

# Modern Drama



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# 1<sup>st</sup> Lecture

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## 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.

This treatment of actual life made the drama more and more a drama of ideas, which were, for the most part revolutionary, directed against past literary models, current social conventions and the prevailing morality of Victorian England. The new dramatists dealt mainly with the problems of labour and of youth, fighting against romantic love, capitalism and parental authority which were the characteristic features of Victorianism. The characters in their plays are constantly questioning restless and dissatisfied. Young men struggle to throw off the trammels of Victorian prejudice.

Following the example of Nora, the heroine in *Ibsen's A Doll's House*, who leaves her dull domineering husband who seeks to crush her personality and keep her permanently in a childlike, irresponsible state, the young women in these plays join eagerly the Feminist movement and glory in a new-found liberty. Thus these dramatists introduced Nature and Life in drama, and loved to make them play their great parts on the stage.



In the new drama of ideas, action became slow and frequently interrupted. Moreover, inner conflict was substituted for outer conflict, with the result that drama became quieter than the romantic drama of the previous years. The new researches in the field of psychology helped the dramatist in the study of the 'soul', for the expression of which they had to resort to symbols.

By means of symbolism the dramatist could raise the dark and even sordid themes to artistic levels. The emphasis on the inner conflict led some of the modern dramatists to make their protagonists not men but unseen forces, thereby making wider and larger the sphere of drama.

In the field of non-serious comedy there was a revival, in the twentieth century, of the *Comedy of Manners*. The modern period, to a great

extent, is like the Augustan period, because of the return of the witty, satirical comedy which reached its climax in the hands of *Congreve* in 1700. Though this new comedy of manners is often purely fanciful and dependent for its effect upon wit, at times it becomes cynical and bitter when dealing with social problems.

Mainly it is satirical because with the advancement of civilization modern life has become artificial, and satire flourishes in a society which becomes over-civilized and loses touch with elemental conditions and primitive impulses.

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**.

Shaw, who was a great thinker, represented the Puritan side of the Anglo-Irish tradition. Wilde, on the other hand a life of luxury and frivolity, was not a deep thinker as Shaw; and his attitude to life was essentially a playful one .

The success of Oscar Wilde as a writer of artificial 'comedy or the comedy of manners was mainly due to his being a social entertainer, and it is mainly as 'entertainment' that his plays have survived. Wilde may be considered, therefore, as the father of the comedy of pure entertainment as Shaw is the father of the *Comedy of Ideas*. Other modern writers who have followed Wilde directly are *Somerset Maugham* and *Noel Coward*.

But the artificial comedy of the last fifty years in England does not compare well with the artificial comedy of the Restoration. The reason is that in the twentieth century there is a lot of confusion and scepticism about social values. Moreover, social manners change so rapidly in the modern time, that the comedy of manners grows out of date more rapidly than any other type of drama.

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This is not the case with the comedy of ideas or social comedy. **George Bernard Shaw**, the father of the comedy of ideas, was a genius. His intellectual equipment was far greater than that of any of his contemporaries. He alone had understood the greatness of **Ibsen**, and he decided that like **Ibsen's** his plays would also be the vehicles of ideas.

But unlike **Ibsen's** grim and serious temperament, **Shaw** was characterized by jest and verbal wit. He also had a genuine artistic gift for form, and he could not tolerate any clumsiness in construction. For this purpose he had studied every detail of theatrical workmanship. In each of his plays he presented a certain problem connected with modern life, and his characters discuss it thoroughly.

In order to make his ideas still more explicit he added prefaces to his plays, in which he explored the theme more fully. The main burden of his plays is that the civilized man must either develop or perish. Other modern dramatists who followed the example of **Bernard Shaw** and wrote comedies of ideas' were **Granville Barker, Galsworthy, James Birdie, Priestly, Sir James Barrie and John Masefield**, but none of them attained the standard reached by Shaw.

Besides the artificial comedy and the comedy of ideas, another type of drama was developed in England under the influence of the **Irish Dramatic Movement** whose originators were **Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats**. The two important dramatists belonging to this movement are **J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey**.

There has been the revival of **Poetic Drama** in the twentieth century, whose most important practitioner was **T. S. Eliot**. Other modern dramatists who have also written poetic plays are **Christopher Fry, Stephen Philips and Stephen Spender**. Most of the poetic plays written in modern times have a religious theme, and they attempt to preach the doctrine of Christianity .

## 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)***.

With his voluntary exile to Rome, he embarked upon his second stage which produced the poetic dramas of **Brand (1866)** and **Peer Gynt (1867)**.

With his stay in Germany, the third stage started, namely, the realistic social stage which has brought him world-fame, and which has resulted in the birth of a new drama, very well represented in ***A Doll's House, Ghosts, An Enemy of the People, The Wild Duck*** and others.



In these plays Ibsen treated social problems that reflect "his own inner needs on the one hand, and the Zeitgeist (the spirit of the age) on the other. Being in advance of the latter, he did not try to adjust himself to it, but rather to adjust it to himself, to his own demands and values.

These burning social issues were expressed in a realistic technique which is based on the abandonment of verse in favour of everyday prose, the realistic portrayal of characters to the extent of drawing on living models, the emphasis on discussion rather than external action, and the use or rather the perfection of technical devices such as the retrospective method which gives scope to the clash of ideas and narration rather than presentation of events.

## Model Questions

**1- AFTER THE DEATH OF SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES DRAMA IN ENGLAND SUFFERED A.....FOR TWO CENTURIES.**

- A- success
- B- flourishing
- C- decline
- D- progress

**The correct answer is (c)**

**2- DRAMA WAS REVIVED IN THE LAST DECADE OF THE.....**

- A- 16<sup>th</sup> Century.
- B- 17<sup>th</sup> Century.
- C- 18<sup>th</sup> Century.
- D- 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

**The correct answer is (D)**

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Lecture

### 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.

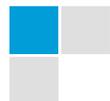
He read Karl Marx, became a Socialist, and in 1884 joined the Fabian Society which was responsible for creating the British Labour Party. He was also a voracious reader, and came under the influence of Samuel Butler whom he described as the greatest writer of the later half of the nineteenth century. Shaw was specially impressed by Butler's dissatisfaction with the Darwinian Theory of Natural Selection.

