



Banha University - Faculty of Education- English Department
Fourth Grade
Drama
Second Term- 2013/2014

Answer the Following Questions:

1. What is “realism” from Brechet’s point of view?

Brecht, whilst rejecting Lukacs’s view of the realist novel, nonetheless offered a similar critique of naturalism, noting, in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, the limitations of ‘descriptiveness’ in an illuminating metaphor: The man who drops a pebble hasn’t begun representing the laws of gravity...nor has the man who merely gives an exact description of its fall’ (Brecht 1965:25). Drawing on the metaphor of photography, Brecht goes on to contrast naturalism with realism:

The crux of the matter is that true realism has to do with more than just making reality recognisable in the theatre. One has to be able to see through it, too. One has to be able to see the laws that decide how the processes of life develop. These laws can’t be spotted by the camera. (Brecht 1965:27)

Brecht's antagonism towards naturalism was well known and explicitly ideological, embracing not only its epistemology but also the whole mimetic (or, as he somewhat misleadingly termed it, the Aristotelian) tradition. In doing so, Brecht opened up a way of redefining the links between naturalism and realism, between descriptiveness and analysis, and between method and intention in a decisive manner. Realism, for Brecht, 'is not only an issue for literature: it is a major political, philosophical and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such—as a matter of general human interest' (Brecht 1977:76). Seen in these terms, realism must be conceived in terms that are 'wide and political and sovereign over all conventions' (Brecht 1977:82); in other words, it is because realism has at its core the ambition to 'render reality to men in a form they can master' that new forms of representation are needed. Brecht summarised the position succinctly thus:

Realism is not a mere question of form. Were we to copy the style of these realists, we would no longer be realists.... For time flows on, and if did not, it would be a bad prospect for those who do not sit at golden tables. Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change. (Brecht 1977:82)

To be realist, then, might mean—and has frequently has meant in the twentieth century—that it is necessary to challenge the dominant theatrical and dramatic conventions associated, historically, with realism and naturalism.

2. Comment briefly on the character of Biff in Miller's *Death of A Salesman*?

Biff Loman

Unlike Willy and Happy, Biff feels compelled to seek the truth about himself. While his father and brother are unable to accept the miserable reality of their respective lives, Biff acknowledges his failure and eventually manages to confront it. Even the difference between his name and theirs reflects this polarity: whereas Willy and Happy willfully and

happily delude themselves, Biff bristles stiffly at self-deception. Biff's discovery that Willy has a mistress strips him of his faith in Willy and Willy's ambitions for him. Consequently, Willy sees Biff as an underachiever, while Biff sees himself as trapped in Willy's grandiose fantasies. After his epiphany in Bill Oliver's office, Biff determines to break through the lies surrounding the Loman family in order to come to realistic terms with his own life. Intent on revealing the simple and humble truth behind Willy's fantasy, Biff longs for the territory (the symbolically free West) obscured by his father's blind faith in a skewed, materialist version of the American Dream. Biff's identity crisis is a function of his and his father's disillusionment, which, in order to reclaim his identity, he must expose.