

# Social and political protest writing: a doll's house and the kite runner

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



In the social and political protest writing Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' and Hosseini's 'The Kite Runner' the desired impact upon the audience is arguably to reveal to them a truth about society or about a particular situation, to inspire empathy and perhaps to bring a new level of understanding which could sculpt change in society. Both texts had a very specific audience in mind, for Ibsen the rising middle classes, and for Hosseini Western readers who had only seen Afghanistan from afar and it is therefore interesting to explore the different methods employed to convey the desired affect and to 'win hearts and minds' over to the author's and characters' sides.

Ibsen, as one of the earliest examples of a naturalist playwright utilizes setting and character to target the Norwegian urban middle class audience. The use of the house setting with its comfortable 'stove lined with porcelain tiles, with a couple of armchairs and a rocking chair' 'a what-not with china and other bric-a-brac' meant that contemporary audiences would've been sat in front of a set, on which this controversial action was unraveling, which could've easily been a reflection of their own front rooms. Nora too, as they housewife who moved from her father's house to her husband's and whose life revolves around the house and children, was a 'stock type' character role whose life and circumstances were likely identical to that of many bourgeoisie women in the audience. This deployment of naturalism means that when the dramatic action unfolds, the audience cannot help but make parallels to their own lives and relationships. In particular Nora's rebellious ending in which she declares 'It's your fault I have done nothing with my life.', thus implicating the whole female audience in this claim and asking

them to question whether they are content or proud of their place in life as a married woman and mother. This sort of impact leads to social change because it forces an audience to reflect on their own circumstances, and in this case particularly challenges bourgeoisie couples over how they treat each other and whether their relationship is being defined by their social roles.

The Kite Runner challenges views and assumptions in a different way, as a second generation post-colonial text, by crafting a new image of the Afghan country and cultural heritage. Throughout the novel Western readers are encouraged to empathize with the plight of Afghanistan through its political characterization as a nation. Through the nostalgic retrospective child's narrative of the first section of the book we come to know the country, almost as its own character through familiar sensory descriptions such as ' multicoloured buses' ' laughter and chatter' ' hot tea steaming from thermoses, and the music of Ahmad Zahir blaring from cassette players.' This immersive description of the culture creates imagery that juxtaposes both the later transformation of the sensory scape- ' staccato of gunfire' ' I closed my eyes and searched for the sweetness. I didn't find it.' ' A haze of dust'- after the Soviet and Taliban occupations and perhaps the popularized images of war-torn Afghanistan Western audiences would've been used to viewing on the news when this book was published. It not only encourages us to view the nation as a victim of war itself through this but also challenges Western perceptions of the region and culture as a whole. To this end it wins the hearts of Westerners, perhaps those with power to make a difference to

the plight of Hosseini's homeland, and encourages protest against potential inaction with Afghanistan's contemporary situation.

Audiences in *A Doll's House* are also privy to a unique perspective on the events and the juxtapositions presented as they follow Nora's interactions with both Helmer and the play's other characters such as Mrs Linde and Dr Rank. Nora is presented initially in the play as a foolish and naïve woman who is dependent on her husband who understood far better than she in his social role as a man and a banker, this is conveyed through her affectionate animalization and dehumanization as 'an expensive pet' or the possessive 'my little songbird'. In this presentation she is entirely powerless and typical of a woman in 19th century society. However, during the course of the play, her interactions with the minor characters are used as foils to reveal, only to the audience, her strength, seriousness and capability for rebellion. When she then returns to her interactions with Helmer they are juxtaposed and undermined because they are structurally so close to the exposition of his weaknesses and Nora's capability and therefore reveal the hollowness of their initial presentations. For example, Nora reveals to Mrs Linde, in well-structured and relatively mature language and tone, such things as how Torvald 'he got quite jealous' and 'he is so proud of being a man' or how 'It was I who found the money.', defying her weak female portrayal. This is then juxtaposed by her immediate interactions with Helmer in which the audience sees Torvald boast an in-control parental role such as 'When the real crisis comes you will not find me lacking in strength or courage. I am man enough to bear the burden for us both,' and Nora returns to a self-deprecating

animalization and third person ' Squirrel would do lots of pretty tricks for you'. This manufactures a sense of irony which only the audience perceives and thereby leads them to question the reliability of the social roles they were presented with in the beginning, and furthermore the social roles they themselves enforce in society, as here the man is weak through his obsession with reputation, and the woman has taken on the financial burden. As critic Clement Scott put it- ' the man becomes the hysterical woman, and the woman becomes the silent, sullen, and determined man.' Demonstrating to the audience the flimsiness of their assumed gender and social roles and thus discouraging their perpetuation.

In the Hosseini's writing he has one final battle to pick in terms of Western perspectives. This is found in his presentation of Assef- the novel's allegory and representation of religious extremism in society. The introduction to Assef draws on the imagery of ' the blond, blue-eyed Assef' ' Born to a German mother and Afghan father', this imagery along with the semantics of radical ideologies such as ' ethnic cleansing' and ' watan' help establish a clear parallel in readers' minds between Assef and the Islamist extremism he comes to represent and the relatable Western example of Hitler- a reference made explicit through his use of ' Mein Kampf' as a present for Amir. This provides a point of reference for Western readers that implies the Taliban and extremists are as representative of Afghan culture as Hitler was of the West and thus forces us to reconsider our assumptions. With Assef type-cast as an almost stage villain in the text, we are inclined to join the side of Amir in the Afghans in a desire to stand up to and reject the legitimacy of the

modern-day extremists impacting the region. His strong demonization, presented clearly as 'insane' 'a sociopath', unites characters and audience in a rejection of this aspect of Eastern culture and once again 'wins over the hearts and mind' of the Western audience who come to empathise with Assef's and extremism's Afghan victims.

Overall then, both texts make a clear link with their intended audience, be it through naturalism and structure, or a style of writing directed at providing a relatable and empathetic perspective. Most of all these writings aim to make their audience question their assumptions, whether that is about a culture or about societal roles. It is this that is conducive change in society because it provokes disgust, guilt or newfound understanding; for Ibsen, in the constructs and condition of society, and for Hosseini in the suffering of his nation and discrimination against Eastern culture.