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‘Millions of women have done it’. Discuss how the Microcosms Presented in Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, J.B. Priestley’s *An Inspector Calls*, and Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* Reflect the Macrocosmic Attitudes Towards Women in the Long Twentieth Century.

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'Millions of women have done it'.[1] Discuss how the Microcosms Presented in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, J.B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, and Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* Reflect the Macrocosmic Attitudes Towards Women in the Long Twentieth Century.

Introduction

The decision to examine these texts as microcosmic examples of the macrocosmic societies in which they are set, developed from the fact that all three titles begin with the indefinite article. This suggests that the plays will only be about one particular environment, yet, I believe the women in these plays are hyponyms for the wider treatment of women in the respective time periods. In spite of being an English translation from the original Norwegian in 1879, the sense that *A Doll's House* will focus on one specific family remains. All three plays are canonical pieces of modern drama spread across the long twentieth century which justifies the comparative approach I will take. The fact that these plays are embedded into the curricula of English education suggests that they represent an integral part of theatrical history and continue to be pervasive and influential.[2] Furthermore, despite extensive research on *Doll's* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), there has not been a direct comparison between all three plays, and particularly not concentrating on how these

[1] Henrick Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, trans. by Michael Meyer (London: Methuen London Ltd, 2009), p.102. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given in my text thus: *Doll's* (x), the 'x' standing for page number.

[2] OCR, 'English Literature- H072, H472', *OCR* (2020) <https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/171200-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-english-literature-h472.pdf> [accessed 10 March 2021]; AQA, 'AS and A-level English Literature A', *AQA* (January 2021) <https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/specifications/AQA-7711-7712-SP-2015.PDF> [accessed 10 March 2021]; AQA, 'GCSE English Literature', *AQA* (September 2014) < https://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/english/specifications/AQA-8702-SP-2015.PDF> [accessed 10 March 2021].

women—namely Sheila, Nora and Blanche—relate to one another.[3] Moreover, the scholarly attention given to *An Inspector Calls* (1945) has only become prominent since the 1992 National Theatre production which revitalised the play through setting and symbolism, and therefore is not as comprehensive as the attention paid to *Doll's* and *Streetcar*.[4] Due to this comparative lack of criticism, I will be using *Inspector* as a subsidiary text, focussing on the characters of Sheila Birling and Daisy Renton (as I will refer to her throughout) as women in the Edwardian era. This dissertation will utilise the lenses of form, mise-en-scène and the tension between male and female characters to explore how Ibsen, Priestley and Williams use the stage as a microcosmic depiction of macrocosmic attitudes towards women.

Section One: Form

A cohesive force between these plays is naturalism, whether the direct employment of it in the case of *Doll's*, or influence of it in *Inspector* and *Streetcar*. Raymond Williams concisely divides naturalism into three categories; the specific historic movement, 'a philosophical alliance to science, natural history and materialism' and the 'method of putting on a production that reflects normal life'.[5] I will be working with the latter two definitions. Christopher Innes argues that 'naturalist drama is particularly important in the way it

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[3] Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (London: Methuen Drama, 2009). All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given in my text thus: *Streetcar* (x), the 'x' standing for page number.

[4] J. B. Priestley, *An Inspector Calls* (Essex: Heinemann, 1992). All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be given in my text thus: *Inspector* (x), the 'x' standing for page number ; Philip Carter, 'Photographs from the 1992 production of An Inspector Calls directed by Stephen Daldry', *British Library* (1992) <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/photographs-from-the-1992-production-of-an-inspector-calls-directed-by-stephen-daldry> [accessed 26 March 2021].

[5] Raymond Williams, 'Social Environment and Theatrical Environment: the case of English Naturalism', in *English Drama: Forms and Development. Essays in Honour of Muriel Clara Bradbrook,* ed. by Marie Axton and Raymond Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp.203-225, p.203.

represents women', and this is something that I wish to demonstrate in my discussion of how the form of these plays alters the efficacy of female representation.[6] While the plays share naturalistic elements, their forms do depart from one another in significant ways, and it is these departures that modify the representation of the female characters. Although *Inspector* is a naturalistic play according to Williams' third definition, the supernatural elements (such as Inspector Goole or the changing photograph) add an unrealistic aspect of mystery. The most significant supernatural element in this play is its treatment of time; a subject that fascinated Priestley and led to his conception of 'multiple time', 'in which past, present, and future become at once available to human understanding'.[7] In *Streetcar,* Williams blends expressionistic elements within the naturalism, such as the non-diegetic polka music with the diegetic sound of the blues piano. The final formal genre I will explore is the extent to which the plays are tragedies and how the tragic features affect representation of female characters.

