

Liberation of women:
"a doll's house"
analysis essay
(critical writing)



**ASSIGN
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Henrik Ibsen's play 'A Doll's House' explores the issue of change in the 19th century Norwegian society. Ibsen's Women characters are discriminated and trivialized to the extent that they feel empty and helpless. This triggers a gradual struggle that leads to their liberation.

Within the play, various characters undergo transformation. Ibsen uses symbols effectively to show how transformation is gradual rather than a radical process. Therefore, through Nora, Ibsen portrays how education leads to enlightenment and the eventual transformation of women.

The role of Women is restricted as compared to role played by men. Women are restricted to domestic chores where they are largely subordinated to men. Women are also forced by circumstances to sacrifice their own freedom and comfort for the sake of their families, and as such suffer in silence.

Miss Linde regrets that "... a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent" (Ibsen, 1889). As such, Nora cannot reveal to Torvold that she is currently struggling to repay a loan she had acquired by forging her father's signature, since women are not allowed to engage in such transactions without their husband's knowledge and consent.

Thus, she suffers in silence. This leads her to contemplate suicide because of the guilt she feels when blackmailed by Krogstad for forging her father's signature on the bonds she committed to acquire a loan, "It was I that wrote papa's name" (Ibsen, 1889).

This exposes the challenge in their marriage. Whereas Nora is presented as a loving and caring wife, Torvald, on the other hand, views her as a helpless

person. As such he refers to her as “ my little caged song bird” (Ibsen, 1889). Reference to small and physically weak creatures amplifies male dominance and superiority.

It is such an attitude towards Nora that leads her to revolt and leave her husband. Furthermore, Mrs. Linde sacrificed her love for Krogstad, to marry a richer man so as to support her mother and siblings. However, after the death of her husband she feels free to reunite with Krogstad who forgives her and delights on the boost this development will have on his social standing.

Gender roles are also reflected through education. Education is meant to be a means of empowerment for individuals. Despite the fact that Ibsen's female characters are educated, they are not empowered to utilize their knowledge and skills.

The society does not allow women to work, especially the married. Mrs. Linde doesn't get a chance to meaningfully utilize her education until after the death of her husband. Nora, on the other hand has to work secretly against her husband's will (Marker, 1989).

Ibsen uses a number of symbols to highlight how the themes are portrayed through characterization. One of the symbols used is the door. Nora closes the door whenever she wants to talk.

This signifies that she is a secretive person. Ironically, the last door she closes ushers her to freedom. This signifies the change in gender roles

(Durbach, 1991). Furthermore, the direction of light in the play also signifies changes, especially in gender roles.

While in some scenes the lights are turned off, towards the end of the play the intensity of light increases especially when Nora is talking to her husband. This illuminates the gradual enlightenment of women as a result of the education they have already attained, in school and through real life experiences.

Contrary to popular opinion, Nora's development is gradual and not radical. At the beginning of the play, Nora is portrayed as a harmless child-like wife. However, her change in character is gradual and is reflected through her manner of expression.

Gradually, Nora expresses her anxiety and the desire to be free (Templeton, 1997). This is escalated towards the end of the story and culminates in her slamming the door on her husband. Slamming the door signifies the beginning of her freedom (Abcarian and Klotz, 2002).

Initially women are portrayed as dolls. However, with time they are transformed to become more vocal members of the society. This is symbolized through Nora who rebels from her husband's enslavement. She largely lacks a grasp of her immediate environment outside the house.

Nora has been misguided and overruled by her dominating husband who limits her to mere doll. However when she experiences a reawakening, she questions the social ideals (Markotic, 1998). By the end of the play she

emerges a stronger woman psychologically. Thus, 'A Doll's House' is a conscious reawakening play.

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