Shaw came to believe in the Force which Butler had described as 'the mysterious drive towards greater power over our circumstances and deeper understanding of Nature. Shakespeare had described it as 'divinity that shapes our ends'. Shaw termed it the Life Force.

Two other writers who provoked the critical mind of Shaw during his formative period were **Ibsen**, a Norwegian dramatist; and Friedrich **Nietzsche**, a German philosopher. Ibsen whose doctrine, 'Be Thyself,' which was very much like Nietzsche's theory of the Superman who says 'Yea to Life', gave a dramatic presentation of it by picturing in his plays the life of the middle class people with relentless realism. In his plays Ibsen had exposed sentimentality, romanticism **and** hypocrisy.

He showed men and women in society as they really are, **and** evoked the tragedy that may be inherent in ordinary, humdrum life. Working under the influence of Butler, Nietzsche and Ibsen, Shaw who up to the age of forty was mainly concerned in learning, in propagating ideas, in debating, and" persuading people to accept his views about society and morals, decided to bring the world round to his opinions through the medium of the theatre.

With that end in view he studied the stage through and through, and came out with his plays which were theatrically perfect and bubbling with his irrepressible wit. The result was that he immediately attracted attention and became the most popular and influential dramatist of his time.



Shaw wrote his plays with the deliberate purpose of propaganda. He himself said, "My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals." He prepared the minds of the audience by written prefaces to his plays which are far more convincing than the plays themselves. That is why his plays were more successful when they were produced a second or third time when the audience had read them in their published forms.

All the plays of Shaw deal with some problem concerning modern society. In *Widower's House* he put the blame on society, and not on the individual landlord for creating abuses of the right to property. In *Getting Married* he showed the unnaturalness of the home-life as at present constituted. In *The Doctor Dilemma* he exposed the superstition that doctors are infallible. In *John Bull's Other Island*, the hero talks exactly like Shaw, and the Englishman represents the worst traits in English character.

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*Caesar and Cleopatra* has no particular theme, and that is why it comes nearer to being a play than most of Shaw's works. In *The Apple Cart* Shaw ridiculed the working of democratic form of government and hinted that it needed a superman to set things right. It was in *St. Joan* Shaw reached the highest level of his dramatic art by dealing in a tragic manner a universal theme involving grand emotions.

### 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.

Oscar Wilde had the tact of discovering the passing mood of the time and expressing it gracefully. Otherwise, his plays are all superficial, and none of them adds to our knowledge or understanding of life. The situation he presents in his plays are hackneyed, and, borrowed from French plays of intrigue.

*Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* are the four important comedies of Wilde. The first three plays are built on the model of the conventional social melodramas of the time. They are given sparkle and literary

interest by the flashing wit of the dialogue. *The Importance of Being Earnest*, on the other hand, is built on the model of the popular farce of the time.

Wilde calls this a trivial comedy for serious people. It is successful because of its detachment from all meaning and models. In fact this play proved to Wilde that the graceful foolery of farce was the form which was best suited to the expression of his dramatic genius.

#### 4- John Galsworthy (1867-1933)

Galsworthy was a great dramatist of modern times, who besides being a novelist of the first rank, made his mark also in the field of drama. He believed in the naturalistic technique both in the novel and drama. According to him. "Naturalistic art is like a steady lamp, held up from time to time, in whose light things will be seen for a space clearly in due proportion, freed from the mists of prejudice and partisanship."

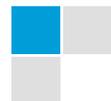
Galsworthy desired to reproduce, both upon the stage and in his books, the natural spectacle of life, presented with detachment. Of course his delicate sympathies for the poor and unprivileged classes make his heart melt for them, and he takes sides with them.

The important plays of Galsworthy are *Strike (1909)*, *Justice (1910)*, *The Skin Game (1929)*, and *The Silver Box*. All these plays deal with social and ethical problems. *Strike* deals with the problem of strikes, which are not only futile but do immense harm to both the parties. *The Skin Game* presents the conflict between the old-established class. *Justice* is a severe criticism of the prison administration of that period. *The Silver Box* deals with the old proverbs that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor.

#### 5- Harley Granville-Barker (1877-1946)

Granville-Barker belonged to that group of dramatist like Galsworthy who dealt with Domestic Tragedy and Problem Plays. Though he wrote a number of plays of different sorts in collaboration with other playwrights, he occupies his place in modern drama mainly as a writer of four "realistic" plays-***The Marrying of Anne Leete (1899)***, ***The Voysey Inheritance (1905)***, ***Waste (1907)*** and ***The Madras House (1910)***. Each of these plays deals with a dominant problem of social life.

The importance of Granville-Barker in the twentieth century drama lies in his fine delineation of character and realistic style. His plays seem to be excerpts of real life to a greater extent than even those of Galsworthy. The dialogue is very natural and near to ordinary conversation. The life



presented in those plays is the narrow and petty life lived by the upper-middle class in England in his days.

## 6- John Masefield(1878- 1967)

Another dramatist belonging to the same school as Galsworthy and Granville-Barker is Masefield. He combines in himself high imagination and a sternly classical spirit; passionate enthusiasm and cold logic, fantasy and realism. Though he clings to the natural world and is a confirmed realist, he is wrapped in the spirit of mysticism. All these conflicting qualities are seen in his greatest play-*The Tragedy of Nan*, which is the best modern example of the form of domestic tragedy.

## 7- J.M. Barrie (1860-1937)

J.M. Barrie did not belong to any school of dramatists. The best of his work is marked by imaginative fantasy, humour and tender pathos. His most characteristic and original play is *The Admirable Crichton* (1902) a drawing-room comedy in which the family butler is the hero. Three other plays, *Peter Pan*, *The Golden Bird* and *The Golden Age* have the children story-book characters in them, who are brought to life by the writer's skill.

Barrie's last and most ambitious drama was *The Boy David* (1936) in which he has given a fine picture of the candid soul of boyhood. As the play deals with a story from the Bible, which is well-known, Barrie could not here effectively make use of the element of surprise; which is his strongest point in other plays.

On the whole, Barrie is a skilled technician. He discovered that in an age of affectations and pretensions, the theatre-goers needed the sincerity and innocence of childhood, and he earned his popularity by giving them what they needed.