It is important to distinguish that it is naturalism running throughout these plays, rather than solely realism. One of the most significant distinctions for my discussion is naturalism's engagement with the free will versus determinism debate and how environment affects character. Interestingly, Williams and Ibsen based their female protagonists on real women. For Williams, it was his sister, Rose, whose mental decline ensued after being rejected by her lover.[8] For Ibsen, it was his protégé (Laura Petersen Kieler) who took out an illegal loan in order to travel to Italy to cure her ill husband and was consequently taken

[6] Christopher Innes, ed., *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p.1.

[7] Jesse Matz, 'J. B. Priestley in the Theatre of Time', *Modernism / modernity*, 19:2 (2012), 321-342 (p.321).

[8] Brenda Murphy, *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.20.

away from her children and sent to an asylum.[9] Subsequently, the real-life inspiration to these plays creates a closer tie to the macrocosmic reality and founds a strong realistic springboard from which the naturalistic elements can develop. For example, in *Doll's,* Nora is repeatedly likened to her father; by Kristine 'It's your father in you' (51) and Torvald '…Hypocrite. Liar. *She stares at him.* I should have known. Her father's daughter' (98). This allusion to the Darwinian interest in genetic heredity adds a proleptic sense to the play, that Nora (as a representative of all women), is doomed by her genetics and cannot avoid repeating her family's mistakes. This adds ambiguity to the end of the play as the audience is left to question whether Nora has truly broken the hereditary chain, or whether her decision to leave is an inevitable link to her eventual downfall.

Similarly, Daisy Renton's suicide can be seen as pre-determined, by her social environment rather than genetic. Although *Inspector* works backwards in time to unravel the reasons for her suicide, it is clear from the outset that the economic precariousness associated with Daisy's working-class status would lead to her demise. This is demonstrated by the loss of her job and subsequent financial income that starts the deterministic chain of events propounded by each of the Birlings. Williams also incorporates Darwinian ideas of determinism and 'survival of the fittest', yet he does so via expressionism, which will be discussed later. Innes argues naturalism allows female characters and their ideas to be given equal prominence to their male counterparts, which is why this form is so intrinsically linked to female emancipation.[10] The eminence of the female character within naturalistic drama explains why Ibsen and Williams decided to use this form to depict the stories of two specific women who represent a much greater cohort of women. Although Priestley utilises naturalism, the genre of the play as a 'whodunnit', or indeed a crime thriller, adds components of mystery and takes the play beyond naturalism to address concerns of the supernatural.

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[9] Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.135.

[10] Innes, ed., *A Sourcebook*, p.18.

A key theme that Priestley uses to extend the play beyond realism and naturalism is his treatment of time. Time permeates all of these plays, particularly the female characters' refusal to accept the inevitability of time. For example, Blanche consistently lies about her age, such as by stating that her younger sister is actually '…somewhat older than I' (30), and Nora believes that losing her looks and Torvald's love is a '…time [that] will never come' (36). However, Priestley delves further into the interaction between the characters and time, due to his theory of 'multiple time'. Dramatic irony is a prime example of this theory, as Mr Birling pontificates that 'The Germans don't want war' (6), when the audiences of 1945 and onwards know very well that World War One would begin two years after the setting of *Inspector*. Matz homes in on the vital aspect of Priestley's theory that the future could occur before, and therefore influence, the present.[11] Sheila Birling is the first character to arguably see the future by understanding where the Inspector's enquiry is leading. This is demonstrated when she reprimands Gerald for being 'stupid' when telling him, 'We [they] haven't much time.' (25). Sheila's perception of time tragically mirrors that of Daisy Renton, whose inevitable future is cemented by the present actions of the Birlings ('present' here referring to the time when each Birling interacted with Daisy). The fact that it is the two young women of the play who are either subjected to or begin to comprehend this concept of time, suggests that Priestley saw young women as potential pioneers for a changing society because they were not the proponents of the static patriarchal structures.

Williams was also interested in time and condemned the 'continual rush of time' that he believed 'deprives our actual lives of so much dignity and meaning'.[12] This attitude towards time is acutely reflected in Blanche's attempts to evade the ageing process, mainly through the expressionistic use of lighting, which she avoids with hyperbolic statements such

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[11] Matz, 'J. B. Priestley in the Theatre of Time', p.326.

