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A Doll House, by Henrik Ibsen, and A Raisin in the Sun, by Lorraine Hansberry, both have central themes of search of self-identity within a social system. This is demonstrated by women characters from both plays breaking away from the social standards of their times and acting on their own terms. In most situations women are to be less dominant than men in society. These two plays are surprisingly different from the views of women in society and of the times and settings that they take place in. Henrik Ibsen's A Doll House, which was written during the Victorian era, introduced a woman as having her own purposes and goals, making the play unique and contemporary.

Nora, the main character, is first depicted as a doll or a puppet because she relies on her husband, Torvald Helmer, for everything, from movements to thoughts, much like a puppet who is dependent on its puppet master for all of its actions. Nora's duties, in general, are restricted to playing with the children, doing housework, and working on her needlepoint. A problem with her responsibilities is that her most important obligation is to please Helmer. Helmer thinks of Nora as being as small, fragile, helpless animal and as childlike, unable to make rational decisions by herself. This is a problem because she has to hide the fact that she has made a decision by herself, and it was an illegal one. In Act I, it seems evident that Nora does not understand the actual value of money but she has an infatuation with luxuries such as expensive Christmas gifts and she justifies this by buying less expensive clothes, which she has confided in Mrs. Linde, her friend. Helmer, immediately labels his wife as a " little spendthrift" (Ibsen, 660). She seems to think that money can be easily borrowed and paid back. Nora: Oh, but Torvald, we can squander a little now.

Can't we? Just a tiny, wee-bit. Now that you've got a big salary and are going to make piles and piles of money. (Ibsen, 660) Helmer feels strongly that women and finances should have nothing to do with each other, and that a woman could never rationally economize a household. He feels that taking loans out in order to buy expensive items is unnecessary and most importantly, what would other people think? Helmer: Nora, Nora, how like a woman! No, but seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debts! Never borrow! Something of freedom's lost-and something of beauty too-from a home that's founded on borrowing debt. We've made a brave stand up to now, the two of us; and we'll go right on like that the little we have to (Ibsen, 660). Nora thought she did the right thing by borrowing money when Helmer was sick and not telling him. She knows that it was illegal to forge her father's signature but feels that this crime should not apply to her because she had the good intention of helping her husband get well.

This can be seen as an example of the subordinate position of women in society. Nora was thinking of the well being of her husband, while not thinking about the rules of the business world which is where men had all of the power at the time and even today. This is evident when Krogstad, the man she borrowed money from, comes to meet with Nora with the forged loan to discuss what she has done.

Krogstad: Laws don't inquire motives. Nora: Then they must be very poor laws. Krogstad: Poor or not-if I introduce this paper in court, you'll be judged according to law. Nora: This I refuse to believe. A daughter hasn't a right to protect her dying father from anxiety and care? A wife hasn't a right to save her husband's life? I don't know much about laws, but I'm sure that

somewhere in the books these things are allowed. And you don't know anything about it-you who practice the law? You must be an awful lawyer, Mr.

Krogstad (Ibsen, 669). After Krogstad threatens to expose Nora's crime, she comes to the realization that what she did was in fact illegal. This is the beginning of the end for Nora's perfect marriage and family. She tries to use her feminine charm on the men in her life to make the situation right. Nora tries to please Helmer by dressing up and doing the tarantella dance. She pretends that she needs him to teach her every move in order to relearn the dance. This is evidence of Nora's submissiveness to her husband.

Helmer in turn shows interest in Nora physically and emotionally, but not intellectually which is consistent throughout the play. It is obvious that Helmer looks at Nora as his object. Nora: Torvald, don't look at me like that! Helmer: Can't I look at my richest treasure? At all that beauty that's mine, mine alone-completely and utterly, Nora (moving around to the other side of the table): You mustn't talk to me that way tonight. Helmer (following her): The tarantella is still in your blood. I can see-and it makes you even more enticing.

Listen. The guests are beginning to go. (Dropping his voice.) Nora-it'll soon be quite through this whole house. (Ibsen, 682)When Nora feels that she has no where else to turn to for help in hiding her secret, she goes to Dr. Rank, a friend of Helmer's, who is also attracted to Nora physically. Nora feels that Rank will be able to prevent her from the consequences she is about to face

with her husband, but he wants to tell her how he feels about her. Just as she is about to tell him about her situation, Dr.

