 Resource 6

Dramatic conventions in A Doll’s House

Drama structure

A Doll’s House uses a three act structure. Summarise the key elements of the play that reflect the following elements of dramatic plot structure:

Exposition – the opening of a play, introduction of background information necessary for the audience’s understanding of the plot events, conflict, characters and setting.

Complication – intensification of the play’s central conflict.

Resolution – the conflict is resolved, the final moment of which is referred to as the denouement.

Genre

Which elements of the play conform to the following genres? Which elements revolutionise or resist the genre?

| Genre | Modern tragedy | Well-made play | Realistic problem drama | Melodrama |
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| Elements | * A fatal flaw in the character of the protagonist leads to their downfall
* Downfall occurs in a serious and dignified style
* Internal conflict is often a result of or a precipitant of external conflict
* Protagonist and audience gain insight into themselves
* Catharsis for the audience is the key effects of the play’s resolution/denouement
 | * Composed for relaxation and amusement
* Plot often resolves around “missing element”, revelation of missing element to provide closure.
* Artificial constructions: detailed expositions, definitive resolutions.
* Satisfaction for audience because of restoration of status quo.
* Performed in one act
 | * Moves away from a romantic presentation of reality
* Social problems
* Based in ordinary, domestic settings
* Critical perspective on society
* Protagonist in opposition to hostile society
 | * Plots and characters exaggerated for effect.
* Expressive emotional gestures
* Disjointed styles of speech
* Stock characters (heroes and villains)
* Clear delineation between right and wrong
* Self-dramatising
* Sensational events
* Exaggerated language
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| Elements present in A Doll’s House |       |       |       |       |
| Elements of A Doll’s House that revolutionise the genre |       |       |       |       |

Dramatic and literacy techniques

Identify an example of each of the following techniques in the play. Explain how Ibsen uses this technique to convey his ideas.

* External or internal conflict – the conflict which drives the drama. This can centre on: person versus person, person versus themselves, person versus society, person versus environment.
* Retrospectivity – the events which are spoken about in the dialogue have occurred in the past. This enables characters to reflect upon the events, so the play becomes more about the character’s perceptions and reactions to the events rather than the events themselves.
* Multiple perspectives on single events – often the audience is told about the same events by different characters. This demonstrates how different experiences, such as those of different genders, can affect perception.
* Character parallels and foils – the characters within the play have other (minor) characters who provide contrasts to their own qualities, actions and reactions. There is a similar quality to the relationships in the play.
* Entries and exits – these mark units or pseudo-scenes within each of the three acts of the play. Consider when characters enter and exit and why they might do so. Consider whether the actions or reactions of other characters change when this occurs.
* Dialogue – characters in conversation with one another. Aspects to pay particular attention to in the dialogue is the tone of the speaker, the dominance of the conversation by any character, the way characters address each other, whether the register of dialogue changes based on the characters present.
* Monologues – a single character speaking for an extended time. Monologues are often used to demonstrate a character’s deeper thoughts on a topic, or develop or build an emotion.
* Symbolism – the representation of an abstract idea, theme or concept by a concrete element in the environment or the speech of a character.
* Setting – the location and the props provide important information about the time and place of the play’s action. Settings used in A Doll’s House imply a domestic environment, the private sphere, a woman’s place.
* Stage directions – stage directions give important information about character’s movements, facial expression, tone and emotions. They also provide significant indications about the level of tension in a scene.
* Costume – costumes can indicate significant aspects of context and setting of the play (social, historical), as well as elements of characterisation.
* Dramatic irony – the audience’s knowledge of events or aspects of characterisation of which the characters are not aware. This allows the development of themes such as deceit and is an effective method of creating and intensifying tension.
* Situational irony – the disjunction between the expectations and the actual occurrence. Consider how this concept of expectation is a central theme in the play as well as a device used.
* Verbal irony – words used express something contrary to the truth or what is really meant. Nora’s use of verbal irony is often because she is trying to play the role others expect of her, for example, she lies about her knowledge of certain topics, because she knows she should not have this knowledge as a woman.
* Foreshadowing – this occurs when the composer provides information about events or outcomes that occur later in the text.