[12] Tennessee Williams, 'The Timeless world of a play', in *Tennessee Williams New Selected Essays: Where I Live*, ed. by John S. Bak (United States: New Directions Book, 2009), pp.59-62, p.59.

as, 'I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!' (7). The association between Blanche and expressionism is palpable throughout *Streetcar*, beyond the relationship with time. Styan argues that expressionistic plays are grounded on 'rigorous anti-realism'.[13] Alternatively, Williams blends the realistic elements of naturalism with expressionism in order to present characters who are relatable, yet crucially, of whom the audience have a deeper psychological understanding. Toten Bear defines expressionism as 'the external manifestation of an internal condition', and this could not be more aptly applied to Blanche.[14] This is demonstrated by Blanche's first line, 'They told me to take a streetcar named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!' (5). In addition to the streetcar names and stops being concrete nouns, they have expressionistic resonances, as Blanche's 'Desire' leads to her downfall, represented by the 'Cemeteries'. The first director of the stage and screen versions of *Streetcar,* Elia Kazan, highlighted '"Blanche's special relation to all women… Blanche is like all women"'.[15] Taking Kazan's argument, it is significant that Williams employs expressionistic techniques to investigate Blanche's psyche, as they therefore also delve into the female psyche in general. Fleche argues that 'the allegorical reading [of *Streetcar*] also seems to be the most "realistic" one'.[16] I share Fleche's view and believe that the expressionistic techniques give the most

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[13] J. L Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.1.

[14] Deanna M. Toten Bear, 'American Experimentalism, American Expressionism and Early O'Neill', in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama,* ed. by David Krasner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp.53-68 (p.60).

[15] Elia Kazan, 'Notebook for *A Streetcar Named Desire*', in *Directors on Directing,* 2nd edn, eds., Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), pp.364-365; quoted in Brenda Murphy, *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan: A Collaboration in the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.37.

[16] Anne Fleche, 'The Space of Madness and Desire: Tennessee Williams and *Streetcar*', *Modern Drama,* 38:4 (1995), 496-509 (p.497).

insight into the reality of the characters' minds. For example, in scene IX, Blanche is dressed in a '*scarlet satin robe*' (69) compared to a '*crumpled white satin evening gown*' (75) in scene X. This expressionistically demonstrates that Blanche has capitulated her sexual manipulation of men (after her rejection from Mitch) and is desperately trying to return to her Southern Belle innocence, as symbolised by the white gown. This change in mindset is only conveyed through the particular choice of costume. This creates so much more pathos in the subsequent rape scene, as the audience understands that Blanche wants to return to a state of innocence, and this is what the rape by Stanley prevents forever.

Similarly, Nora's iconic line, '(*in her everyday dress*) Yes, Torvald. I've changed.' (96) is undeniably an 'external manifestation of an internal condition'; she has changed outfits and the audience understands that this is the beginning of the denouement, as Nora's character has irreparably changed.[17] Subsequently, the playwrights' employment of expressionism elicits more sympathy from the audience, as they are privy to the female characters' inner psychologies. These characters may acquire sympathy, yet, whether these female characters are considered tragic heroes (or heroines) further complicates how they represent the general macrocosm of women in society.

For my discussion, I will be focussing solely on the plays' treatments of the hero's tragic flaw, or *hamartia*. I will be taking Nicoll's definition that the tragic hero must 'have noble qualities in him' and 'some flaw in his being, derived either from ignorance of affairs beyond his knowledge, or from human passion'.[18] Although, I will be adapting Nicoll's outdated androcentric model by applying it to women.

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[17] Toten Bear, 'American Experimentalism', p.60.

[18] Allardyce Nicoll, *An Introduction to Dramatic Theory* (London: George G. Harrap & Co ltd., 1923), p.98.

Poole concisely outlines that tragedy is centred on consequences and is therefore comprehensively realistic.[19] This suggests that it is the uncontrollable nature of consequences and personal *hamartia* that is so relatable for audiences. Blanche's sexual desire can be seen as her *hamartia*, leading to her madness and eventual ostracism. Whilst being imprisoned for being homosexual, Oscar Wilde wrote that 'Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both'.[20] This sense that 'other' types of desire in society (such as homosexuality or nymphomania) lead to downfall is applicable to *Streetcar*, as it is Blanche's sexual desire as a woman that is deemed a flaw. Contemporary reviews of *Doll's* believed Nora's *hamartia* to be her selfishness, yet this very element made the play 'unrealistic' rather than tragic. This is demonstrated by Clement Shorter who believed that Torvald 'treats his Nora exactly like the spoiled baby that she is', therefore diminishing the play's message of female liberation.[21] Equally, an unsigned notice review argued that 'no women who ever breathed would do any such thing', referring to Nora leaving her children.[22] These reviews establish societal views of women at the time; if Nora was a man whose 'selfishness' led to the liberating decision to leave, he would be seen as a tragic hero with a tragic flaw, yet, the fact that Nora is a woman (for these critics) removed her tragic status and merely made the play unbelievable.

Unlike Blanche and Nora, Daisy Renton had no tragic flaw, yet her suicide is still considered a tragic death and the Inspector articulates that this is because 'each of you helped to kill her' (55). I would argue that the Inspector's accusation can also be applied to

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[19] Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.32.

[20] Oscar Wilde, 'De Profundis' in *Collected Works of Oscar Wilde: Wordsworth Library Collection* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2007), pp.1067-1098 (p.1071).

