

A study of the  
significance of mrs.  
linde and krogstad's  
confrontation in act  
iii...



As one of the leaders of the realist movement in drama, Henrik Ibsen earned his reputation for creating plays that accurately depict the details of ordinary peoples' lives. The first two acts of *A Doll's House* are safe territory, following the accepted conventions of dramatic writing in Ibsen's portrayal of life in a lavish Victorian household. The third and final act, however, features a groundbreaking breach of tradition, as it ignores both the conventional rules drama and the social conventions of its era. While many critics have discussed Nora Helmer's shocking decision to abandon her household in the play's final scene, the overlooked beginning of the third act is a pivotal turning point in the play's progression. The meeting between the characters of Mrs. Christine Linde and Nils Krogstad launches the plot into its memorable unresolved climax, offers a suspenseful twist for the play's audiences, and breaks a few gender stereotypes as well. Critics and audiences alike have praised Ibsen for his memorable, three-dimensional ensemble characters throughout his vast body of work. While *A Doll's House* is first and foremost a character study of Nora Helmer and her marital relationship with Torvald, the minor characters also offer a realistic slice of the Victorian lifestyle and assist in conveying the play's themes and ideas. Throughout the first two acts of the play, Mrs. Linde acts as a foil to Nora's character. Her proactive, practical nature contrasts starkly with Nora's idealistic, dream-filled approach to life. While Nora is brimming with hope, working hard to fulfill her duties and maintain the facade of a happy housewife, Mrs. Linde represents the women who were not fortunate enough to live the Victorian woman's dream. In the scene, Mrs. Linde reveals to Krogstad that her marriage to an old, wealthy man was driven, not by

romance, but by duty to her suffering mother and underage brothers (Ibsen 50). Ever since then, Mrs. Linde continues, she has emptied her life of luxurious fantasies and taken on various jobs to support her family. Up until her meeting with Krogstad, it appears that Mrs. Linde is a negative character in comparison to Nora. While Mrs. Linde has refused to submit to a male figure and has endured many hardships in her “unspeakably empty” life, Nora has fulfilled her womanly duties and is now pampered by Helmer in a comfortable home (Ibsen 10). In the final act, this message is reversed completely and Mrs. Linde turns into a positive foil for Nora. As Mrs. Linde and Krogstad share their feelings with one another, the former lovers admit to being “two shipwrecked people...clinging to some wreckage” (Ibsen 50-51). They have both suffered as a result of Mrs. Linde’s decision to escape a romantic life with Krogstad in order to assume responsibility for her family. Consequently, they have both learned to become reasonable people, as Mrs. Linde approves of Krogstad’s decision “not to believe in fine speeches” (Ibsen 50). As they reminisce on their difficult life lessons, the two choose to reunite and are both thrilled with the idea. After Krogstad’s exit, Mrs. Linde even joyfully proclaims, “What a difference!” at the prospect of leading a life with someone to support and for whom to care (Ibsen 52). The arrangement that the couple agrees upon is a shocking violation to gender roles in the Victorian age, since Mrs. Linde will be providing their income through her position at Helmer’s bank. Through these two characters, Ibsen indicates that true happiness is not found through material possessions in patriarchal households, but through an equal relationship in which the two lovers understand one another. In the beginning of their conversation, Mrs. Linde

claims that Krogstad “ never properly understood [her]” in their days of courting (Ibsen 49). This sentiment is echoed by Nora later in the play immediately before she abandons her husband. Mrs. Linde and Krogstad represent the healthy relationship that Nora comes to realize she lacks. In her final conversation with Helmer, it is safe to assume that Nora’s “ duties to [her]self” are the same ones Mrs. Linde has fulfilled through her independent lifestyle (Ibsen 65). In fact, the play’s famous final line is extremely ambiguous. However, should “ the most wonderful thing of all” happen to Nora and Helmer, then their relationship will echo Mrs. Linde and Krogstad’s love. Should the Helmers reunite after Nora’s exit, it must be because they have changed enough for their “ life together [to] be a real wedlock” (Ibsen 68). This can only happen if Nora learns to be independent like Mrs. Linde, and if Helmer learns to submit to his wife in the same fashion that Krogstad does to his lover. In many ways, Krogstad’s reunion with Mrs. Linde serves to transform the audience’s perspective on happiness and gender roles, as it sets the stage for A Doll’s House’s controversial finale. While Mrs. Linde and Krogstad’s meeting serves Ibsen’s agenda to shock audiences of the time, their conversation deceptively acts like a pending resolution to the climax of Nora’s financial situation. After Nora reveals to Mrs. Linde that Krogstad has left a letter to expose her debt to her husband and publicly humiliate the Helmers, Mrs. Linde claims that she has left Krogstad a note to try to amend the situation before Helmer opens the letter (Ibsen 48). This initially appears to be the climax of the play, as the third act opens with Krogstad going to see Mrs. Linde at the Helmers’ household. While this scene initially seems like Mrs. Linde’s manipulative

attempt to convince Krogstad to take back his letter, the audience observes an unanticipated twist when Mrs. Linde instructs Krogstad not to do so because the matter must be exposed in order for the Helmers to have a “complete understanding between them” (Ibsen 52). Despite her seemingly malicious actions, Mrs. Linde has positive intentions for Nora as she aims to liberate her from false happiness. She states to Krogstad, “A woman who has once sold herself for another’s sake, doesn’t do it a second time,” indicating that she will not sacrifice her personal happiness for duty once more (Ibsen 52). The line may also be interpreted as Mrs. Linde’s refusal to sell herself by driving Nora to do so and suffer through a passionless life for her husband’s sake. In his masterful construction of *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen has granted Mrs. Linde and Krogstad a scene that would at once resolve the play’s obvious conflict about Nora’s financial dilemma, while subtly drawing attention to Nora’s inner conflict and driving the play into its famous cliffhanging climax. The pairing of Mrs. Linde and Krogstad complements the play’s messages towards gender equality, as it depicts a happy ending for a couple that has defied gender roles before the audience witnesses the dramatic failure of a conventional patriarchal marriage. Though this scene has not been granted the spotlight of the play’s finale, it is essential to understand the impact of the ending as it presents a couple for which “the most wonderful thing of all” has happened in a very unconventional way.

Works Cited  
Ibsen, Henrik. *Four Great Plays*. Trans. R. Farquharson Sharp. New York, USA; Bantam Books, 1981.