

John Gardner
21M.710: Script Analysis
Summary Paper

There are several different things I learned about reading scripts this semester. I think that the way I look at a script is more focused. I remember when we first discussed *A Doll's House* you asked us to summarize what the play means in one sentence. This was hard for all of us, but then you were easily able to state it concisely in one statement. I feel that before this class I would look at a script and see different themes and ideas, but the ideas were never focused or clear. It is difficult to summarize a play's meaning in a single statement, but it is important to get that focus and cut out all the extraneous thoughts.

To get this kind of focus, one has to evaluate how all the aspects of a play come together. I do not think I ever thought about this before. The characters, setting, plot, relationships, symbolism all seemed very disjoint. However, over the semester I feel that we learned how all these different aspects work together to focus on one meaning. We certainly discussed all of these aspects over the course of the semester and we had to consider all of them for our final analysis presentation and paper.

The way I look at a script, the way I analyzed *Democracy* for my final paper and presentation, was to start with the plot. We did this the very first day with *A Doll's House*. The first thing you did was to ask us to outline the plot, exactly what happened starting in the past before the play even starts. I think that it is important to start with the plot first because it is the framework in which everything happens.

Next, I would look at the characters. I would see what each one was like, what they did in the play, and most importantly what their function was in the play. I think

that it was easiest to see what the main characters were doing in a play because everything is focused on them. I think that it was much harder to find the purpose in secondary characters. For example, in *A Doll's House* I did not initially see how certain characters were used to mirror the main characters and their relationship. I think that this kind of function is more subtle, which is why it is more difficult to pick up on, but I think that it makes the playwright's meaning much more clear and specific.

From here I think it is important to think about themes within a play and focus these down to concise idea about what the play is about. The aspects of a play in which the themes are strongest changes from play to play. Some plays have deep symbolism in certain props, such as *Hedda Gabler*, *Piano Lesson*, and *Substance of Fire*. I think others have the themes in the relationships and characters, such as *A Doll's House*, *Copenhagen*, and *Democracy*. Certainly plays have themes that are supported by an assortment of aspects, but I think there are certain aspects which are more important than others in a specific play. Once I look at these different parts of a play, what the play is about becomes much clearer and I continue to refine my thoughts until what the play is about can be stated in a sentence.

One important consequence of this type of framework is evaluating a play's effectiveness or success. I never before really thought about a play's success in terms of its construction, rather more about whether I liked it or not. I like plays that have a less conventional structure, but I never thought about the purpose of that structure beyond the fact that it was interesting. I never thought that maybe such a play was so unfocused that it did not have a meaning. I think that I learned about this when we studied *Democracy*. It had a very non-linear structure where the meeting of Heisenburg and Bohr was

replayed multiple times. However, this structure was essential to the play's main idea of uncertainty. I remember we read a play which you handed out to us just before we looked at *Copenhagen* which was about Oppenheimer and the bomb. We decided that though it had some interesting ideas and themes, but it never really connected; it was not a unified play.

There were a few parts of the course which I found to be most important to my learning, most of which you probably gathered from what I said above. First, we spent a long time on *A Doll's House*, but I think that it was important to do the first play in such depth because it set the tone for the rest of the course and really established the foundations on which to analyze a script. Second, I really enjoyed *Copenhagen* because it was a very interesting and fun play to read, but also because it is different than the other plays we read. It has a very unique structure and I found it very profound to see the purpose behind this structural choice. I also personally feel that *Copenhagen* was the most well constructed plays we read in that it had unity; it was a cohesive whole, which I found very elegant. Third, the final presentation and paper are essential because we have to do all the analysis our self instead of depending on you for all the connections and meanings.