even if the last scene of an expressionist play be that of death and cemetery, it also proclaims a new and better future for man at least the hope of the birth of the New Man:.