

## **HENRYK IBSEN, “A DOLL’S HOUSE”**

In Europe, there are two main stages of theater development: the old theater (from the time of antiquity, William Shakespeare and others until the end of the nineteenth century) and the new theater (from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century). Representatives of the “new drama” were Henrik Ibsen (Norway), Bernard Shaw (Great Britain), Maurice Maeterlinck (Belgium), Bertolt Brecht (Germany), Lesya Ukrainka, Ivan Franko, Volodymyr Vynnychenko, Mykhailo Semenko, and others (Ukraine).

In the “old drama” the conflict was manifested externally. In the “new drama” conflicts were transferred to the psychological plane, to the inner world of a person.

In the “old drama” the audience watched the events, and in the “new drama” they seemed to be involved in the events, they had to recognize themselves in the characters.

The “old drama” was about individual stories, while the “new drama” was about the general atmosphere of the world, about the tragedy of existence, about the tragedy of all mankind.

In the “new drama,” the focus was on the individual, his or her inner state, his or her feelings and emotions, which became the spiritual symptom of the era.

It should also be noted that the “new theater” became intellectual and debatable. The plot was based not on external events but on the clash of ideas, views, and positions.

In the “new drama” there is no division of characters into positive and negative, into main and secondary characters; all characters are important for revealing the problems of existence.

The “new” drama also shows signs of modernism: symbolism, impressionism, and neo-romanticism.

A significant role in the “new drama” is played by hints, subtext, and internal action. An entirely new aesthetic was being formed, which was supposed to reflect the complex inner state of the individual against the background of a difficult era.

The ending of the “new drama” is mostly open-ended; readers or viewers have to continue the plot of the play in their own imagination.

### **Henrik Ibsen and His Influence on the “New Drama”**

Henrik Ibsen is an important figure of the Norwegian and European “new drama.” In the 19th century, playwright Henrik Ibsen introduced new rules of drama. He believed that the theater should not be a toy or amusement. Therefore, he preferred moral analysis. His talent and innovation as a dramatist lies in the fact that through his deep and insightful works the reader had to look for answers to many difficult questions represented by life. Ibsen radically reformed traditional drama. He used analytical composition. Mystery has a significant role in it, events that took place long before those unfolding on the stage. But it was they who caused the situations in which the heroes found themselves. Ibsen’s analyticity is not so much plot as intellectual. Such a composition required the inner development of the characters. The discovery of the secret changes of the characters. And these changes become conclusive in

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the development of the plot.

Ibsen gained popularity largely because of his refusal to follow the rules of the theater of his time. His determination developed his own style of drama coincided with the growing demand of the new intelligentsia for a serious “thinking” theater, as opposed to foolish entertainment on the leading stages.

Ibsen’s heroes are characterized by strong human feelings. In this way, Ibsen differs from many writers of the end of the 19th century who didn’t believe in human capabilities. In Ibsen’s plays, the ability to understand reality, that gives the heroes the opportunity to change their fate.

By the way, Henrik Ibsen was the first in Europe who raised the problem of the position of women, their dependence and lack of social rights. In the Ibsen’s play “A Doll’s House” he defended women and their freedom in society and in family.

### **“A Doll’s House” (1879) by Henrik Ibsen**

In his play “A Doll’s House” (1879) Ibsen discussed the problem of power in society, and the problem of female independence. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Norway, women had no say in family problems, financial, legal, and professional issues. And this problem was widely discussed. Ibsen was aware of the contemporary debates about equality for women. And Nora is a product of those debates, because she challenged the audience to think about feminism.

In a letter dated October 19, 1878 Henrik Ibsen wrote that: “There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different, in woman. They do not understand each other; but in practical life the woman is judged by man’s law, as though she were not a woman but a man. A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint.”

The play is set in a house which belongs to Torvald Helmer, a successful lawyer. He’s married to Nora who loves him and the kids, and makes their home warm, cozy, filled with joy. We first meet the characters on Christmas Eve: everyone is getting ready for the holiday, kids are laughing, it smells like pine tree and almond cookies. The furniture is not very expensive, but long-lasting, there are some books and engravings here and there... It seems like the Helmer household is prosperous and happy. But it turns out to be only superficial.

