



A Doll's House
by Henrik Ibsen

An introduction

What is Realism?

- Literature that attempts to create the appearance of life as it is actually experienced. Commonplace, everyday life rather than extraordinary events are the focus. (1875-1900)
 - Records details of ordinary life
 - Concentrates on the typical/average “Joe” (not royalty)
 - Examines a slice of life

Realism Characteristics

- Speak the way we speak in real life
- Conflicts involve work, love, marriage, children, death
- Deals with factories, slums, bosses, social outcasts, shopkeepers, the rising & struggling middle class
- Portrays man imprisoned by forces he could not control or understand. Views society as restricting.

Realism on the Stage

- Attempts to create the illusion of “real life” on stage
- Scenery is real
- “life-like” language
- “well-made” plots
- 4th wall convention - actors address each other; they **do not** speak directly to audience

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)

- Father of realism and the modern drama
 - He moved away from romanticism and its use of stereotyped characters, exaggerated emotions, and flowery language
- Explored controversial topics of his time



Ibsen's Style

- Lack of metaphors, but...
- ...Lots of symbolism
- Short, choppy, dialogue



A “social problem” play

- Addresses controversial topics, problems in society
 - *A Doll’s House* –role of women in society & home
 - *An Enemy of the People* – corrupt public officials
- Wants to teach about & correct social problems
- The danger of this type of work is that the playwright has to create characters with whom the audience can identify and sympathize; otherwise, the play feels like propaganda

Major Issues in *A Doll's House*

- Coming of age
- Loss of innocence
- Loss of female identity due to the inferior position of women in late Victorian society
- Individuality
- Appearances vs. reality

Meet the Cast of Characters

- Nora Helmer: the protagonist, a young wife & mother, who has led a sheltered existence; she went from her father's house to her husband's house without having had any real contact with the world or a role/responsibilities in it.
- Torvald Helmer: Nora's husband, her chief antagonist. He is a serious man who is highly concerned with the appearance of things, including social status.

Cast of Characters, continued

- Nils Krogstad: a bank clerk. He was known to have been involved in a crime (involving fraud—not good for a banker) a while ago. He had also lent money to Nora without Torvald's knowledge, which was against the law.
- Christine Linde – recently widowed and without financial means of support, she visits the Helmers' home hoping Torvald can help her get a job. She & Krogstad were close at one time long ago (what a coincidence!).

Cast of Characters, concluded

- Dr. Rank: He is a neighbor and old friend of the Helmers, one of Torvald's closest of confidants; he thoroughly enjoys Nora's company as well. The doctor is suffering from tuberculosis of the spine, but he intentionally conceals the severity of his condition to both Torvald and Nora.