

The impact of public scandal leads the protagonists on to “the path to self-knowledge” (K McLeish, 1994) How far do Henrik Ibsen and GB Shaw develop their characters on stage in the light of this critical view?

Public scandal, for either a man or a woman during the Victorian period of 1837 to 1901, could lead to ruin both socially and financially. The topic of public scandal is present in both Henrik Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' and G B Shaw's 'Mrs Warren's Profession', and both plays feature public scandal as a path to self-knowledge, notably the idea of a 'good society'.

The idea of a good society dominates both 'A Doll's House' and 'Mrs Warren's Profession'. Both plays involve the idea of a good society; George Bernard Shaw demonstrates the idea of a good society by showing that women are not able to support themselves sufficiently without turning to an immoral profession like prostitution. However, Shaw demonstrates through 'Mrs Warren's Profession' that the men who condemn the acts of prostitution are the ones who are using the brothels and the prostitutes, showing that society- though supposedly rigid and correctly structured- was duplicitous in its self because women had a limited range of options when poor, but one was condemned by society and one was condemned by themselves. Women could chose factory work but the wage was low and could not support them financially: this was the job that was condemned by the women themselves because of it leaving little money to live on. However, they could choose prostitution that, though frowned upon by society, gave them considerably more money and in this way, they could better themselves but would be convicted to scandal even though the leaders of the society, whether in government or religion, relied on the women-of-the-night for their own satisfaction whilst condemning their actions- this is the hypocrisy shown in Shaw's play through the character of Mrs Warren. A woman found to be participating in these acts would find herself at the centre of a scandal, and a scandal could damage both reputation and prospects for a woman: this is highlighted in Ibsen's 'A Doll's House'. In the play, Nora's future life could possibly be ruined when society (and her husband) find out that she has been paying a secret debt: a woman was owned by her husband and the idea that she would go behind his back concerning money would have been scandalous because it shows the woman to be going against her husband's wishes and is a demonstration of disobedience. Nora's path to self-knowledge becomes clear when she realises that though leaving her husband and her children would cause scandal and ruin her reputation, it was a necessary to take this step and discover who she really was, shedding her former self, which was moulded by the men in her society. It is in these two texts, Shaw's 'Mrs Warren's Profession' and Ibsen's 'A Doll's House', that you find two women who are lead to self-knowledge by the reflection of their own society in which they are a part of.

A woman's path to self-knowledge could be taken when supporting oneself through life: Mrs Warren from G B Shaw's play supported herself as a young woman through prostitution, a profession which was discouraged in the late Victorian era. It could be argued that there is a natural human instinct to improve oneself and keep oneself, and that Mrs Warren's natural instinct was to improve herself too, and the only way that she could do that proficiently was to go into the profession of prostitution, as it paid well. The irony of this is that throughout the play, Shaw highlights the point that though the whole of society did not agree with Mrs Warren's profession, it was the men who were feeding her profession, regardless of class. Without the corruption of men in the society, Mrs Warren would not had earnt enough money