## Model Questions

1-G.B. SHAW DIED IN.....

A- 1950

B- 1951

C- 1952

D- 1953

**The correct answer is ( A)**

**2-G.B. SHAW WAS BORN AND BROUGHT UP IN.....**

A- Britain

B- Ireland

C- France

D- Italy

**The correct answer is (B)**



## 3<sup>rd</sup> Lecture

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### 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.

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.

#### No Artificialities of Plot; and Creation of Complex Characters

His second great contribution was technical. He threw out the old artificialities of plot. Equally important was his third contribution: he developed the art of prose dialogue to a degree of refinement which has never been surpassed; not merely the different ways people talk, and the different language they use under differing circumstances, but that double-density dialogue which is his peculiar legacy, the sub-text, the meaning behind the meaning.

#### 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.

He created a succession of male characters of a size and strength that represent a challenge to any actor—Brand, Peer Gynt, Oswald Alving, characters who defy shallow or clever acting but who, worthily interpreted, offer as rewarding experiences as it is possible to receive in a theatre. Yet so delicate was Ibsen's understanding of human relationships that a selfish actor can only partially succeed in these roles. Unless the relationships with the other characters are right, the performance fails.

## A Doll's House- Key Facts

**full title** · *A Doll's House*

**author** · *Henrik Ibsen*

**type of work** · *Play*

**genre** · *Realistic, modern prose drama*

**language** · *Norwegian*

**time and place written** · *1879, Rome and Amalfi, Italy*

**date of first publication** · *1879*

**tone** · *Serious, intense, somber*

**setting (time)** · *Presumably around the late 1870s*

**setting (place)** · *Norway*

**protagonist** · *Nora Helmer*

**major conflict** · *Nora's struggle with Krogstad, who threatens to tell her husband about her past crime, incites Nora's journey of self-discovery and provides much of the play's dramatic suspense. Nora's primary struggle, however, is against the selfish, stifling, and oppressive attitudes of her husband, Torvald, and of the society that he represents.*

**rising action** · *Nora's first conversation with Mrs. Linde; Krogstad's visit and blackmailing of Nora; Krogstad's delivery of the letter that later exposes Nora.*

**climax** · *Torvald reads Krogstad's letter and erupts angrily.*

**falling action** · *Nora's realization that Torvald is devoted not to her but to the idea of her as someone who depends on him; her decision to abandon him to find independence.*

**themes** · *The sacrificial role of women; parental and filial obligations; the unreliability of appearances*

**motifs** · *Nora's definition of freedom; letters*

**symbols** · *The Christmas tree; New Year's Day*



**foreshadowing** · *Nora's eating of macaroons against Torvald's wishes foreshadows her later rebellion against Torvald.*

## 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.

She has always accepted that position. Thus Nora has all these years been a "doll" and she has been living in a doll's house. But at the end Nora rejects her role as Helmer's "doll-wife" and, forsaking him, goes into the world outside in order to have a first-hand experience of life to establish her own identity and to discover her own potentialities.

## 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.

Tragedy before Ibsen used to deal with kings, queens, princes, princesses, army generals and so on. But Ibsen's tragedy deals with middle-class characters. Besides, tragedy was previously written in verse, but here it is a tragedy in prose, and in everyday prose at that. The play is modern also in so far as its message is concerned and so far as its technique is concerned.

## 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 the 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.

## A Variety of Themes in the Play

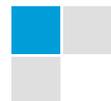
A Doll's House deals with a variety of themes. The most important theme, of course, is the liberation of the individual from the shackles and restraints of custom -and convention. More emphatically, the theme is the assertion of her rights by a wife. Nora who has remained passive and self-effacing for eight years ultimately asserts herself and becomes an individual in her own right.

Taking this aspect of the play, we can confidently affirm that A Doll's House is a feminist play, even though Ibsen denied this fact. Then there is the theme of filial duty which is embodied in the person of Mrs. Linde who sacrificed her personal happiness for the sake of her old and sick mother (and also for the sake of her two younger brothers).

## The Story of a woman's Liberation from Conventional Restraints

***A Doll's House***, written by a Norwegian dramatist, is a play in three Acts. It was written in 1879 a time when women were completely subservient 'to their husbands. No matter how much a husband might love his wife, she was regarded by him in those days as his property. In other words, a husband looked upon his wife as his possession. Custom and convention demanded that she should be guided completely by her husband and should in all respects adjust herself to his ideas, views, opinions, and tastes.

This meant that a woman had no opportunity to develop her own mind and her own individuality. A *Doll's House* tells the story of a woman called Nora who, after having lived as a conventional kind of wife to her husband for nine years or so, ultimately decided to liberate .herself from the restraints under which she had been living contentedly .and without complaint.



In order to liberate herself, this woman took the extreme step of leaving her home, her husband, and even her three children. She went into the world outside to get a first-hand experience of life and to discover her own potentialities.

## A model Question

**1- IBSEN..... THE SOCIAL BARRIERS WHICH PREVIOUSLY BOUNDED DRAMA.**

A- settled

B- broke own

C- fixed

D- established

The correct answer is ( B )

## 4<sup>th</sup> Lecture

### "A Doll's House": The Story in Brief

#### ACT ONE

##### Helmer's Advice to Nora to be Economical

*A Doll's House* largely concerns Torvald Helmer, a lawyer, and his wife Nora. They have been married for .eight or nine-years, and they have three children, two boys and a girl. The play begins on a Christmas eve when Nora has just returned home after having made some purchases in connection with the Christmas festival. She has brought a Christmas tree and some Christmas presents for the children, for the Nurse, and for the maid-servant.

Helmer asks her if she has spent a lot of money. Nora replies that they can afford to be a little extravagant at this Christmas because, now that he has been appointed the manager of a bank, he would be getting a fat salary. Helmer says that he is yet to take charge of the bank as its manager and that the fat salary will start coming only three months after that.

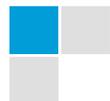
He then urges her to continue to be economical in spending money on household needs. At the same time he gives her a little extra money for Christmas. From Helmer's manner of talking to Nora we find that he is very fond of her even though he tries to impose his own will upon her. He addresses her by such pet names as "my little skylark" and "my little squirrel".