[21] Clement Shorter, 'on Ibsen's unlovely creed, 1889', in *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. by Michael Egan (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1972), pp.101-102 (p.102).

[22] Anon, 'Henrik Ibsen in English 1889', in *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage,* ed. by Michael Egan (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1972), pp.104-105 (p.104).

Streetcar and *Doll's.* Certainly, Blanche and Nora are flawed characters, however, it is difficult to ascertain their one particular *hamartia*—is it Blanche's sexual desire, her attachment to magic over realism, or even her vain self-obsession? With Nora, it could be her selfishness, her naivety, or her childish manipulation of her husband. What seems to be an overarching flaw for all three women is not within their own character, rather the societies in which they live. Women's inferior social standing meant they were forced to depend on things like their sexuality, magic, or indeed manipulating the men in their lives to live any sort of fulfilled life. For this reason, Ibsen, Priestley and Williams condemn the patriarchal structures that entrap these women by presenting them as tragic figures, flawed by actions and consequences beyond their control.

The formal techniques of these plays enable Ibsen, Priestley and Williams to use the microcosmic space of the stage to criticise society's zeal to blame the woman for wrongdoing, rather than her circumstances—particularly in a patriarchal system that is constructed on benefitting men. In the next section, I will discuss how the particular mise-en-scène of each play brings the microcosmic fiction on the stage into direct contact with the macrocosmic reality experienced by audiences.

Section Two: Mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène can be interpreted in various ways and has different definitions in the film and theatre industries. Pavis argues that mise-en-scène 'must call upon numerous media' and I will be using it as an umbrella term to examine the media lighting, music, costume, and staging.[23] It is important to note that the timespan of over fifty years between the publication of *Doll's* and *Streetcar* greatly impacts the theatrical technology available to performance. For this reason, I will not be commenting on the comparative efficacy or ingenuity of the mise-en-scène employed; instead, I will be using these elements as lenses under which to

[23] Patrice Pavis, *Contemporary Mise en Scène: Staging Theatre Today,* trans. by Joel Anderson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.132.

examine the presentation of female characters. In addition to the capacity of mise-en-scène to establish unities such as time and place, these components allow the playwrights to present their female characters as realistic members of society and, crucially, trace these characters' relationships with societal expectations of women—from abidance to rejection.

Lighting is one of the most overt aspects of mise-en-scène; it controls what the audience sees and literally and figuratively illuminates aspects of character. For example, after the Inspector's announcement that Daisy Renton was fired from Millwards, the stage direction reads, '*He* [Inspector Goole] *moves nearer a light—perhaps standard lamp—and she* [Sheila] *crosses to him*' (21). It is crucial that Sheila moves away from her family and towards the Inspector, thus signifying her departure from Edwardian feminine ideals of ignorance and beauty towards social awareness. Furthermore, the fact that the light and the Inspector are connected illustrates that Sheila willingly accepts the truth provided by the Inspector, as she moves into his light.

In a similar vein, lighting consistently emphasises Blanche in *Streetcar.* Murphy observes that Mielziner (the set designer for Kazan's production of *Streetcar*) incorporated sixteen Leko follow-spots and one follow-spot was constantly 'on Blanche in either blue or amber, depending on whether the light supposedly derives from daylight, moonlight, or candlelight'.[24] This is a prime example of lighting enhancing the sense of realism, whilst also revealing aspects of the female character. This light following Blanche enabled the audience to simultaneously see the world on stage from her perspective, and the objective action of the play. Blanche notoriously wants to avoid light, 'I like it dark. The dark is comforting to me.' (72), and the audience learns this is because she felt her unrequited love for her husband was '…like you suddenly turned a blinding light on…'(56). Blanche finds harsh social realities, such as the fact that her husband was homosexual, or that the Old South is a dying way of life, 'blinding', therefore retreats into the darkness, and lighting supports the dialogue conveying this.

[24] Murphy, *Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan*, p.28.

Juxtaposed to *Streetcar*'s plethora of lighting cues, they are scarce in *Doll's*, apart from during Act Three and Dr Rank's admission of his love and impending death to Nora in Act Two. As noted by Johnston, 'as they contemplate this idea of the sorrowful, the stage darkens'.[25] Whilst Johnston focuses on the darkness as a symbol of Rank's death, I believe it to be foreshadowing Nora's decision to leave. This is because the lighting is not simply dimmer; '*it begins to grow dark*' (64) during the scene. This active progression of darkness mirrors the slow decline of the Helmers' marriage, and although the couple try to escape it, as Nora tells Helen to 'bring the lamp' (68) and Torvald '*goes in and lights a couple of candles*' (86), these attempts are otiose. Ibsen, Priestley and Williams employ lighting to educate their female characters; the realisation that they have been mistreated by society due to their gender lies in the light. For example, Sheila's behaviour is changed (although the permanence of this is questionable) due to the Inspector's unveiling of the consequences of her actions. Nora must go out into the darkness in order to find a new light that will guide her, and the light and truth is too strong for Blanche who must continue to live in a dimly lit fantasy.

