



Gender Role and Identity

A Doll's House

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ABSTRACT

A Doll's House is a play by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. This play exposes the character or the role of a woman to take care of her husband and her children and she should always be dependent on her husband whereas the husband will be independent by himself. Nora is treated like a child and the other characters like Mrs. Linden and Dr. Rank do not take her seriously. Nora thinks that she borrowed money from Krogstad because she loves her husband but when Torvald comes to know about this matter he did not react expectedly. Nora thought borrowing money and having control of it was her pride. Women are treated as mere household objects whereas men are the breadwinners of the family. This paper focuses on the gender roles that are fixed for men and women in society. These gender roles play a major role in Nora's character which makes her leave her husband and her children.

Keywords – Money, Nora, Woman, Torvald

Henrik Ibsen is known as the Father of Modern Age Drama. He was the founder of 'Realism' in theatre. He makes use of colloquial language to give the audience a realistic experience. *A Doll's House* written by Henrik Ibsen was published in 1879. It can be considered a modern tragedy.

The play centres on the married life of Nora and Torvald Helmer. Nora, a female character in the play is always treated like a little child by her husband Torvald. He calls her a spendthrift and says that she spends money on unnecessary things.

What an odd little woman you are! Just like your father – Always eager to get hold of money. But the moment you have it, it seems to slip through your fingers somehow; You never know how to get rid of it.(34)

Not only does he call Nora a spendthrift, but he also says that she inherited those qualities from her father. "I should not think of doing what you disapprove of (35)." From this dialogue, we can see that Nora was under the control of Torvald and she does not like going against his wishes or doing anything that he disapproves of. She does everything according to Torvald's liking and since no one takes her seriously she plays along with it and calls herself 'Little Nora'.

"Nora, Nora, haven't you grown sensible yet? In our school days, you were a great spendthrift (41).""It is doubly good in you, who know so little of the troubles and difficulties of life (45).""Through these dialogues, we can know that even Nora's friend Mrs. Linden does not take her seriously. Mrs. Lindencriticized Nora that she knows so little of the burdens and troubles of life. Most of the characters in the play think that Nora is incapable of anything amenable. "I too have something to be proud and glad about. It was I who saved Torvald's life (46)."" But she wants to be taken seriously so she told her friend a secret about the money that she borrowed without the consent of her husband. She felt proud of borrowing money without her husband's consent. She was so proud that she had control of money but Mrs. Linden said that "How could a wife without her husband's consent borrow such an important sum as that? (47)."" This dialogue also proves that if it is a serious matter then the wife should have got the husband's permission. A wife should always be under the control of her husband but Nora said with much pride that she felt pleasurable and like a man when she was handling money.

“Torvald loves me he would not hesitate a moment to give his very life for mine (96).” This dialogue proves that Nora believed her husband will stand by her side when she was in trouble. She thought her husband will pay off the debts if he came to know about it. But when the truth got out, when he saw the letter from Krogstad the person who gave Nora money, Torvald calls her a ‘miserable creature’. Torvald also mentions that Nora had destroyed his happiness and ruined his future, where he will not allow her to bring up the children because he does not trust her. While all these were going on they receive Krogstad’s letter of apology with the bond attached to it.

You loved me just as a wife should love her husband. It was only the means you could not judge rightly about. But do you think you are less dear to me for not knowing how to act alone? No, indeed; only lean on me; I will advise and guide you. I should be no true man if it were not just this woman’s helplessness that makes you doubly attractive in my eyes. You must not dwell on the harsh words I spoke in my first moment of terror when I believed ruin was about to crush my very life. I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you. (135-136)

He asked Nora to lean on him, and that he will advise and direct her. He wanted Nora to be under his control. He thinks that she is not responsible and does not have sufficient knowledge. Nora did everything out of the love that she has for her husband but her husband did not understand it. He does not apologise for the harsh things he said to her.

“We have now been married eight years. Does it not strike you that tonight for the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, are speaking together seriously? (137-138).” This was the moment of realisation for Nora, she says that they have been married for eight years but this is the first time they are having a serious conversation.

While I was still at home with my father, he used to tell me all his views and so of course I held the same views; if at any time I had a different view I concealed it because he would not have liked people with opinions of their own. He used to call me his little doll, and play with me, as I in my turn used to play with my dolls. (138-139)

From these lines, she understood that when she was with her father, she did everything according to his opinion, and even if she had a different point of view, she did not have the freedom to say it. Her father called her his ‘doll-child’ and after marriage, Nora was just transferred into Helmer’s hands. Now she was his ‘doll-wife’. She borrowed money for Torvald; she lied for Torvald; she did everything for the sake of her husband. Her whole world revolved around Torvald. She did everything according to the liking of her husband. It was as if she was a doll who was controlled by her husband. A doll cannot speak or move on its own. The owner’s world is the world for the doll it can only move if the owner moves it same way Nora was not allowed to voice out her opinions, she was controlled by her husband in all the things right from what she should eat to the decisions that are taken in her life. Nora realised all these only in the end. She calls her house a playroom and she realised how she was being treated as a doll-wife and as a father’s doll-child. After the conversation, she decided that she was leaving the house to educate herself and she has some duties that she must do for herself. For that Helmer said, “Before all else, you are a wife and a mother (141).” Even after everything that she did for him, he still wanted her to fulfill the duty as a wife and a mother when he has not fulfilled his role as a husband and a father.

Nora thought that Torvald would be by her side and sacrifice his honour for her no matter what the situation would be in the future, but her expectations were shattered. Helmer says that “No man sacrifices his honour to a person he loves (145).” For that Nora gave a reply “That is what millions of women have done (145).”

A woman is expected to fulfill the duties and play the role of a good daughter, wife, and mother. While playing those roles she sacrifices many things in life. Likewise, Nora’s character is excellent for showing women’s tough character and serves the purpose of accepting it she also demonstrates women’s social acceptance. Before her transformation she did all her duties out of love towards her husband and children until he finds the letter, she was considered to be an amusing doll. After the realisation, Nora fights for her own, did hard work, and even changes the pattern of her life with her strong mind. This made her understand her identity crisis as a doll and move out to explore herself encouraging her identity.

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