

FINAL REVISION- Modern Drama

- After the death of Shakespeare and his contemporaries drama in England suffered a decline for two centuries. Even Congreve in the seventeenth, and Sheridan and Goldsmith in the eighteenth, could not restore drama to the position it held during the Elizabethan Age. It was revived, however, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and then there appeared dramatists who have now given it a respectable place in English literature.
- Two important factors were responsible for the revival of drama in 1890's. One was the influence of Ibsen, the great Norwegian dramatist, under which the English dramatists like Bernard Shaw claimed the right to discuss serious social and moral problems in a calm, sensible way. The second was the cynical atmosphere prevailing at that time, which allowed men like Oscar Wilde to treat the moral assumptions of the Victorian age with frivolity and make polite fun of their conventionality, prudishness or smugness. The first factor gave rise to the **Comedy of Ideas or Purpose**, while the second revived **the Comedy of Manners** or the Artificial Comedy.
- Under the influence of Ibsen the serious drama in England from 1890 onward ceased to deal with themes remote in time and place. He had taught men that the real drama must deal with human emotions, with things which are near and dear to ordinary men and women. The new dramatists thus gave up the melodramatic romanticism and pseudo- classical remoteness of their predecessors, and began to treat in their plays the actual English life, first of the aristocratic class, then of the middle class and finally of the labouring class.
- The two important dramatists who took a predominant part in the revival of drama in the last decade of the nineteenth century were George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, both Irishmen. Shaw was the greatest practitioner of the **Comedy of Ideas**, while Wilde that of the new **Comedy of-Manners**.

FINAL REVISION- Modern Dramatists**1- Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)**

- **Henrik Ibsen** is considered the father of modern realistic drama. This does not mean that he started his dramatic career by a representation of real life problems. He underwent certain developments beginning with experimental plays that were indebted to the French well-made play of Scribe and to romantic and traditional patterns. This is clear **in Lady Inger Of Ostrat (1855), Love's Comedy (1862), The Pretenders (1863)**.

2- George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

- The greatest among the modern dramatist was George Bernard Shaw. He was born and brought up in Ireland, but at the age of twenty in 1876 he left Ireland for good, and went to London to make his fortune. At first he tried his hand at the novel, but he did not get any encouragement. Then he began to take part in debates of all sorts, and made his name as the greatest debater in England.

3- Oscar Wilde (1856-1900)

- Another dramatist who took an important part in the revival of drama in the later part of the nineteenth century was **Oscar Wilde**. It was only during the last five years of his life that he turned his attention to writing for the stage. During his lifetime his plays became very popular, and they were thought to represent a high mark in English drama. But their importance was exaggerated, because they are merely the work of a skilled craftsman. It was mainly on account of their style- graceful, polished and full of wit-that they appealed to the audience.

FINAL REVISION-A DOLL'S HOUSE

High Tragedy About Ordinary People in Everyday Prose

- Ibsen's contribution to the theatre, says a critic, was threefold, and in each respect the drama owes more to him than to any other dramatist since Shakespeare. Firstly, he broke down the social barriers which had previously bounded it. He was the first man to show that high tragedy could be written about ordinary people and in ordinary everyday prose

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- Before Ibsen, tragedy had concerned itself with kings and queens, princes or princesses . Ibsen showed that high tragedy did take place at least as frequently in back parlors as in castles and palaces. He was, of course, not the first dramatist to attempt this, but he was the first to write a tragedy about ordinary people that proved a tremendous success.

Ibsen's Deep Understanding of human Character and Human Relationships

- But none of these technical contributions explains the continued life Of Ibsen's plays on the stage today. Ibsen's enduring greatness as a dramatist is due not to his technical innovations, but to the depth and subtlety of his understanding of human character (especially feminine character), and, which is rarer, of human relationships.

The Title and Its Significance

- The play has an appropriate title. The word "doll" means a woman without any will or mind of her own, a passive and subservient woman. For eight long years Nora has been a passive and obedient Wife to Helmer, always conforming to his ideas, opinions, and tastes. He has always treated her as a pet and as his property. His attitude towards her has always been possessive, as if she wholly belonged to him and had no individuality of her own.