Music is another key avenue allowing for such discoveries, typified by Nora's Tarantella dance. In her review of Penna's work, Ettlinger draws out the two distinctive types of Tarantella: a courting dance from Naples, or a 'solo dance from la Puglia' used to cure the 'bite of the tarantula during harvest time' and later 'as a cure for the strange behaviour of neurotic women'.[26] Dean disregards the second definition because there are no historical

[25] Brian Johnston, 'Three Stages of "A Doll House"', *Comparative Drama*, 25:4 (1991-2), 311-328 (p.319).

[26] Ellen Ettlinger, '213, review of *La Tarantella Napoletana*, by Renato Penna', *MAN*, 65 (1965), p.176.

records to support such an epidemic of tarantulas.[27] This is a convincing observation, however, the fact that Dean then fails to classify the dance as a cure for neurotic women weakens his argument. No matter the origin, the dance's association with neurotic women is substantial. This suggests that instead of performing the dance as a means of escape, Nora is actually trying to adhere to patriarchal instructions (exemplified by the fact that Helmer and Rank both play the piano accompaniment), so that she can be 'cured' of her 'neurotic' desire for liberation. Subsequently, it is the dance's failure to 'cure' Nora that catalyses her decision to leave. Furthermore, the acousmatic sound of the Tarantella whilst Christine and Krogstad reconcile at the beginning of Act Three purposefully links the two couples and their relationships to the music and dance. Whilst the Tarantella's failure to constrain Nora in the patriarchy facilitates her escape from it, its ominous accompaniment to Christine and Krogstad's conversation implies that Christine's need to 'be a mother' (83) will return her to the patriarchal system from which she had departed.

Whilst music ultimately leads to Nora's liberation, it is a form of entrapment for Blanche; particularly the Varsouviana, which is the song she and Allan danced to before his suicide. In Kazan's production of *Streetcar*, the final music cue as the '*swelling of the "blue piano" and the muted trumpet*' (90) was replaced by 'a more melancholic variation of the original Varsouviana tune'.[28] Davison astutely argues that this would direct the audience's perception of the play to be based on Blanche's, rather than Stanley's, reality.[29] By allowing the audience to be privy to the music in Blanche's mind, Williams also invites a connection between all music in the play and Blanche. This is illustrated by the diegetic music cue, '*rhumba music comes over the radio*' (28) in the Poker Scene. Rhumba is a sensual dance

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[27] Robert Dean, 'Diegetic Musical Motifs in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *John Gabriel Borkman*', *Ibsen Studies,* 11:1 (2011), 51-70 (p.55).

[28] Annette Davison, 'Drama with Music: Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire and the Challenges of Music for the Postwar Stage', *American Music*, 29:4 (2011), 401-442 (p.410).

[29] Ibid.

and its presence in this scene is indicative of Blanche's sexuality—her inappropriate sexuality may have led her to The Quarter, yet she still clings to it as her way to survive. Subsequently, the music in *Doll's* and *Streetcar* serves to establish the female characters' perspectives to the audience and exemplifies that these women's inner psychological realities are incongruent with wider patriarchal society.

Costume is a particularly relevant connection between female theatre goers and actresses by drawing an irreputable link between the microcosmic fiction and macrocosmic reality. In their seminal work, Kaplan and Stowell observe how the relationship between costumes on stage and the fashion of audience members became prominent in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, particularly around the time of initial *Doll's* performances.[30] In particular, the pair note that the theatre was becoming an alternative source of fashion inspiration to the Parisian Houses.[31] Even though Nora is fictional, a female audience member could directly relate to her and envision her in society simply because she is wearing a dress seen in shop windows. For the majority of the play Nora is in everyday dress of the period, which would most likely consist of a corset, petty coat and high neck dress, as depicted in the 2012 production by the Young Vic company (Appendix A). Her Tarantella costume is a complete juxtaposition to this, with many productions focusing on its colour and ornateness, again exemplified by the Young Vic (Appendix B). Johnston argues that Nora's Tarantella dress is 'a fantasy of feminine identity'.[32] This argument has some validity as Torvald bought the dress and it can thus be seen as his way of dressing Nora up as a doll. However, the dress being 'all so torn' (57) since their departure from Italy indicates that for Nora, the dress is a symbol of the independence she had there, which is torn now

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[30] Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, *Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.8.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Johnston, 'Three Stages of "A Doll House"', p.326.

that she has returned to being a domesticated woman in Norway. Moreover, it is costume that reveals Nora's altered state of being when she removes the Tarantella dress and utters the line, 'Yes, Torvald. I've changed' (96). Ibsen's use of the polysemic verb, 'changed', conveys Nora's state and illustrates just how intrinsically linked clothing is with the sense of self—particularly for a woman.

