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A DOLL'S HOUSE-HENRIK IBSEN

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INTRODUCTION

A Doll's House is an 1879 play by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Written one year after *The Pillars of Society*, the play was the first of Ibsen's to create a sensation and is now perhaps his most famous play, and required reading in many secondary schools and universities. The play was contentious when first published, as it is sharply critical of 19th century marriage norms. It follows the formula of well-made play up until the final act, when it breaks convention by ending with a discussion, not an unravelling. It is often called the first true feminist play. The play is also an important work of the naturalist movement, in which real events and situations are delineated on stage in a departure

from previous forms such as romanticism. The influence of the play was recognized by UNESCO in 2001 when Henrik Ibsen's autographed manuscripts of *A Doll's House* were inscribed in the World Register in recognition of their historical value.

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

At fifteen, Ibsen was forced to leave school. He moved to the small town of Grimstad to become an apprentice pharmacist and began writing plays. In 1846, when Ibsen was age 18, a intermediary with a servant produced an illegitimate child, whose upbringing Ibsen had to pay for until the boy was in his teens, though Ibsen never saw the boy. Ibsen went to Christiania to enroll at the university. He soon rejected the idea, preferring to commit himself to writing. His first play, the tragedy *Catiline* (1850), was published under the pseudonym "Brynjolf Bjarme", when he was only 20, but it was not performed. His first play to be staged, *The Burial Mound* (1850), received little attention. Still, Ibsen was determined to be a playwright, although the numerous plays he wrote in the following years remained unsuccessful. Ibsen's main inspiration in the early period, right up to *Peer Gynt*, was apparently Norwegian author Henrik Wergeland and the Norwegian folk tales as collected by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe. In Ibsen's youth, Wergeland was the most extolled, and by far the most read, Norwegian poet and playwright.

Life and Writings

He spent the next several years employed at Det norske Theater (Bergen), where he was involved in the production of more than 145 plays as a writer, director, and producer. During this period, he did not publish any new plays of his own. Despite Ibsen's failure to achieve success as a playwright, he gained a great deal of practical experience at the Norwegian Theater, experience that was to prove valuable when he continued writing.

Ibsen returned to Christiania in 1858 to become the creative director of the Christiania Theatre. He married Suzannah Thoresen on 18 June 1858 and she gave birth to their only child Sigurd on 23 December 1859. The couple lived in very poor financial circumstances and Ibsen became very disenchanted with life in Norway. In 1864, he left Christiania and went to Sorrento in Italy in self-imposed exile. He was not to return to his native land for the next 27 years, and when he returned it was as a noted, but contentious, playwright.

His next play, *Brand* (1865), was to bring him the censorious applaud he sought, along with a measure of financial success, as was the following play, *Peer Gynt* (1867), to which Edvard Grieg famously composed incidental music and songs. Although Ibsen read snippets of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and traces of the latter's influence are evident in *Brand*, it was not until after *Brand* that Ibsen came to take Kierkegaard seriously. Initially annoyed with his friend Georg Brandes for comparing *Brand* to Kierkegaard, Ibsen nevertheless read either/ or and *Fear and Palpitate*. Ibsen's next play *Peer Gynt* was consciously informed by Kierkegaard.

With success, Ibsen became more confident and began to introduce more and more of his own beliefs and judgments into the drama, exploring what he termed the "drama of ideas". His next series of plays are often considered his Golden Age, when he entered the height of his power and influence, becoming the center of dramatic controversy across Europe.

Ibsen moved from Italy to Dresden, Germany in 1868, where he spent years writing the play he regarded as his main work, *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), dramatizing the life and times of the Roman emperor Julian the Heretic. Although Ibsen himself always looked back on this play as the cornerstone of his entire works, very few shared his opinion, and his next works would be much more acclaimed. Ibsen moved to Munich in 1875 and published *A Doll's House* in 1879. The play is a scathing criticism of the marital roles accepted by men and women which characterized Ibsen's society.