We also find that he is a moralist; he advises his wife in a solemn manner never to borrow money and never to incur debts. He has also advised her not to eat macaroons because sweets would spoil her teeth. However, Nora loves sweets and eats them secretly.

##### A Visit By Mrs. Christine Linde

Christine Linde, a friend of Nora's school-days, now comes to see Nora. They have not met for many years. Nora receives her friend cordially and, from the dialogue which now ensues' between them, we learn something about the past lives of both the women.

Christine had been forced by circumstances to marry a man of wealth whom she did not love. She had found it necessary to marry, him because her mother had at the time been bed-ridden and she had two younger brothers also to look after. However, her husband had died soon afterwards, and his business too had gone to pieces after his death. Christine had therefore been faced with great difficulty in maintaining herself, her mother, and her younger brothers.



But now her mother is dead and her younger brothers are grown up and can therefore look after themselves. Feeling lonely and having no purpose in life, Christine has come to this city in order to look for a job: Having been aware that Nora lives in this city, she has now come to see her in order to seek her help in getting a job. Nora *promises* to speak to her husband about Christine's need for a job.

### **Money Borrowed By Nora from Krogstad**

Nora's own past life had not been very comfortable or happy either. Eight years ago her husband had fallen critically ill and she had been forced to borrow money, secretly and without telling her husband, in order to take him to a warm climate under medical advice.

She has regularly been paying monthly installment to her creditor, Krogstad, but in order to do so she has had to save every penny and she has been denying to herself many things that she could otherwise have been able to buy for herself. However, she has no regrets. In fact, she is proud of the fact that she had been able to save her husband's life by having borrowed money in order to take him to Italy where they had stayed for a year or so.

### **Helmer's Promise of a Job to Mrs. Linde**

When the two women are talking to each other, the man called Krogstad comes to see Helmer and is admitted into Helmer's study. Mrs. Linde tells Nora that she had known this man many years ago when he was a solicitor's clerk in the town where she had been living. Nora tells her that this man had got married, but that he is now a widower with several children. Just then Doctor Rank, a close friend of Helmer and Nora, and a regular visitor at this house, joins the two women.

He tells them that Krogstad, the man who has just gone into Helmer's study, is morally corrupt. Doctor Rank describes Krogstad as "rotten to the core". A little later Helmer also joins this group, after having seen off Krogstad. Nora introduces her friend Mrs. Linde to her husband and asks him to arrange for a job for her.

Helmer promises to give her a job in the bank of which he would be taking charge on the New Year's day. Helmer, Doctor Rank, and Mrs. Linde then go away, and Nora is left alone.

### **Krogstad's Threat to Nora On the Basis of Her Act of Forgery**

Nora is now playing with her children when there is a knock at the door and Krogstad comes once again, this time to meet Nora. Actually Krogstad is the man from whom Nora borrowed money eight years ago and to whom she has regularly been paying monthly instalments against that loan. Krogstad has been working for some time in the bank of which Helmer has been appointed the manager.

But with Helmer as the manager of the bank, Krogstad's job is in danger because Helmer does not have a good opinion about this man. Krogstad has already met Helmer about his job, but Helmer has not given him a favourable reply. Krogstad now comes to seek Nora's help in this matter.

He tells Nora that she can save his job in the bank by recommending his case to her husband. But she tells him that it would not be possible for her to influence her husband and that she can therefore be of no help to him. Krogstad thereupon says that he has a weapon in his possession against her and that he

will use that weapon in case she does not prevail upon her husband to let him keep his job in the bank. Krogstad then explains what he means.

He tells her that she had signed a bond in order to get the money from him on credit. It had been necessary for her to have the bond signed by somebody who could stand surety for her for the repayment of the loan. She had said that her father would stand surety for her and that she would send the bond to her father for his signature. After a few days she had given the bond to Krogstad with her father's signature. However, Krogstad had discovered a disparity in the bond.

The date on which her father was supposed to have signed the bond as surety for her was the 2nd October, but her father had died four days earlier, on the 29th September. How could a dead man have signed the document? asks Krogstad He then says that the obvious explanation for this disparity is that she herself had signed for her father. Nora admits that she had signed for her father. Krogstad tells her that in signing for her father she had been guilty of forgery which is a criminal act.

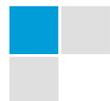
Nora says that her father had been seriously ill at the time and that she had not thought it proper to send the document to him for his signature. As Krogstad had demanded a surety for the loan, she had herself signed for her father. Krogstad says that she had been guilty of fraud. Nora says that she had badly needed the money because her husband was critically ill at the time and had to be taken away to a warm climate. Krogstad says that she does not seem to realize the gravity of her offence.

He then tells her that *he* himself had been guilty at one time of an act of forgery and that he had suffered heavily for having been guilty of it. He goes on to say that in the eyes of the law forgery is a serious crime. Nora says that no law can be so unjust as to ignore the motives and circumstances behind a criminal act. If her intention in forging her father's signature had been to save her husband's life with the money that she wanted as a loan, no law can punish her.

Krogstad says that the law takes no account of motives, and that a crime remains a crime no matter what the motive behind it. Krogstad then says that the choice is hers to make. Either she should prevail upon her husband to let him retain his post in the bank, or he would make a public disclosure of her crime of forgery. Krogstad then goes away.

### **Nora, Mentally Disturbed**

Nora is now feeling much disturbed mentally. When her children come again to play with her, she sends them away because she is feeling very upset on account of the threat which Krogstad has given her. She tries to get busy with the Christmas tree which she has yet to decorate for the evening's celebration. But Krogstad's threat keeps coming to her mind and making her feel uneasy.



## 5<sup>th</sup> Lecture

### "A Doll's House": The Story in Brief

#### **Nora, Scolded by Helmer for Telling a Lie**

Helmer now returns home and asks if anybody had come to see him or her. Nora tells a lie, saying that nobody had come. Helmer says that he had just seen Krogstad leaving their house. Nora then admits that Krogstad had come and had remained with her in the house for a minute or so. Helmer asks if Krogstad had sought her help in connection with his post in the bank.