Crucially, all of these productions were intended for a proscenium arch stage, which wholly lends itself to the depiction of family life in a home. Shanahan argues that the fourth wall 'invokes a male gaze… to objectify female characters'.[33] This reading is applicable to these three plays as the audience for each is watching a woman in the home; a domestic space which she is expected to uphold. Shanahan also compellingly argues that playwrights use the staging of a house 'to inform conflicts surrounding women's freedom'.[34] Ibsen, Priestley and Williams have certainly used staging in this way; Nora and Blanche must leave the home for any chance of freedom and Sheila's place in the domestic sphere is left ambiguous as she, 'must think' (72) at the curtain fall. Williams was particularly experimental with his use of staging, exemplified in Scene X when the walls of the apartment become '*transparent*', therefore a '*struggle*' between, '*a prostitute*' and a '*drunkard*' can be seen by the audience (75). This transparency is key for examining the interaction between the microcosm and macrocosm, as the street life of The Quarter directly invades the Kowalski's apartment, thus creating prolepsis for the sexual assault about to occur. Conversely, *Doll's* and *Inspector* do not utilise this expressionistic technique, rather, doors are their ways of bringing the macrocosm onto the stage. Each act of *Inspector* (or with the Inspector's arrival in Act One) and *Doll's* begins with a door opening, and *Doll's* ends with the emphatic stage direction, '*The street door is slammed shut downstairs*' (104). The doors represent the world beyond the home, and indeed, beyond the stage, to remind the audience that the

[33] Ann M. Shanahan, 'Playing House: Staging Experiments About Women in Domestic Space', *Theatre Topics,* 23:2 (2013), 129-144 (p.131).

[34] Ibid.,129.

performance they are watching is not isolated from society; these scenes could be played out in their own living rooms.

In the 1992 revival of *Inspector,* Daldry and MacNeil 'created a doll's house' set.[35] This artistic decision encapsulates the idea that *Doll's*, *Inspector* and *Streetcar* can all be seen as microcosmic examples of the macrocosmic societies which they set and performed in, just as a child replicates the world around them in their doll's house. Subsequently, the women who are portrayed within these houses are not unbelievable caricatures; they are real women whose stories happen to be told on the stage. In the next section, I will examine how the conflict between the male and female characters on stage demonstrates macrocosmic attitudes of the time towards women.

Section Three: Men Versus Women

The men who play alongside, or rather against, these women are the greatest representation of contemporary macrocosmic attitudes towards women. Stella believes Stanley to be a 'different species' (10) and it is this inherent conflict that causes Ibsen's, Priestley's and Williams' male protagonists to never fully comprehend their female companions. In this section, I will explore the conflict between women's understanding of society and society's understanding of them (exhibited by the perspective of the male characters) and focus on what the endings of each play reveal about societal views of women in the long twentieth century.

Nora, Sheila and Blanche all initially appear to be ignorant to the mechanics of society. For example, Nora tells Dr Rank, 'What do I care about society? I think it's a bore' (40). However, she then naively asks Krogstad, 'hasn't a daughter the right to shield her father from worry and anxiety…?' (50) These statements are contradictory and suggest that

[35] Aleks Sierz, 'A Postmodernist Calls: Class, Conscience and the British Theatre', in *The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments,* ed. by Jane Stokes and Anna Reading (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), pp.236-244 (p.239).

Nora only pretends to be disinterested in society for the sake of her husband; she is actually acutely aware of the injustices within it. The fact that Nora expresses these views to men, whereas she informs Christine that she enjoyed working as it 'was almost like being a man' (37), suggests that she knowingly plays up to the men's expectations of her and those are not her true opinions. Sheila also puts on a façade of hyperbolic innocence when she *'(gaily)*' re-enters the drawing room to say, 'What's this about the streets?' (16) in Act One. Perfunctorily, this question demonstrates Sheila's sheltered upbringing as she does not appreciate the connotations of what she is asking, as she does so '(*gaily*)'. However, this question also reveals Sheila's interest in society and how different classes live, which is supported when the Inspector points out that Sheila 'isn't living on the moon' (37). Blanche's dismay at her sister's living situation conveys how oblivious she is to ways of life other than her own. However, her gritty speech in Scene V illustrates that this too is merely a pretence; Blanche is actually more aware of the workings of a patriarchal society than Stella, as she candidly explains that '[…] *men* don't—don't even admit your existence unless they are making love to you' (45). This reliance on female sexuality to survive society is also expressed in all three plays. Fodstad explores *Doll's* from an economic stance and argues that 'the character of their [Nora's and Torvald's] marital relationship is so explicitly and exclusively presented in economic terms'.[36] This is supported by Nora's admission that she will only tell her secret 'when I'm no longer pretty' (36), thus making the secret a bargaining chip in their negotiation of marriage once her leverage of sexuality fades. Similarly, Blanche's obsession with her appearance is not superficial, rather, it is because she knows it is her only currency in this society. Furthermore, Gerald's argument that it was 'inevitable' (37) that he and Daisy Renton had an affair reveals that Daisy knew the only way to maintain this comfortable way of life with an upper-class man was to use her sexuality. Subsequently, all three plays demonstrate that women in the long twentieth century had to