Ghosts followed in 1881, another coruscating exegesis on the morality of Ibsen's society, in which a widow reveals to her cleric that she had hidden the evils of her marriage for its duration. The pastor had advised her to marry her betrothed" despite his trifle, and she did so in the belief that her love would reform him. But his trifle continued right up until his death, and his vices are passed on to their son in the form of syphilis. The mention of venereal disease alone was discreditable, but to show how it could poison a respectable family was considered intolerable.

In *An Enemy of the People* (1882), Ibsen went even further. In earlier plays, controversial elements were important and even crucial components of the action, but they were on the small scale of individual households. In *An Enemy*, dissension became the primary focus, and the antagonist was the entire community. One primary message of the play is that the individual, who stands alone, is more often "right" than the mass of people, who are delineate as ignorant and

sheeplike. Contemporary society's belief was that the community was a noble institution that could be trusted, a notion Ibsen challenged. In *An Enemy of the People*, Ibsen upbraided not only the conservatism of society, but also the liberalism of the time. He illustrated how people on both sides of the social hue cycle could be equally self-serving. *An Enemy of the People* was written as a response to the people who had rejected his previous work, *Ghosts*. The plot of the play is a cloaked look at the way people reacted to the plot of *Ghosts*. The protagonist is a physician in a vacation spot whose primary draw is a public bath. The doctor discovers that the water is contaminated by the local tannery. He expects to be extolled for saving the town from the nightmare of infecting visitors with disease, but instead he is declared an 'enemy of the people' by the locals, who band against him and even throw stones through his windows. The play ends with his complete repudiation. It is obvious to the reader that disaster is in store for the town as well as for the doctor.

As audiences by now expected of him, his next play again attacked ingrained beliefs and assumptions; but this time, his attack was not against society's mores, but against overeager reformers and their idealism. Always an iconoclast, Ibsen was equally willing to tear down the ideologies of any part of the political spectrum, including his own.

The Wild Duck (1884) is by many considered Ibsen's finest work, and it is certainly the most complex. It tells the story of Gregers Werle, a young man who returns to his hometown after an extended exile and is reunited with his boyhood friend Hjalmar Ekdal. Over the course of the play, the many secrets that lie behind the Ekdals' apparently happy home are revealed to Gregers, who insists on pursuing the absolute truth, or the "Summons of the Ideal". Among these truths: Gregers' father permeated his servant Gina, then married her off to Hjalmar to validate the child. Another man has been disgraced and imprisoned for a crime the elder Werle committed. Furthermore, while Hjalmar spends his days working on a wholly imaginary "invention", his wife is earning the household income.

Ibsen displays masterful use of irony: despite his peremptory insistence on truth, Gregers never says what he thinks but only insinuates, and is never understood until the play reaches its climax. Gregers hammers away at Hjalmar through implication and coded phrases until he realizes the truth; Gina's daughter, Hedvig, is not his child. Blinded by Gregers' insistence on absolute truth, he disavows the child. Seeing the damage he has wrought, Gregers determines to repair things, and suggests to Hedvig that she sacrifice the wild duck, her

wounded pet, to prove her love for Hjalmar. Hedvig, alone among the characters, recognizes that Gregers always speaks in code, and looking for the deeper meaning in the first important statement Gregers makes which does not contain one, kills herself rather than the duck in order to prove her love for him in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice. Only too late do Hjalmar and Gregers realize that the absolute truth of the "ideal" is sometimes too much for the human heart to bear.