Nora admits that this was the case. Helmer mildly scolds Nora for having talked to an undesirable man like Krogstad. He also scolds her for having told him a lie by having said that nobody had come to the house in his absence. However, he also begins to fondle Nora in order to show that he is not very annoyed with her. Helmer then gets busy with his official papers while Nora gets busy with the Christmas tree.

#### **Helmer's Strong condemnation of Krogstad's Character**

After a brief pause, Nora speaks to Helmer and asks him what kind of dress she should wear for the fancy-dress ball which is to be held the next evening in their neighbors' apartment upstairs. He replies that he would think over the matter and let her know what kind of a costume she should wear for the purpose. She then asks Helmer what offence Krogstad had been guilty of and why Krogstad's post at the bank is now in danger.

Helmer replies that Krogstad had been guilty of forgery which was a very serious offence. Nora says that Krogstad had perhaps been compelled to commit forgery by circumstances over which he had no control. Helmer says that it might be so and that he would not like to punish a man to the extent of dismissing him from the bank just because he had been guilty of one single offence.

Nora feels happy to hear this, but Helmer goes on to say that not only had Krogstad committed an offence but that he had escaped the punishment for that offence by means of a cunning trick. It was the use of this trickery which showed Krogstad to be a morally depraved person. Helmer then goes on to express his views about the evil effect which such a man would be exercising upon his family. If a man has a crime on his conscience, he would always be telling lies and putting on false appearances.

Such a man would spread disease and infection all over his household. Such a man would be an evil influence on his children because the house of such a man would be full of evil germs. Helmer says that he finds it impossible to work with a man like Krogstad and that he would feel literally sick in that man's presence. Helmer then goes into his study. Helmer's attitude clearly shows to Nora that he is bent upon dismissing Krogstad.

### Nora's Torturing Thoughts

Nora is now feeling terribly upset. Not only has she failed to save Krogstad's job for him, but she has been told by Helmer that a person with a crime on his conscience is sure to exercise an evil influence upon his children. Helmer's words are now ringing in her ears and she asks herself if she too is unconsciously exercising an evil influence upon her children because she, like Krogstad, has been guilty of a criminal act.

Indeed, the thought terrifies her and in a brief soliloquy she expresses *the* state of her mind thus: 'Corrupt my children? Poison my home? It's not true! It could never, never be true!' In other words, she is now torn by a conflict. Far from having been able to help Krogstad, she is herself faced with a dilemma. She now does not think it proper even to let her children come near her.

When the maidservant asks Nora if she should bring the children, Nora replies that the children should be asked to stay with their Nurse and should not be allowed to come to her. Helmer's words have thus produced a profoundly disturbing effect upon her.

## "A Doll's House"

### ACT TWO

#### Nora in a Terrible Fix

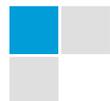
It is Christmas day. Nora continues to be in a deeply disturbed state of mind. When the Nurse, who had been asked to bring the box containing her fancy-dress costumes, comes with the box, Nora asks her about the children. The Nurse replies that they are playing with their Christmas toys but that they have been asking for their mummy.

Nora says that from now onwards she would not be able to spend as much time with the children as she had been doing previously. When the Nurse has gone and Nora is alone, she again begins to feel troubled by all sorts of doubts. Krogstad had threatened her with a disclosure of her criminal act of forgery, and Helmer has made her feel that her influence on her own children would be pernicious. (Of course, Helmer does not know in the least that Nora had been guilty of forgery.

He does not even know that she had borrowed money from Krogstad. He has been under the impression that she had got the money for the trip to Italy from her father. Nora had never told Helmer about the loan or about the person from whom she had taken the loan or anything about her forging her father's signature). Indeed, Nora is now feeling tortured by her thoughts about Krogstad's threat and even more so about her criminal act and her influence upon her children.

#### Helmer's Rejection of Nora's Recommendation

Nora now takes up with Helmer the case of Krogstad. She had already spoken to him on Krogstad's behalf but he had told her that he could not do anything for that man. Now once again she appeals to



him to let Krogstad keep his job at the bank. Helmer says that he is going to give Krogstad's job to Mrs. Linde. Nora suggests that he should keep Krogstad in his post and dismiss some other clerk in the office in order to accommodate Mrs. Linde.

Helmer says that she should not persist in her suggestion because it is simply impossible for him to keep Krogstad in the bank. Nora says that, in case Krogstad is dismissed, he might spread false propaganda against him and her and thus bring both of them into disrepute. She recalls the case of her father who had been made the victim of much malicious propaganda and who would really have found himself in trouble if Helmer had not come to his rescue. Helmer says that there is a good deal of difference between his own case and her father's case.

Her father's professional conduct had not been entirely above suspicion, while his professional conduct is beyond reproach. He says that he wants to maintain his good reputation and that he is not going to keep Krogstad in the bank no matter what Krogstad does, especially because he has already made it known that he is going to remove Krogstad from the bank. He goes on to say that he does not want people at the bank to think that he can be influenced by his wife in his official decisions.

### **The Order or Dismissal Against Krogstad**

He then tells her that there is another reason also why he has decided to dismiss Krogstad. He could have perhaps overlooked Krogstad's past record, but Krogstad has made a nuisance of himself to him at the bank in another way. He and Krogstad had been intimate friends at school, and Krogstad now embarrasses him by speaking to him always in a familiar manner.

Krogstad has a tendency to speak to him like an equal, addressing him by his Christian name and trying to show that he is intimate with him. This position is not tolerable to him, says Helmer. Nora says that, if Helmer resents Krogstad's familiar manner of speaking to him, it only shows that Helmer is a petty-minded man. Helmer feels much offended at being called a petty-minded man and says that he would put an end to this whole affair by immediately sending the order of dismissal to Krogstad.

He then summons the maidservant and asks her to send somebody to Krogstad's house in order to deliver a letter to him. He hands over to the maid-servant the order of Krogstad's dismissal in spite of Nora's appeals to him not to do so. He tells Nora that he fully understands her anxiety, that he knows that her anxiety is due to her love for him, but that he cannot change his decision to dismiss Krogstad.

### **Helmer Ignorant of the Real Situation**

Actually, of course, Helmer does not know the true reason for Nora's anxiety in this matter. Nora is worried because Krogstad had given her a threat that he would disclose her criminal act of forgery. But Helmer is under the impression that Nora is

feeling worried because Krogstad, after receiving the order of dismissal, would begin to spread false and malicious propaganda against Helmer.