[36] Lars August Fodstad, 'Economic Extensions in Space and Time: Mediating Value in Pillars of the Community and *A Doll's House*', *Ibsen Studies*, 20:2 (2020), 110-153 (p.135).

feign ignorance and rely on their bodies as currency in order to meet patriarchal requirements and live a 'satisfactory' life.

The societal attitudes of the eras towards women permeate these plays and are expressed by both men and women. Infantilisation is the dominant mode of articulating sexist attitudes in *Doll's*. This is epitomised by Torvald who consistently anthropomorphises Nora as small creatures, such as a 'skylark' or a 'squirrel' (24), thus conveying a belief that women were to be adorable and charming, yet crucially, still degraded to the status of an animal. This characterisation is significant because it is the basis of the irony in Torvald's final monologue, when he still refers to Nora as 'my frightened little songbird' (96), when, as observed by Arntzen and Bjørnstad, that songbird no longer exists—Torvald has just not realised it yet.[37] Moreover, Ibsen enables Torvald to be a mouthpiece for societal views of women when he exclaims, 'But it's unheard of for so young a woman to behave like this!' (100) in Act Three. This line wholly associates the microcosm on stage with the macrocosm of the audience. Indeed, Dingstad highlights that after its production in Germany in 1881, *Doll's* was not performed again for four years, thus suggesting that many audiences felt the same outrage as Torvald and could not believe such a plot.[38] Although, it is important to mention that the majority of London matinee audiences were women, and they were greatly affected by a new kind of 'feminist self-consciousness' after seeing such performances.[39] Subsequently, the audience demographics greatly affected how this play was received; *Doll's* was not homogenously deemed scandalous.

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[37] Ragnar Arntzen and Gunhild Braenne Bjørnstad, 'The Lark's Lonely Twittering: An Analysis of the Monologues in *A Doll's House*', *Ibsen Studies,* 19:2 (2019), 88-121 (p.102).

[38] Ståle Dingstad, 'Ibsen and the Modern Breakthrough – The Earliest Productions of *The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, and *Ghosts'*, *Ibsen Studies*, 16:2 (2016), 103-140 (p.113).

[39] Susan Torrey Barstow, '"Hedda Is All of Us": Late Victorian Women at the Matinee"', *Victorian Studies,* 43:3 (2001), 387-411 (p.387).

Despite both being women, Sheila and Daisy are understood very differently by society due to their class. Priestley emphasises the derogatory opinions both Mr and Mrs Birling have of Daisy because she was working-class. Mr Birling fired Daisy because 'she'd had a lot to say—far too much' (15) and presumptively asks did she then, 'Get into trouble? Go on the streets?' (16). Priestley refers to 'the streets' as an indictment of the fact that prostitution was a last resort for women. In addition, this reference conveys the attitude held by the middle and upper classes that working-class women somehow deserved this fate. This highlights the macrocosmic attitude that links gender and class; that working-class women will inevitably fall into this disrepute, whereas men of this class, or women of different classes may not. However, the middle-class Sheila is not spared from pejorative assumptions. Throughout the play, the family and Gerald are constantly trying to 'protect' Sheila from the gruesome facts of society and Daisy's death. This is demonstrated at the beginning of Act Two when Gerald suggests Sheila be excused from questioning as, 'She's had a long day, exciting and tiring day' (27), which Sheila translates as, 'He means I'm getting hysterical now' (27). It is implied that Sheila is able to ascertain the illocutionary meaning of Gerald's sentence because this assumption has been made about her before, therefore demonstrating macrocosmic attitudes that women are overly emotional to the point of hysteria.

The final points in the trajectories of the male and female characters in *Doll's*, *Inspector* and *Streetcar* serves to contradict their societies' attitudes towards women, and in turn, criticise the male characters for holding such views. Ibsen's script of *Doll's* ends with Nora's abrupt departure, leaving behind her husband and three young children. However, the first actress to play Nora on the professional stage, Hedwig Niemann-Raabe, refused to play such an ending because she could never leave her children, and therefore could not play the part convincingly.[40] In response, Ibsen wrote an alternative ending where Nora tries to leave, but ultimately cannot do this to her children, so stays trapped in a loveless

[40] Innes, ed., *A Sourcebook*, p.83.

marriage.[41] It is interesting that a woman demanded this change in ending rather than a man, however, the fact that she did illustrates women's internalisation of the social expectation for their lives to revolve around motherhood. Subsequently, these contrasting endings represent the symbiotic relationship between the theatre and society.

