Worksheet 3 - Marriage and the New Woman

Review: Lecture 2

In the second lecture of the course, Dr Sophie Duncan discussed how *A Doll's House* fitted into traditions of theatre and theatergoing in nineteenth-century northern Europe.

What was the ratio of women to men in nineteenth-century matinée performances?

Recall: Lecture 3

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. When was the phrase 'the new woman' first used?

a) 1879

c) 1884

b) 1889

d) 1894

2. What were some of the characteristics commonly associated with 'the new woman'? Choose three correct answers.

a) working class

d) conservative

b) middle class

e) politically active

c) rebellious

f) fashionable

- 3. In her lecture, Dr Duncan explains how life changed for middle class women in the 1880s and 1890s. Which of the below is <u>not</u> one of the changes that occurred?
 - a) Women could attend university at Oxford and Cambridge.
 - b) There were women-only restaurants where women could eat without a chaperone.
 - c) Women who owned property were able to vote in general elections.
 - d) There were exclusive social clubs in London that women could attend.

Analysis

- 4. Dr Duncan describes how nineteenth-century society tended to 'pathologise women's rebellion as abnormal and unhealthy, reducing everything to hormones and hysteria'.
 - a) In your own words, explain what you think Dr Duncan means by this comment.
 - b) How might this comment relate to Torvald's attitude towards Nora in A Doll's House?
- 5. Look at the painting below from 1887, which shows a group of doctors examining a woman who is thought to have **hysteria**.
 - a) What kind of attitude towards women is shown in the picture? Give <u>examples</u> from the picture to justify your opinion.
 - b) How does this image relate to the characterisation of Nora in A Doll's House?



Evaluation

6. How does the title of *A Doll's House* relate to key themes in the play? Write <u>two</u> paragraphs in response to this question.

Success criteria:

- Include analysis of quotations from the play.
- Include historical context about the role of women in the 1880s.

Challenge:

Look at the critics' quotations below, which Dr Duncan discusses in her lecture. Include an analysis of <u>at least one</u> of these quotations as evidence for your answer to question <u>6</u>.

- '[After A Doll's House was staged] marriage was revealed as being far from a divine institution' August Strindberg writing about the impact of A Doll's House in 1884
- 'Baby wife' Clement Scott's description of Nora's character in his 1889 review of *A Doll's House*
- 'Common respectable marriage upon which the safety of all social existence is supposed to rest is the worst, because the most hypocritical, form of woman-purchase.' Mona Caird, critiquing marriage in an article from 1888

Extension: At the end of her lecture, Dr Duncan recommends that students **adjudicate** whether to take into account Ibsen's own claims about his intentions when analysing *A Doll's House*. Do you believe it is important to know what an author "originally" intended when you write an essay on a fiction text? Why/ why not?

Glossary

- **Ibsenism** a style of theatre typical of the work of Henrik Ibsen; often relating to plays that explore a moral problem in contemporary society.
- Caricatured to be drawn or described in an exaggerated fashion; to have someone make
 fun of you by imitating and exaggerating your most striking features.
 e.g. When we visited the seaside, I had a drawing done of my face which caricatured my
 nose: they made it look ridiculously big!
- Lexis a collection of words, often relating to a specific theme or idea.
 e.g. The poem features lexis relating to romance, such as nouns like "love" and "angel".
- Pathologise to describe something in terms of disease and illness.

- **Hysteria** (*in medicine*) a supposed physical illness among women ascribed to malfunctioning sexual organs, thought to cause breathlessness, strong emotions, and seizures; (*general use*) overwhelming, uncontrollable emotion or agitation.
- Fallen woman a term used to describe a woman seen to have lost her social standing and respectability, often because of sexual promiscuity.
- **Feminism** advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of women; the movement associated with this.
- **Reductive** tending to present a subject or problem in an overly simplistic form. e.g. Just because some men treat women badly, it is **reductive** to say that all men are sexist.
- Adjudicate to judge, or act as a referee.
 e.g. During the baking competition, Mary Berry adjudicated to decide who would win.