

A doll's house: jungian analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the path to self-realization and transformation is depicted by the main character, Nora Helmer. She is a woman constrained by both her husband's domineering ways as well as her own. From a Jungian perspective, Nora's lack of a developed contrasexual force, or animus, is the stumbling block to her achieving personal freedom. The author achieves this by creating in Nora the "archetype of transformation," which allows her to change from a child-like object belonging to her husband Torvald Helmer, into an independently thinking, self-realized woman. The outset of the story characterizes Nora as a childish plaything who is controlled by her husband. From a Jungian perspective, her persona points to the lack of balance of her animus. One indication of this is the way Nora tries to persuade Torvald to do something she wants. "NORA: Your squirrel would scamper about and do tricks, if you'd only be sweet and give in" (Ibsen 196). Nora doesn't feel she can be upfront with Torvald, so she relies on silly and flirtatious methods of persuasion. This behavior is prevalent during most of the play. In fairness though, Torvald refers to his wife in childlike ways. Nora is merely responding to his views of her as a pretty little object. HELMER: "Now, now, the little lark's wings mustn't droop. Come on, don't be a sulky squirrel..." (Ibsen 172). It is this circle of belittlement and control that is fostering within Nora the inhibition of her animus. According to Jung, "the animus is the corresponding representative of the masculine contrasexual elements in the psychology of women" (Edinger 4 of 9). That is to say, it is the animus that represents the masculinity in a woman. For Nora to be able to pull away from her husband, or her family, she would first need to focus her contrasexual energies. However, this would be difficult for Nora to achieve due to numerous reasons, one of which involves the past. As author Cheryl Jarvis

points out, “ Historically, our culture has suppressed what we once called ‘ male’ characteristics (power and independence) in women...” (Jarvis 4 of 6). In other words, the historical restrictions placed on male/female characteristics helps contribute to the shortage of contrasexual energies. It is with this in mind that one can understand some of the reasons for Nora’s persona. The persona is “...the partially calculated public face an individual assumes towards others. The persona is composed of various elements, some based on the individual’s personal propensities and others derived from the society’s expectations and the early training of parents and teachers” (Edinger 3 of 9). That is, the persona of an individual is the face they show in public. Given that it’s developed by many means, one including the early training of parents, it is clear that Nora, from an early age, would be at a disadvantage in the development of her animus. A clear example of this is in the way she speaks about her father’s method of raising her. NORA: “ When I lived at home with Papa, he told me all his opinions, so I had the same ones too; or if they were different I hid them, since he wouldn’t have cared for that. He used to call me his doll-child, and he played with me the way I played with my dolls” (Ibsen 220). Her antics and undeveloped sense of power and independence stem from her father’s treatment of her as an unthinking child. Nora’s life is a continuation of the circle of belittlement and control her father began implementing at an early age, except this time it is with Torvald. However, as Ibsen proves with the character of Mrs. Linde, Nora’s chance for transformation and self-realization is not at all impossible. Mrs. Linde can be seen as an ideally transformed and contrasexually developed woman. Ibsen provides in her a glimpse into the possible future of Nora’s personal maturity. A good example of this is when Mrs. Linde speaks

to Nora about relationships and Nora's childlike behavior. MRS. LINDE: " Now listen, Nora; in many ways you're still like a child. I'm a good deal older than you, with a little more experience" (Ibsen 194). Ibsen gives Mrs. Linde a sense of maturity and experience by having her state that she is older and implying that she is wiser. As Jarvis states regarding the need for contrasexual development, " The task of the second half of life, said Jung, is to claim our contrasexual energies – in other words, to find our missing selves" (Jarvis 4 of 6). The second half of life involves one's search for his or her contrasexual force. The cultivation and balance of a person's animus thus becomes one of the focal points of midlife. Ibsen further illustrates Jarvis' point when Mrs. Linde speaks to Krogstad about her personal change. MRS. LINDE: " I've learned to be realistic. Life and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that" (Ibsen 210). It is apparent that she has had a hard life, from which she has learned to be an independent thinker and has achieved self-realization. With her wisdom, she sees the need for Nora to be honest about her predicament. Being mature, experienced, and perceptive allows her to see accurately the problems the couple has. This is made clear when she is again speaking to Krogstad regarding the letter he has dropped into Torvald's mailbox. MRS. LINDE: " Yes, in that first panic. But it's been a whole day and night since then, and in that time I've seen such things in this house. Helmer's got to learn everything; this dreadful secret has to be aired; those two have to come to full understanding; all these lies and evasions can't go on" (Ibsen 211). Mrs. Linde observes the need for Nora to be honest with Torvald, even if the marriage might suffer irreparable damage. She sees that the Helmer household is "...a nursery for hypocrisy and repression, possessiveness and lies" (Thompson 2 of 5). Besides the visible aspects of