Over fifty years after the publication of *Doll's*, the 1951 film version of *Streetcar* also had to create an alternative ending to appease societal values—an ending where Stella leaves Stanley, instead of returning to him as in the play. As observed by Cahir, censorship regulations required that Stanley 'not go unpunished' for raping Blanche, and therefore Stella and the baby must leave him.[42] Yet, Cahir astutely acknowledges that Stella 'leaves' by going to Eunice's, which has always been her temporary residence after fighting with Stanley and thus implies that she will return to him.[43] The influence of social attitudes is palpable in the alternative endings to *Doll's* and *Streetcar*; in the Victorian era, a woman must stay in a loveless marriage to perform her duty as a mother, whereas in post-World War II America, the woman must leave a marriage which is doomed to become loveless. These contrasting demands of society demonstrate that it is not either staying or leaving that is inherently the right choice, rather society dictates what a woman should and should not do depending on the zeitgeist of the time. Conversely, Torvald and Stanley (in the play texts) remain intransigent as a way for Ibsen and Williams to criticise their treatment of the women in their microcosms. For example, Torvald still desperately clings to the hope of 'The miracles of miracles—?' (104) and Stanley reverts to controlling Stella through sex, as tactlessly, '*his fingers find the opening of her blouse*' (90). Ibsen and Williams present these men as being oblivious to the action of the plays and the changes within their wives in order

[41] Dingstad, 'Ibsen and the Modern Breakthrough', (p.114).

[42] Linda Costanzo Cahir, 'The Artful Rerouting of A Streetcar Named Desire', *Literature/ Film Quarterly,* 22:2 (1994), 72-77 (p.76).

[43] Ibid.

to confirm Nora and Blanche as the tragic heroes of each play, and thus portray Torvald and Stanley in a villainous light against these women.

Whilst there is only one written and performed ending to *Inspector,* the ambiguity offers multiple interpretations. Arguably, there are two denouements to *Inspector*; one when the Inspector delivers his final speech that 'there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths' (56) and one when Mr Birling answers the telephone and reveals that 'a police Inspector is on his way here—to ask some—questions—' (72). The fact that Birling is interrupted by the fall of the curtain establishes that the play is left incomplete; whilst the audience believed the denouement was the Inspector's final monologue, this ending propounds whether the Inspector was even real, or indeed, if the Birlings are set to live in a perpetual cycle of being questioned. This ambiguity further complicates Sheila's refusal to accept the engagement ring back from Gerald as 'It's too soon. I [she] must think' (72). Similar to Stella's cursory departure from Stanley in the film version of *Streetcar,* this line suggests that despite rejecting Gerald, Sheila is merely giving herself enough time to process and then accept his proposal. This then implies that the Inspector may not have completely changed Sheila's outlook. Mary Christian criticises *Doll's* for doing 'little more than speculate about what a marital relationship between equals… might look like'.[44] This critique can also be applied to *Streetcar* and *Inspector*, as Williams and Priestley offer equally interpretive endings, rather than directly utilising the microcosms they create to suggest changes to macrocosmic views. Ibsen, Priestley and Williams replicate the societies within which their plays are set so vividly that the conflict between men and women inside the houses can be seen as a direct indictment of the injustices against women outside these homes. Despite the fact that the playwrights do not offer solutions to this inequality, the

[44] Mary Christian, 'Performing Marriages: *A Doll's House* and its Reconstructions in fin-de-siècle London', *Theatre Survey,* 57:1 (2016), 43-62 (p.53).

ambiguous endings put this responsibility on the audiences who are invited to act out alternative endings within their own lives.

Conclusion

The microcosms presented in these three plays reflect the macrocosmic patriarchal attitude of the long twentieth century that women were inferior to men. Ibsen, Priestley and Williams all draw attention to the hypocrisies and injustices faced by women in society, yet I would argue that their social critiques are weakened by not offering alternative ways of treating these women in society. Indeed, Nora leaves her husband for a new life as an independent woman, yet to do so she must callously leave her children; Ibsen does not offer a wholly sympathetic alternative to being a wife and mother. Sheila is the most impressionable Birling, but even she still considers that she may just need more time to return to her family and fiancé. Finally, after her brutal treatment by men, Blanche is punished the most and is doomed to live a life excluded from society in an asylum. Subsequently, I would suggest that it is because these male playwrights are writing on behalf of women’s lived experience that they can only illuminate the problems they face in society; they cannot propose positive alternative views of women because they themselves are embroiled in the patriarchal system.

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Appendix A- Nora’s Everyday Dress

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Appendix B- Nora's Tarantella Dress

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