1875-
THEATRE & THE RISE OF REALISM
THEATRE INNOVATIONS

• The Theatre Space transforms
• Extended Proscenium arch
• Shrinking apron
• Actors enter/exit behind proscenium arch
• Tiers and balconies - continental seating
• Loss of raked stage
• Introduction of elevators & rigging/fly systems to change scenery
More Innovations

• Madison Square Theatre - 2 stages - either lowered or raised via elevators

• Introduction of box set

• Historically accurate settings, costumes

• Introduction of “dimmable” gas lighting

• Blacking out of audience
Social/Science Changes

- Rise of the Working Class
- Industrialization = Urbanization
- Growing Suffragist Movement
- Rise of Unions
- Political power/change in the hands of workers
- Progressive politics
- Freud, Nietzsche, Darwin
- Challenges to “Natural Order” of things- Absolute vs. Relative
- Challenges to existence of “God”- and religious beliefs
Other Scientific/Industrial Changes

- Thomas Edison’s Electric Light Bulb
- Tesla’s Alternating Current
- Wilbur & Orville Wright’s Flying Machine
- Alexander Graham Bell’s Telephone
- Monopolies in various industries - The Railroad
- Theatrical Syndicate - 6 Producers who dominated American Playhouses, touring shows
Theatre Form

• Reaction to Romanticism - development of Realism & Naturalism

• Realistic Revolution

• Emergence of the Director
Realism

- the attempt to create the illusion of everyday life on stage
- ushers in “Modern Theatre”
- mirrors life - through -
  - onstage action, speech, dress, behavior, setting
- radical for 19th century audiences - used to melodramatic, classical & stylized acting
Realism (cont.)

- implied morality or immorality - and relative to situation
- not easy to distinguish what the morality or lesson is
- no stock characters
- complex personalities
- language - colloquial, conversational
- plagued by censorship in Europe and the U.S.
Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)

- Founder of “Realism”
- wrote Romantic dramas in youth
- end of career, experimented with symbolism and mysticism
- Father was a successful businessman
- 1832- father’s business failed- family moved to outside the city
- at age 24- became a Theatre producer
- commissioned to write a play
• After theatre (as artistic director) went bankrupt- left Norway

• lived in Rome, Dresden, Munich

• returned to Norway in 1891

• 3 periods-

• early period- Romantic- plays in verse and based on myth and historical figures

• middle period- Realism- most well-known- i.e. The Pillars of Society (1877), Doll’s House (1879), Ghosts (1881), An Enemy of the People (1882), Hedda Gabler (1891)

• late period- Experimental- experimented with symbolism, mysticism, within a framework of Realism
Ibsen’s Themes

- Realistic Social Dramas
- Unhappy marriages
- Sexual double standards
- Gender biases
- Position of women in society
Janet McTeer- Interview- *Doll’s House*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ8BhPrHb7U