Nora's marriage, she is made aware of Thompson's viewpoint by the things Nora reveals about her relationship to Torvald. NORA: " You see, Torvald loves me beyond words, and, as he puts it, he'd like to keep me all to himself" (Ibsen 194). Nora, unknowingly, makes obvious to Mrs. Linde such things as the possessive nature of Torvald. Through her attained self-realization and contrasexual development, she provides Nora with an example of what can become of a woman who changes her persona and attempts to find her " missing self." This is achieved through the advice she gives to Nora as well as the examples of financial independence she provides. Case in point, MRS. LINDE: " Yes, so I had to scrape up a living with a little shop and a little teaching and whatever else I could find. The last three years have been like one endless workday without rest for me" (Ibsen 177). Mrs. Linde's description of self-support and independence gives Nora a living example of achieved self-realization, one that is worthy of emulation. The last act of the play depicts Nora's transformation. From a Jungian perspective, the breaking away from Torvald proves that she has begun to develop her masculine side. Ibsen, from the beginning, created in Nora the archetype of transformation, which "...pertains to a psychic process of growth, change, and transition. It can express itself in many different images with the same underlying core of meaning... The theme of death and rebirth as well..." (Edinger 6 of 9). This archetype applies to individuals who change, or mature, mentally. In A Doll's House, Ibsen expresses the image of change and transition with Nora. During most of the play, she is aware of her limitations in her role as " wife" and she consciously plays the part of Torvald's pet. However, this changes in the last act. Nora finally confronts her husband and allows herself to reveal her innermost feelings regarding

her role as his wife. NORA: “ I don’t believe in that any more. I believe that, before all else, I’m a human being, no less than you – or anyway, I ought to try to become one. I know the majority thinks you’re right, Torvald, and plenty of books agree with you too. But I can’t go on believing what the majority says, or what’s written in books. I have to think over these things myself and try to understand them” (Ibsen 222). Nora, for the first time in her life, has revealed openly and with confidence a personal need. She tells Torvald that she no longer believes in the traditional views society holds of marriage. Most important though, is her newfound need to think things through for herself. Nora further depicts this when she responds to Torvald’s claim of her being childlike and naive. NORA: “.... But now I’ll begin to learn for myself. I’ll try to discover who’s right, the world or I” (Ibsen 222).

Admitting that she is indeed inexperienced with the ways of the world, she is nevertheless willing to begin being an independent woman. The need to become self-realized has come to fruition. “ To become whole...women who need to develop their ‘ masculine’ traits are pulled outward, away from home and family life” (Jarvis 4 of 6). As Nora begins to realize the stifling nature of her marriage and her husband’s lack of self-sacrifice, she sees the need to pull away from him. NORA: “ Good. Well, now it’s all over. I’m putting the keys here. The maids know all about keeping up the house – better than I do. Tomorrow, after I’ve left town, Kristine will stop by to pack up everything that’s mine from home. I’d like those things shipped up to me” (Ibsen 224). Nora’s decisiveness regarding the choice to leave Torvald is made clear and her contrasexual energy is beginning to show. From a Jungian point of view, Nora’s path to self-realization and transformation begins to take shape with her final resolve to separate herself from Torvald. Since the theme of death

and rebirth are expressions of the “ archetype of transformation,” the death of Nora’s marriage allows her transformation to begin taking shape. She is beginning to develop her masculine side by taking charge of her life and thinking for herself. No longer is she a mere “ doll.” In the end, a Jungian analysis of “ A Doll’s House” gives insight into Nora’s character and shares Ibsen’s view of the importance of personal development and acquired independence. The main character starts off as a childish girl who succumbs to her husband’s demands and behaves as if unable to think for herself. However, Ibsen shows that underneath Nora’s surface is a woman screaming to be free. Although naive, she is not completely silly, but rather uses that persona to fill a role she feels is demanded of her. This would not be the case if her sense of contrasexual prowess, stemming from her animus, had been effectively developed. But, as Jung defined with the archetype of transformation and Ibsen illustrated with Nora’s beginnings of self-realization, the psychic process of change takes time, effort, and often a revelatory experience. Works Cited: Edinger, Edward F. “ An Outline of Analytical Psychology.” Quadrant. New York: 1968. Ibsen, Henrik. “ A Doll’s House.” Pocketful of Plays: Vintage Drama. Ed. Christopher P. Klein. Boston: Heinle, 1996. 170-224. Jarvis, Cheryl. The Marriage Sabbatical: The Journey that Brings You Home. New York: Perseus Books, 2000. Thompson, Bruce. “ Ibsen, The Liberator.” 11April. 2001. University of California Santa Cruz. 19 November. 2003