Rank professes his love for her, and Nora simply replies, “ Really, I don’t know what to say-Why did you have to be so clumsy, Dr. Rank! Everything was so good”. (Ibsen, 675) This proves that Nora’s charm has worked but not for what she really wanted. Nora can be seen as selfish and naive, but she is only a product of the society that she was raised in. She has been handed everything that she has needed in life by her father and later by her husband because she is a woman. It is obvious that she has become dependent on the men in her life. Nora: I mean, then I went from Papa’s hands into yours.

You arranged everything to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you-or I pretended to; I can’t remember. I guess a little of both, first one, then the other. Now when I look back, it seems as if I’d lived here like a beggar-just from hand to mouth. I’ve lived here by doing tricks for you, Torvald. But that’s the way you wanted it. It’s a great sin what you and Papa did to me.

You’re to blame that nothing’s become of me. (Ibsen, 686) Nora has never really had to make decisions on her own, and when she did, in the case of forging her father’s signature, she did not think or even know about the consequences. By the end of the play she eventually sees herself as an ignorant person, and unfit wife and mother because of the way she has been treated by society. When Nora decides that she has to face Helmer and tell him the truth about the loan and forging, she also decides that she has to

accept the consequences, which she feels will at first lead Helmer into understanding the position that she has been placed in.

Helmer, on the other hand, at first is extremely upset with Nora for going behind his back and committing such a crime. When Helmer is making his speech about Nora now being an unfit wife and mother because of what she did she confronts her position of being subordinate in the eyes of her husband, who is more worried about what other people will think of the situation. Nora is no longer the innocent, doll-like, wife he thought he loved. Their ideal home and marriage is nothing more than what it looks like. The society at the time probably would have felt that this was in fact a perfect marriage. Nora and Helmer have never really had an actual conversation about what is going on in their relationship until this point. Helmer (sitting at the table directly opposite her): You worry me, Nora. And I don't understand you.

Nora: No, that's exactly it. You don't understand me. And I've never understood you either-until tonight. No, don't interrupt. You can just listen to what I say. We're closing accounts, Torvald. (Ibsen, 685)When Nora changes her clothes to get ready to leave near the end of the play, it is symbolic of her changing her whole outlook on life, society and the position that she has been placed in. By Nora making the decision to leave her husband, children, and the comfortable life that she has been living, she takes a position that is equal to her husband and breaks society's expectations.

She proves to her husband that she is well able to make decisions for herself, whether or not they are rational is left up to the reader. Nora's decision to

leave was also a decision to leave all expectations put on a woman, wife, and mother by society. She realizes this and does not care. Nora needs to find her individuality and freedom from her husband, even if it costs her family. As she is leaving, she tells Helmer, " There has to be absolute freedom for the us both". (Ibsen, 688) In order for a relationship to survive there has to be equality among it's members. The kind of marriage Nora and Helmer had was far from equal.

Many women would have stayed and tried to repair what had gone wrong in their marriage. When Helmer forgave Nora and begged her to stay, even if it was just to be there for the children, she had already made up her mind, she could no longer be bought by Helmer's promises, she no longer wants to please him and be his " Doll". When the door slams behind Nora, there is uncertainty about her future.

We have no idea where she is going to go and what she is going to do. But, we are left with a strong feeling that she will survive because she has proved to herself that she is a strong women by standing up to her husband and the norms of society. Similar to A Doll's House, A Raisin in the Sun takes place in a society where women are generally submissive to men and take on the roles that society places them in. One of the major themes of the play is the American dream. Beneatha, one of the main characters, displays strength and hopefulness for the future in a society where women have little mobility in the social system to pursue their dreams of a better future. The Younger family is an African-American lower to middle class family who lives in Chicago's Southside.

The family of five live in an old apartment, with only two small rooms. From the description in the play the apartment is obviously well lived in and too close for comfort. “(It’s furnishings are typical and undistinguished and their primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years-and they are still tired)” (Hansberry, 1274). Each of the Youngers have dreams for their future that they think a \$10, 000 insurance check guarantees them. Each family member’s dream is different and is vital to the development of the play. The check that they are waiting to receive is from their deceased father and husband.

Mama’s, Lena Younger, dream is to own her own two story house, so her family will have a nicer place to live and to also provide an education for Beneatha to become a doctor. Walter, Lena’s son, has great plans to become a partner in a liquor store with two acquaintances. Ruth, Walter’s wife, is accepting of her life and the people she lives with but also wants to see everyone happy, typical of the role that many wives play in society.