A Modern Tragedy

- Ibsen called his play a modern tragedy, and a modern tragedy it surely is. It is a tragedy because it has a sad ending, with Nora leaving not only her home and her husband but even her children in order to face an uncertain future. It is a tragedy because it depicts the break-up of a family and the disintegration of the domestic life of a couple. It is modern because it departs from the old style of writing tragedies.

The Story

- A Doll's House is the story of Nora and her husband Helmer. They have been married for about nine years and have three children. Eight years ago Nora had borrowed some money from a man called Krogstad against a promissory note on which she had forged signature of her father who was supposed to be a surety for the repayment of the loan. Nora had found it absolutely necessary to obtain this loan.
- Her husband had fallen critically ill and the doctors had advised her to take him away to a warm
- climate. Having no money and desperately anxious to save her husband's life by taking him to Italy she had raised this loan. Her husband had fully recovered. Since then Nora has regularly been
- paying monthly installments to Krogstad against the principal amount and the interest accruing thereon.
- However, she has never told her husband about the loan, about the purpose for which the loan was taken, about the terms of the loan, and about the monthly payments she has been making. Nor has she ever had any notion that in forging her father's signature she had committed a serious criminal act. Now after eight years, Krogstad needs Nora's help to save his job in a bank of which Nora's husband has been appointed the manager. As Nora finds it impossible to help Krogstad, he reveals Nora's secret transaction with him and the fact of the forgery to her husband through a letter.

- Helmer becomes furious with his wife for having been guilty of the crime of forgery. Nora is shocked by her husband's attitude. She had thought that he was capable of making any conceivable sacrifice for her sake, but she finds that he is a self-centered man . She also finds that he is incapable of living 'up to the moral principles which he has always been professing loudly and emphatically. Her love for him drops dead, and she leaves him and also her children.

Helmer's Reasons for wanting to dismiss Krogstad

- Helmer and Krogstad had been great friends during their boyhood but now Helmer holds Krogstad in contempt. In the first place , Krogstad had spoilt his reputation by an act of dishonesty for which he could have been prosecuted if the matter had gone to the court.
- This act of dishonesty in Krogstad's part was an act of forgery similar to that of Nora. But while Nora had forged a signature without realizing that it was something illegal and punishable with imprisonment, Krogstad had committed an act of forgery knowing fully well what he was doing. Helmer had come to know of Krogstad's act of dishonesty and had therefore formed a low opinion about his friend of old days.
- For this reason, Helmer has decided to dismiss Krogstad from his post in the bank and now when Nora recommends Mrs. Linde for a job, Helmer makes up his mind to appoint Mrs. Linde to the post which would be vacated by Krogstad. But Helmer has a second reason also to get rid of Krogstad. Krogstad always speaks to Helmer in a familiar manner, addressing him by his Christine name and behaving as if the friendship of their days of boyhood still exists between them.
- Helmer does not want that a man in a subordinate position, and especially a man who had been guilty of criminal act, should behave as if he were Helmer's equal.

A Doll's House- Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Themes

The Sacrificial Role of Women

- In A Doll's House, Ibsen paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women of all economic classes in his society. In general, the play's female characters exemplify Nora's assertion (spoken to Torvald in Act Three) that even though men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have."

The Unreliability of Appearances

- Over the course of A Doll's House, appearances prove to be misleading veneers that mask the reality of the play's characters and -situations.

Symbols

The Christmas Tree

- The Christmas tree, a festive object meant to serve a decorative purpose, symbolizes Nora's position in her household as a plaything who is pleasing to look at and adds charm to the home. There are several parallels drawn between Nora and the Christmas tree in the play.

New Year's Day

- The action of the play is set at Christmastime, and Nora and Torvald both look forward to New Year's as the start of a new, happier phase in their lives. In the new year, Torvald will start his new job, and he anticipates with excitement the extra money and admiration the job will bring him.
- Nora also looks forward to Torvald's new job, because she will finally be able to repay her secret debt to Krogstad. By the end of the play, however, the nature of the new start that New Year's represents for Torvald and Nora has changed dramatically.