Having this impression, Helmer now tells Nora that he has enough strength to face whatever happens and that he is man enough to take everything upon himself. Now there is

an irony in this situation. Helmer means that -he has courage enough to face all the consequences of his action in dismissing Krogstad.

But Nora takes him to mean that, in case anything happens to her, Helmer would take all the blame upon his own shoulders, She thinks that, if Krogstad exposes her criminal act of forgery, Helmer would come forward and declare that he was entirely responsible for whatever Nora had done.

Helmer then goes away into his study while Nora feels terribly frightened by the thought that Krogstad would expose her criminal act of forgery.

## MODEL QUESTIONS

**1- IN TELLING HELMER THAT NOBODY HAD COME TO SEE HIM OR HER, NORA WAS TELLING.....**

- A- the truth
- B- a fact
- C- a lie
- D- a joke

The correct answer is ( c )

**2- KROGSTAD HAD BEEN GUILTY OF.....**

- A- robbery
- B- murder
- C- burglary
- D- forgery

The correct answer is ( D )



## 6<sup>th</sup> Lecture

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### "A Doll's House"

#### ACT TWO

##### **Krogstad's Second Visit and His Fresh Threat to Nora**

Doctor Rank now goes away into Helmer's study, while Krogstad comes to have a private talk with Nora. Krogstad has received the letter of dismissal and he now comes to settle the whole thing with Nora and to get her help. He is desperately anxious to keep his job at the bank and so he tells Nora that, in case she does not help him to retain his job, the consequences for her and her husband would be very serious.

He has brought with him a letter addressed to her husband. He has stated in this letter all the facts about Nora's transaction with him and about Nora's having forged her father's signature. He now tells Nora that, after having suffered the loss of his reputation by his criminal act of forgery, he had now decided to lead an upright life in order to re-establish his good reputation but that her husband was now bent upon dismissing him and thus ruining his plan to reform himself.

He says that now he does not simply want to retain his job, but that he wants her husband to promote him to a higher post so that in course of time he can become the most important official in the bank. In case she does not manage this, he would hand over the incriminating letter to Helmer and then both she and her husband would find themselves in trouble.

Nora tells him that she is in no position to help him. She admits that she had even thought of committing suicide because of the complication that he has created in her life, but he tells her that suicide is not something easy. Krogstad then goes away but, before going, he drops the letter which he had brought with him into Helmer's locked letter-box.

Nora feels that very soon Helmer would come to know all the facts about the loan and the forgery and that she would then be in real trouble.

##### **Mrs. Linde's Promise to Help Nora**

Mrs. Linde who had been all this time mending Nora's fancy dress in the other room has now completed the job and she comes to hand over the costume to Nora. By this time Mrs. Linde has also been able to judge that it was from Krogstad that Nora had borrowed the money. Nora now admits to her that she had forged a signature on the bond which she had executed.

Mrs. Linde promises to speak to Krogstad and to prevail upon him to withdraw the incriminating letter. Nora says that something miraculous is going to happen. What she means is that, if Helmer comes to know that she had forged a signature, he would take upon himself the entire responsibility. But she is mistaken in this belief.

#### NORA'S INTENTION TO COMMIT SUICIDE

Mrs. Linde goes away to meet Krogstad, while Nora begins to rehearse the Tarantella in the presence of her husband and Doctor Rank. Nora's effort now is to prevent Helmer from opening the letter-box as long as possible so that Mrs. Linde gets enough time to speak to Krogstad and prevail upon him to withdraw the letter before Helmer reads it.

After a little while Mrs. Linde returns and informs Nora in a whisper that Krogstad was not available because he had gone out of station and would return on the following day. Nora now makes up her mind to commit suicide after giving her dance performance at the fancy-dress ball on the following day. She inwardly calculates that she has now about thirty one hours more to live.

She has decided to commit suicide for two reasons: first, because Helmer would now come to know that she had borrowed money and that she had forged a signature; second, because, Helmer, on coming to know about her criminal act of forgery, would take the entire responsibility on his own shoulders.

Nora does not want that Helmer should be put in a position in which he has to perform such a great sacrifice for her sake. Nora does not want that her husband should take upon himself the responsibility for what she had done. The best course, under the circumstances, would be for her to put an end to her own life, she thinks.

## "A Doll's House"

### ACT THREE

#### **Mrs. Linde's Offer of Marriage to Krogstad**

Mrs. Linde had left a message for Krogstad when she had gone to his lodgings to have a talk with him about the complication which he had created in Nora's life. Krogstad now comes to see Mrs. Linde at the Helmers' apartment in response to Mrs. Linde's message. Helmer and Nora are at this time attending the fancy dress ball in the flat upstairs.

So Mrs. Linde is alone with Krogstad. First Mrs. Linde explains to him the circumstances under which she had been forced to terminate her relationship with him and to marry another man. She tells him that she had to look after her ailing mother and her two younger brothers and that it was necessary for her to marry somebody rich enough to enable her to look after them.



Krogstad says that, when he had received the letter from her terminating her relationship with him, the ground from under his feet had slipped away and that he had at that time felt most miserable. Even now, says Krogstad, he is like a broken man, like a ship-wrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage.

Mrs. Linde thereupon says that she is herself like a ship-wrecked person, with nobody to care for and with no purpose in her life. She then suggests that, if they get married now, they might be able to provide some comfort to each other. Krogstad is astonished by Mrs. Linde's offer to marry him. He asks her if she is really serious about her proposal, and she assures him that she is really serious.

Krogstad feels overjoyed by Mrs. Linde's reply. However, wanting to make sure that she is sincere about her offer, he asks her if she is making this offer (if marriage in order that he should spare her friend Nora). She tells him that it is not for Nora's sake that she is offering to marry him. He then feels fully satisfied and says that, in view of her promise to marry him, he would now, of his own accord, withdraw the incriminating letter which he had addressed to Helmer.

But by now Mrs. Linde has changed her view in this affair. She tells Krogstad that he should not withdraw his letter because she feels that Helmer should come to know all the facts about what Nora had done. In her opinion, the secret which Nora had been hiding for years from her husband should now become known to Helmer so that all secrecy and deception should end between Helmer and Nora and so that they can come to some sort of permanent understanding.