Beneatha’s character is very similar to Nora in A Doll House. She is searching for self-identity within a social structure that constrains her because she is an African American woman. Like Helmer, Walter, her brother, does not believe that his sister is capable of fulfilling her dreams of going to medical school and becoming a doctor because it is not a typical occupation for a woman to be in. Walter: Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy bout messing round with sick people-then go be a nurse like the other women-or just get married and be quiet (Hansberry, 1278)Another issue that Walter is worried about is where is the money going to come from to educate her? He has more important plans with the insurance money than

to provide an education for Beneatha, whom he feels should be doing more for the family than worry about becoming a doctor. He feels this way because while the rest of the family is working hard all day trying to make ends meet, Beneatha is at school. When she comes home she brings her ideas and thoughts with her and this makes Walter feel inferior.

Unlike Nora, from the beginning, Beneatha wants to be independent. She does not want to have to rely on her family or anybody else to put her through school. When Beneatha is at school, she feels as if she has a place in society. She is surrounded with people who are similar to her.

When she is at home she is uncertain of her place because of the contradicting views her family has of their social status. She frequently questions the ideas and values of her family. There was a discussion between Mama, Ruth and Beneatha about “rich white people” versus “rich colored people”, and Beneatha was stating that “the only people in the world who are more snobbish than rich white people are rich colored people”. (Hansberry, 1282) Mama immediately said, “You must not dislike people cause they well off”. (Hansberry, 1282) Beneatha felt that her mother did not understand the concept of how society easily labels people of all classes, and she replies, “Why not? It make just as much sense as disliking people cause they are poor, and lots of people do that”.

(Hansberry, 1282) Beneatha knows that in her society she may be looked down on because of the color of her skin and her sex, but she will not let that stop her from accomplishing her dreams. While Mama, on the other hand, has lived through many years segregation and has become accepting of her

place in society, but wants to see a better life for her children. Mama puts up with Beneatha expressing her opinions and ideas about issues, but the one thing she will not put up with is Beneatha denouncing God. Mama was raised in a completely different society, where religion was everything, it was something you had and believed in when you had nothing else. When Mama, Ruth and Beneatha, were talking about Beneatha becoming a doctor “ only God willing”, Beneatha relied, “ God hasn’t got a thing to do with it.

Does he pay my tuition?” (Hansberry, 1282-1283) Mama immediately reprimanded her and slapped her. Not only does Beneatha question society but also religion and it’s purpose. George Murchison is one of Beneatha’s friends. He is rich, and Beneatha’s family feels that he would be a good husband for her because of this.

Beneatha: As for George. Well. George looks good-he’s got a beautiful car and he takes me to nice places and, as my sister-in-law says, he is probably the richest boy I will ever get to know and I even like him sometimes-but if the Youngers are sitting around waiting to see if their little Bennie is going to tie up the family with the Murchisons, they are wasting their time.

(Hansberry, 1282)Beneatha sees past the money and feels she could never love him for who he really is, he is not as interesting to her as Asagai, and their conversations are not as intellectual. It is obvious that George does not go out with her for her because of her mind, unlike Asagai who is interested in her thoughts. Beneatha: Then why read books? Why go to school? George (with artificial patience, counting on his fingers): It’s simple. You read books-to learn facts-to get grades-to pass the course-to get a degree.

That's all-it has nothing to do with thoughts. (Hansberry, 1295) Beneatha also questions her heritage. Asagai, a friend and romantic interest, who is originally from Nigeria, makes her curious to find out about her origins. He introduces her to African customs and styles of dress. He encourages her to be herself and not to fall into the "assimilationism that is so popular in your country".

(Hansberry, 1286) Beneatha also confides in him when Walter loses the money, and she feels that there is no hope for her dreams. Asagai feels that Beneatha should go back to Africa with him, to help find her identity there, now that she feels Walter has taken it all away from her. At the end of the play it is unclear whether or not Beneatha would actually leave her family in order to find herself and pursue her dreams of becoming a doctor. She is obviously not going to marry George, although Walter would like her to because of the money. Living in such close quarters for so many years with her family, she developed a love-hate relationship with all of them. I would be surprised if she did actually go to Africa.

Like Nora, Beneatha at the end of the play has a strong sense of self. She knows what she wants, and is determined to accomplish her dream.

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