Suddenly, “people from the past” arrive into the house, like Christine Linne – Nora’s old friend. She has had a difficult few years, ever since her husband died leaving her with no money or children. Nora promises to talk to Torvald about finding her a job. There’s also Nils Krogstad, who works at Torvald’s bank. But instead of asking for help, he blackmails Nora.

As the plot progresses, Nora’s secret comes to light. It turns out she is afraid of Krogstad because he knows something ugly. A few years ago Nora forged her father’s signature to borrow money from Krogstad, so they could travel to Italy to improve Torvald’s health. Krogstad knew Nora had broken the law, and although she paid her debts in due time, he decided to blackmail her to get a job.

Nora didn’t tell her husband about what she did. Deep down, she is proud, although she’s aware of the legal outcomes. Her secret is her joy and her pride, because it testifies her love. And although Nora did think she might have to tell Torvald everything, she wanted to do it as

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late as possible, maybe in a few years or decades. But Krogstad came in and crushed Nora's plans. His despair sped up the events and made life in the Helmer household unpredictable.

### **Real Life and Human Drama in "A Doll's House"**

Ibsen shows how real life interferes with peaceful and righteous existence of a Norwegian family. Nils Krogstad threatens Nora: he says he will let her secret out unless she helps him to get a job in the bank. He is doing a bad thing, but only because he has to take care of his children, whose mother died too early. Besides, he believes this new job will give him a chance to earn money honestly. So blackmail is presented ambiguously. But Nora cannot help Krogstad because of her husband's refusal.

The climax of the play is Krogstad's letter to Torvald Helmer, in which he reveals the truth about Nora. But the main thing isn't Nora's misdemeanor; it's the characters' essence, their true motives and real relationships.

Nora cherished her husband's love and was sure that he would take her fault in a critical situation, but suddenly she saw a totally different person. After reading Krogstad's letter, Torvald was only worried about his own reputation – what the people were going to say. He was scared that his family might be known as scandalous. So he only took interest in how he could save the family's image and keep Nora away from the kids. Nora who adored Torvald just stopped existing for him as a woman and as a human being. So the prosperity of Helmer household was only a façade to cover up the alienation and loneliness.

Nora was mistaken about Torvald. But she didn't quite know her friend Christine as well. Nora took pity on the poor and lonely woman, but Christine who was able to stop Krogstad from sending the letter, didn't do that. What is it: a wish to restore justice or female envy? The author doesn't answer this question, inviting the audience to think for themselves.

As the plot progresses, we see the characters and their opinions of each other evolve. Krogstad changes too. Rude and cruel at first, he turns out different. Although his behavior was immoral, he only did that for the sake of his children, who had to survive without their mother. Meeting Christine Linne and hoping to start a happy family with her made him change. He became noble and self-conscious, and though he did send the letter, later he visited Torvald to say he won't threaten him anymore. So the threat of public condemnation was over for the Helmers.

### **Who Did She Love?**

Upon getting new information, Torvald changes again. He's on cloud nine that he isn't under threat anymore. But Nora is different now... She cannot be a doll anymore. She saw her husband's essence in a critical situation, and now she's unsure who she loved and who she took a risk for.

The play ends with this family falling apart. Nora breaks up with Torvald and leaves her home. The finale is vague and open-ended, just like no life situation can be resolved once and for all.

With the secret revealed, the characters' family, social and psychological roles are shifted.

The ending of the play is a catastrophe devoid of any elements of compromise. However,

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such an ending cannot be called tragic. Nora, didn't die ; on the contrary, she became victorious, because Nora found herself and had enough courage to fulfill her will and reject everything that hamper her. At the same time, this victory had a tragic tint because it meant a painful break with all of Nora's previous life (especially with her three children) and made her lonely in her confrontation with society and its moral norms.

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