

# Literary analysis of tell-tale heart

Law, Criminology



A Doll's House was a controversial play in its time because of Ibsen's bold questioning of society's basic rules and norms. One of the most pressing questions in the play is that of the unequal treatment of women. Ibsen questions 'Is it right to treat women as inferiors?' Through the relationship between Nora and Helmer, Ibsen presents unequal power sharing in a negative light, trying to provoke the audience into questioning what was accepted as the norm in that period. One of the subtler techniques used is Helmer's language and diction.

He uses animal terms to refer to her, such as 'skylark' and 'squirrel'. This suggests that Helmer does not love Nora as an equal, and treats her like a pet. Worse, he calls her his 'possession', as if she were a thing, not an individual with her own separate identity. This use of patronizing, demeaning terms highlights the social norm of treating women as inferior, and provokes the audience to question the validity of that norm. Moreover, for the larger part of the play, Helmer is portrayed as having the most power in the relationship.

He controls all the money, and gives it to Nora as gifts. Nora's statement that she has lived by performing 'tricks' and by being pretty and charming, makes the audience aware of the demeaning, unethical aspects of inequality, and again questions the validity of this social norm, which, unfortunately, has not been completely eroded even in modern society. Nevertheless, the question of inequality between the sexes is only part of the major question Ibsen poses: 'Is it right to force people into social roles without giving them the freedom to explore who they are and what they want to be?' Ibsen presents this question by first characterizing Nora and Helmer as faithful conformists

to social roles and then dramatizing the negative effects of those roles in an effort to provoke audiences of that period to think about their deeply ingrained beliefs. Nora seems to fulfill the role of a dutiful wife and mother. She does not work but stays at home and takes care of her children. Ibsen then reveals that, firstly, she is not really fulfilled, or self-actualized, through this role.

The role of wife and mother does not bring out all her potential. He shows this through Nora's fond reminiscence about doing a bit of copying' to pay off her debts: It was almost like being a man'. She finds the experience fun' and gratifying, and does it for a good cause. However, she has to work in secret as her role does not permit her to work. The audience is shown the negative effects of confining men and women to stereotypical roles. Ibsen is questioning, through Nora, whether it is right to constrain men and women to certain roles in society.

Moreover, Ibsen reveals that forcing individuals into roles because of gender might be an exercise in futility as not everyone is suitable for their roles. Nora, for instance, is not a very good mother. The maids spend more time than her with the children (though it is possible that this is also a social convention), and she plays with them like dolls'. Helmer, too, is a victim of society's expectations. He tells Nora that he loves her so much he wishes that she were in danger so that he could risk everything' for her sake.

He sees himself as bold and strong, doubtless part of his identity he has received from social conditioning. However, when Nora is really in danger from Krogstad's blackmailing, Helmer's reaction shows the audience that he is a coward and cares only for himself when there is danger. He is unable to

fulfill the role expected of him. This not only shatters the perfect model husband stereotype, but also leads the audience to question whether it is right to force such unjust expectations onto individuals without giving them freedom to grow by themselves.

Finally, this leads us to the most important question Ibsen presents: Should individuals not be free to create their own identity, uninfluenced by society? ' We have seen the negative effects of Nora being forced into the role of wife and mother. She feels suppressed as can be seen through her comments that she would simply love to say Damn' in front of Helmer (in that period, the word damn' was seen as extremely rude and vulgar). She enjoys working, but cannot because her role does not allow her to.

The question presented here is that would it not be better if society did not determine roles based on gender and let individuals decide by themselves what they want to be? Ibsen reveals a common failing of society through Nora's reminiscences of childhood: her father formed his opinions, and Nora just accepted them, never voicing her own. And when she married Helmer, she merely acquired his tastes'. She has had no chance of gaining of more experience of the world and to learn more about herself. All those years, she has been what her father and husband, symbols of society, want her to be.

The aforementioned question is presented beautifully in that last conflict between Helmer and Nora. Helmer says that Nora's sacred duty' is to her husband and children. Nora replies that first and foremost [she is] an individual', and leaves her doll's house' to gain experience and knowledge, and to find out more about herself. The play does not tell us her eventual fate. Such as ending merely presents the audience with questions regarding

the validity of deeply ingrained social norms, roles and values, and whether it would be better if individuals, like Nora, used their freedom to find their own way in life.

These questions were highly relevant in the period in which *A Doll's House* was written, and are still significant now. Even in modern society, men and women are still expected to take on certain roles and identities and are persecuted for going against cultural and social norms. And because these questions are presented through the lives of ordinary men and women like us, whom we can identify with and whose situations are not so dissimilar to our own, those questions become even more significant to us and the problems we face in our daily lives.