### **Helmer's Angry Outburst After Reading Krogstad's Letter**

Just then Helmer, who has gone through Krogstad's letter, flares up and surprises Nora with his outburst of anger. Krogstad's disclosure of Nora's having borrowed money and having forged her father's signature has come as a great shock to him; but even more shocking to him is Krogstad's threat that he would make a public disclosure of all the facts if Helmer does not keep him in the bank at a higher post than the one which he has been holding so far.

Helmer gets furious with Nora and says that she has ruined his entire happiness and endangered his whole future. Krogstad's threat means that Helmer should accept all Krogstad's demands because, if Krogstad makes a public disclosure of Nora's guilt, there would be a scandal and Helmer's name would be dragged into the mud.

Helmer now tells Nora that he will have to comply with Krogstad's demands but that at the same time he would not be able to treat Nora with the same love and regard which he has always felt for her. To all appearances they would still continue to be man and wife but the relationship between them would now be of a different kind.

He would not be able to trust her any longer with their children because in the light of what she had done, he does not think her fit to continue to be in charge of the children's upbringing.

## MODEL QUESTIONS

1- KROGSTAD HAS RECEIVED THE LETTER OF .....FROM HELMER.

- A- congratulations
- B- dismissal
- C- praise
- D- recommendation

**The correct answer is ( B )**

2- KROGSTAD DROPPED..... INTO HELMER'S LOCKED LETTER- BOX.

- A- a parcel
- B- a gift
- C- a letter
- D- nothing

**The correct answer is ( C )**



# 7<sup>th</sup> Lecture

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## "A Doll's House"

### ACT THREE

#### A Shocking Revelation for Nora

Helmer's reaction to Krogstad's letter comes to Nora as a shocking revelation. She had thought that Helmer, with all the moral principles which he had always professed, would never yield to Krogstad's blackmail and would defy Krogstad, refusing flatly to accept his demands.

She had also thought that, with all the love that he had been professing for her and in the light of the sacrifice she had made for his sake, he would take upon his own shoulders the entire responsibility for the criminal deed which she had committed without having realized its implications.

But Helmer has lost his temper and taken a drastic decision against her even without giving her a chance to explain the circumstances under which she had entered into that transaction with Krogstad several years ago. But there is yet another shock in store for her.

#### Krogstad's Second Letter, and Helmer's Reaction to it

Just at this time another letter from Krogstad comes through a messenger. In this letter Krogstad has said that, on account of the good luck that has befallen him in the shape of Mrs. Linde's offer to marry him, he no longer bears any grudge against Nora and her husband.

In this letter he has offered an apology to Nora for having written his previous letter and for having tried to blackmail her and her husband. On going through this letter, Helmer feels overjoyed. This letter has put an end to all the tormenting anxiety which he had been experiencing only a few moments ago. This means that there will be no scandal and that he will be secure in his position.

At the same time his attitude towards Nora undergoes a complete change. He tells her that the crisis with which he was faced is over and that they have now nothing to worry about. He tells her that he forgives her for whatever she had done and that he will again love her, protect her, and guide her through life just as he had been doing before.

He says that now she is his property in a double sense because he has given her a new life by having forgiven her. He goes on to say that she has now become both his wife and his child. In other words, he will love her as his wife and he will protect her as if she were his child.

Helmer's reaction to this second letter from Krogstad shows that Helmer has relapsed into his

former self-complacency and has once again assumed the role of the "possessor" of his wife. Krogstad's second letter has made Helmer forget all those offensive remarks which he had made to Nora only a little while ago as a consequence of the first letter.

### **Nora's Discovery of the True Character of Helmer**

Helmer's behaviour after-going through Krogstad's first letter and then after going through Krogstad's second letter has revealed to Nora the true character of her husband. It has become clear to her that he is not the kind of self-sacrificing husband that she had thought him to be.

It has also become clear to her that the moral principles which he always used to profess were not genuinely held by him. She has discovered the hollowness of his moral principles and the selfishness of his love for her.

She has also discovered his ego-centric nature and his unabashed self-complacency. As a result of these discoveries, Nora now takes a crucial decision so far as her relationship with Helmer is concerned.

### **Nora's Decision to Leave Her Husband Altogether**

Nora now tells Helmer that, having discovered what he really is, she has made up her mind to leave him altogether. She says that he is not the man she had thought him to be. She says that he has always treated her as his doll-wife just as her father had always treated her as his baby-doll.

She says that she has always been adopting his opinions and views and conforming to his tastes just as she had, as a girl, been adopting the views and opinions of her father. But now she is no longer prepared to continue to live in a doll's house. She has discovered that she is an individual in her own right. She has discovered her own identity.

She can no longer continue to accept unquestioningly the ideas and views of society. She wants to discover for herself what is right and what is wrong. She is not prepared to accept even the teachings of religion blindly.. She would go out into the world to gain first-hand experience of life and to find out whether she is right or society is right.

She must test the traditional ideas of society by her own experience. She tells her husband that his treating to her as his property and as a doll is a traditional way of treating a wife, but that she wants to find out her own potentialities. She would not mind even leaving her children in order to arrive at her own conclusions about life from her first-hand experience of it.

Helmer tries to dissuade her from leaving him and her home, and he repeatedly appeals to her not to leave. But her mind is made up. She says that more sacred than her duty to her husband and to her children is her duty to herself.

She takes back from Helmer the wedding-ring which she had given him at the time of the marriage and she then makes her exit from the house, slamming the door behind her.

### **The Significance of Nora's Decision**

Nora leaves her home, her husband, and even her children in order to establish her own identity and individuality in the world and in order to form her own ideas and opinions.



Her action is a symbol of the liberation of the individual from the traditional bonds and restraints under which the individual suffers and which hinder his development. But, more than that, the drastic step taken by Nora was at that time a trumpet-call to the women of the time to assert their rights and not to continue as the property of their husbands.

### The Message of the Play

It is in the final Act that the message of the play becomes clear to us, Even though Ibsen himself denied it, the last discussion between Nora and Helmer in this Act clearly shows that the real theme of the play is the rights and duties of a woman. Nora's decision at the end is intended to show that a man has no business to treat his wife as an item of his property or as a possession of his.

