

Financial struggles affecting individuality



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Financial Struggles affecting Individuality The individuals within the society of Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*, are prohibited from being fully developed individuals, due to social and financial problems. *A Doll's House* is set in Norway in the late 1800s. At the time, Norway was just hit by an economic depression, making it difficult to find a job, and even harder to get promoted to a high-paying position. Also, sexism was very prominent, and women were precluded from their rights and freedom. Because everybody did not want to face socioeconomic hardships, people like Nils Krogstad, Christine Linde and Torvald Helmer were forced to lose oneself, and the desperate attempt to not get excluded by society lead them to follow mainstream societal values. Nils Krogstad is a character who harasses Nora, eventually ruining her marriage, and is portrayed as the antagonist of this play, but he is not necessarily a villain. He made a mistake in life by committing the crime of forgery, but his motive for this crime was to protect his loved ones. Under the villainous exterior, he is a respectable gentleman. His interactions with Nora is rather courteous for someone who is a blackmailer, and under the cold-hearted appearance, a human, pure heart can be observed. In the scene where he checks on Nora and talks her out of the idea of suicide, Krogstad says to her: " Even money-lenders, hacks, well, a man like me, can have a little of what you call feeling, you know"(Ibsen 1348). His display of compassion for Nora shows that he is not a cold-hearted criminal, but a man who is just desperate to correct his wrongdoings for the future of his family. In the beginning of act III, Krogstad has an earnest conversation with Christine Linde, who was his lost love. The conversation gets their amiable feelings reconciled, and also pushes Krogstad to have a change of heart, making him no longer want to blackmail Nora. In the end,

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Krogstad's compassion overpowers his bitterness towards Nora, and comes to recover his senses. Ibsen used Krogstad as a symbol for people who were crushed by societal pressure, leading them to execute villainous acts, despite their true feelings and values. Another character that lost their individuality in life because of a financial struggle is Christine Linde. When she was younger, she had to give up her love for Nils Krogstad, and marry a wealthier man so that she could support her sick mother and her two younger brothers. She never felt anything for this man she married, she says that " The last three years have seemed like one endless slog for [her], with no rest"(1325) and that she felt 'unspeakably empty' about her husband's death. Christine was never happy, until she was reunited with Krogstad, which made her gladly jump back to a role of being a wife. Although Christine is shown to be a very capable, intelligent, and self sufficient individual, deep down she wanted to have a typical 'woman's role'. This is apparent in her soliloquy in act III, " What a Change! Oh, what a change! Somebody to work for... to live for! A home to bring joy into! I won't let this chance of happiness slip thorough my fingers"(1355). All in all, Ibsen makes Christine a example of individual who lost her happiness and desires due to financial needs. The final victim of social and financial difficulties in the play, is Torvald Helmer. In the past, he suffered from heavy economic hardships and worked very hard to save his family for it. He finally gets a promotion to become the manager of the bank, suddenly feels immense pressure from society, and makes him very conscious of other people's perceptions of him and of his position in the community. Torvald gets Nora to keep their house in a 'perfect' condition. He constantly monitors his wife - the food she eats, and also her appearance. His over-anxiety of a good appearance in the

community is shown when he reasons his rejection of Nora's request to keep Krogstad at the office. Torvald says that he will not listen to her because if he did, he would become " a laughing stock before the entire staff"(1342). In the end, when Nora leaves Torvald, his chief concern was to save 'the appearance' of their household. Because of his over commitment to social appearances, Torvald gets his values and priorities distorted, and that leads him to the tragic ending of the story, losing Nora. Nils Krogstad, Christine Linde and Torvald Helmer from A Doll's House suffer greatly and eventually lead each individual to losing themselves - their identity, their needs, and their ethics. Krogstad suffered because of his crime, and his attempt to save his loved ones made him become an antagonist. Christine had to sacrifice 3 years of her life in order to financially support her family, and was constrained from her happiness for a long time. Torvald's hard work to bring a better life for his family backfired and lead to the corruption of it. The socioeconomic pressure, the fear of exclusion from society, made one behave in a way that is not true to themselves, resulted in a negative effect to the individuals, causing grief in their life.