

# **The New Woman in *A Doll's House* and *Pygmalion***

by

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**Abstract**

This thesis explores the portrayal of the New Woman in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) and George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913). The concept of the New Woman is a major theme that figures prominently in both plays, though with different approaches and new purposes. In Ibsen's play, the protagonist Nora Helmer embodies the characteristics of the New Woman as conceived of in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The New Woman values self-fulfillment and financial independence rather than the traditional ideal that requires woman to sacrifice for and be obedient to her husband. She is an educated woman who believes in sexual equality. As reflected in his play, Ibsen called for giving greater freedom for women and opposed the notion of an exclusively male society which judges feminine conduct solely from the male's point of view. Similarly, Eliza in *Pygmalion* represents Shaw's conception of the New Woman. As an embodiment of this concept, Eliza endeavours to break away with traditional social conventions and aspires to be an independent and free woman with her own separate identity. The thesis highlights some of the basic similarities and differences between the two playwrights and their two respective plays besides investigating the possible influence that Ibsen might have had on Shaw. Though he wrote his play more than 30 years before the appearance of *Pygmalion*, Ibsen seems to have gone a longer step in affirming the equality of women to men.

Unlike Eliza who appears at the end of the play as a New Woman who is still under the influence of her patriarchal and class-divided society, Nora emerges at the end as a New Woman who is keen on pursuing a new and independent life separate from her husband and children.