A woman has a mind of her own, and an individuality of her own. She needs a favorable environment in which she can think for herself and can make her own wishes known to her husband. She should not be taken for granted by her husband.

Helmer has shown himself to be a complete egoist, a self-centered man, a self-complacent husband who thinks that a wife is intended to be a source of warmth and comfort in the household and that all that matters is the husband's ideas, opinions, and tastes to which a wife

must conform, Nora, by her bold action at the end, shows that she is not the conformist type of wife, or that she has been a conformist for too long a time and that she is not prepared to continue in that role. The play's advocacy of feminist independence becomes manifest in this Act.

## A MODEL QUESTION

AT THE END OF A DOLL'S HOUSE NORA HAS DISCOVERED HER.....

- A- own car
- B- own house
- C- own doll
- D- own identity.

**The correct answer is ( D )**

## 8<sup>th</sup> Lecture

### 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 spoiled 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 Christian 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 a criminal act, should behave as if he were Helmer's equal.

Of course, as has already been pointed out above, Helmer is totally unaware of two very important facts which are relevant to the present situation. He does not know that his wife had borrowed money from Krogstad, and he does not know that his wife had forged a signature on the bond which she had executed at the time. (She had borrowed money from Krogstad in order to take her husband to Italy to save his life from the dangerous illness from which he was suffering at the time).

## A Doll's House- Themes, Motifs & Symbols

### Themes

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.*

### 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.”

*In order to support her mother and two brothers, Mrs. Linde found it necessary to abandon Krogstad, her true—but penniless—love, and marry a richer man. The nanny had to abandon her own child to support herself by working as Nora’s (and then as Nora’s children’s) caretaker. As she tells Nora, the nanny considers herself lucky to have found the job, since she was “a poor girl who’d been led astray.”*

*Though Nora is economically advantaged in comparison to the play’s other female characters, she nevertheless leads a difficult life because society dictates that Torvald be the marriage’s dominant partner. Torvald issues decrees and condescends to Nora, and Nora must hide her loan from him because she knows Torvald could never accept the idea that his wife (or any other woman) had helped save his life.*

*Furthermore, she must work in secret to pay off her loan because it is illegal for a woman to obtain a loan without her husband’s permission. By motivating Nora’s deception, the attitudes of Torvald—and society—leave Nora vulnerable to Krogstad’s blackmail.*

*Nora’s abandonment of her children can also be interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice. Despite Nora’s great love for her children—manifested by her interaction with them and her great fear of corrupting them—she chooses to leave them. Nora truly believes that the nanny will be a better mother and that leaving her children is in their best interest.*

### **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. Our first impressions of Nora, Torvald, and Krogstad are all eventually undercut. Nora initially seems a silly, childish woman, but as the play progresses, we see that she is intelligent, motivated, and, by the play’s conclusion, a strong-willed, independent thinker.*

*Torvald, though he plays the part of the strong, benevolent husband, reveals himself to be cowardly, petty, and selfish when he fears that Krogstad may expose him to scandal. Krogstad too reveals himself to be a much more sympathetic and merciful character than he first appears to be. The play’s climax is largely a matter of resolving identity confusion—we see Krogstad as an earnest lover, Nora as an intelligent, brave woman, and Torvald as a simpering, sad man.*

*Situations too are misinterpreted both by us and by the characters. The seeming hatred between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad turns out to be love. Nora’s creditor turns out to be Krogstad and not, as we and Mrs. Linde suppose, Dr. Rank. Dr. Rank, to Nora’s and our surprise, confesses that he is in love with her.*

*The seemingly villainous Krogstad repents and returns Nora’s contract to her, while the seemingly kindhearted Mrs. Linde ceases to help Nora and forces Torvald’s discovery of Nora’s secret.*

*The instability of appearances within the Helmer household at the play's end results from Torvald's devotion to an image at the expense of the creation of true happiness. Because Torvald craves respect from his employees, friends, and wife, status and image are important to him.*

*Any disrespect—when Nora calls him petty and when Krogstad calls him by his first name, for example—angers Torvald greatly. By the end of the play, we see that Torvald's obsession with controlling his home's appearance and his repeated suppression and denial of reality have harmed his family and his happiness irreparably.*

### **Motifs**

*Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.*

### **Nora's Definition of Freedom**

*Nora's understanding of the meaning of freedom evolves over the course of the play. In the first act, she believes that she will be totally "free" as soon as she has repaid her debt, because she will have the opportunity to devote herself fully to her domestic responsibilities.*

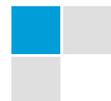
*After Krogstad blackmails her, however, she reconsiders her conception of freedom and questions whether she is happy in Torvald's house, subjected to his orders and edicts. By the end of the play, Nora seeks a new kind of freedom. She wishes to be relieved of her familial obligations in order to pursue her own ambitions, beliefs, and identity.*

### **Letters**

*Many of the plot's twists and turns depend upon the writing and reading of letters, which function within the play as the subtext that reveals the true, unpleasant nature of situations obscured by Torvald and Nora's efforts at beautification. Krogstad writes two letters: the first reveals Nora's crime of forgery to Torvald; the second retracts his blackmail threat and returns Nora's promissory note.*

*The first letter, which Krogstad places in Torvald's letterbox near the end of Act Two, represents the truth about Nora's past and initiates the inevitable dissolution of her marriage—as Nora says immediately after Krogstad leaves it, "We are lost." Nora's attempts to stall Torvald from reading the letter represent her continued denial of the true nature of her marriage.*

*The second letter releases Nora from her obligation to Krogstad and represents her release from her obligation to Torvald. Upon reading it, Torvald attempts to return to his and Nora's previous denial of reality, but Nora recognizes that the letters have done more than expose her actions to Torvald; they have exposed the truth about Torvald's selfishness, and she can no longer participate in the illusion of a happy marriage.*



## A MODEL QUESTION

NORA INITIALLY SEEMS A SILLY, CHILDISH WOMAN, BUT AS THE PLAY PROGRESSES, WE SEE THAT SHE IS .....

A- stupid and careless.

B- intelligent, motivated.

C- unintelligent and mindless.

D- slow- witted and unmotivated.

**The correct answer is ( B)**