Late in his career, Ibsen turned to a more inward-looking drama that had much less to do with denunciations of society's moral values. In such later plays as *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and *The Master Builder* (1892), Ibsen explored psychological conflicts that outstripped a simple rejection of current conventions. Many modern readers, who might regard anti-Victorian didacticism as dated, simplistic or overused, have found these later works to be of absorbing interest for their hard-edged, objective consideration of communal elash. *Hedda Gabler* is probably Ibsen's most performed play, with the title role regarded as one of the most challenging and rewarding for an actress even in the present day. *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House* center on female protagonists whose almost fiendish energy proves both attractive and destructive for those around them, and while Hedda has a few similarities with the character of Nora in *A Doll's House*, many of today's audiences and theater critics feel that Hedda's intensity and drive are much more complex and much less comfortably explained than what they view as rather routine feminism on the part of Nora.

Ibsen had completely rewritten the rules of drama with a verisimilitude which was to be adopted by Chekhov and others and which we see in the theater to this day. From Ibsen forward, challenging assumptions and directly speaking about issues has been considered one of the factors that makes a play art rather than entertainment. He had a abstruse influence on the young James Joyce who adulates him in his early autobiographical novel "Stephen Hero". Ibsen returned to Norway in 1891, but it was in many ways not the Norway he had left. Indeed, he had played a major role in the changes that had happened across society. The Victorian Age was on its last legs, to be replaced by the rise of Modernism not only in the theater, but across public life.

Death

On 23 May 1906, Ibsen died in his home at Arbins gade 1 in Christiania after a series of strokes in March 1900. When, on 22 May, his nurse assured a visitor that he was a little better, Ibsen spattered his

last words "On the contrary". He died the following day at 2:30 P.M. Ibsen was buried in Var Frelzers gravlund ("The Graveyard of Our Savior") in central Oslo.

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

Works

- 1850 Catiline
- 1850 The Burial Mound also known as The Warrior's Barrow
- 1851 Norma
- 1852 St. John's Eve
- 1854 Lady Inger of Oestraat
- 1855 The Feast at Solhaug
- 1856 Olaf Liljekrans
- 1857 The Vikings at Helgoland
- 1862 Digte
- 1862 Love's Comedy
- 1863 The Pretenders
- 1866 Brand
- 1867 Peer Gynt
- 1869 The League of Youth
- 1873 Emperor and Galilean
- 1877 Pillars of Society
- 1879 A Doll's House
- 1881 Ghosts
- 1882 An Enemy of the People
- 1884 The Wild Duck
- 1886 Rosmersholm
- 1888 The Lady from the Sea
- 1890 Hedda Gabler
- 1892 The Master Builder
- 1894 Little Eyolf
- 1896 John Gabriel Borkman

Act I

A Doll's House opens as Nora Helmer gets back from Christmas shopping. Her husband Torvald comes out of his study to banter with her. They discuss how their finances will improve now that Torvald has a new job as a bank manager. Torvald expresses his horror of mortgage. With her husband, Torvald, Nora behaves very childishly, and he enjoys treating her like a child to be enjoined and satiated.

Soon an old friend of Nora's, Christine Linde, arrives. She is a childless widow who is moving back to the city. Her husband left her no money, so she has tried different kinds of work, and now hopes to find some work that is not too Herculean. Nora divulges to Christine that she once secretly borrowed money from an opprobrium lawyer, Nils Krogstad, to save Torvald's life when he was very ill, but she has not told him in order to protect his pride. She told everyone that the money came from her father, who died at about the same time. She has been repaying the mortgage from her housekeeping budget, and also from some work she got copying papers by hand, which she did secretly in her room, and took pride in her ability to earn money "as

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- 1855 The Feast at Solhaug
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"as if she were a man." Torvald's new job promises to finally liberate her from this debt. Nora asks Torvald to give Christine a position as a secretary in the bank, and he agrees, as she has experience in bookkeeping. They leave the house together.

Krogstad arrives and tells Nora that he is worried he will be fired to create a position for Christine. He asks her to help him keep his job and says that he will fight perilously to keep it. Nora is grudging to commit to helping him, so Krogstad reveals that he knows she committed falsification on the bond she signed for her loan from him. As a woman, she needed an adult male co-signer, so she said she would have her father do so. However the signature is dated three days after his death, which suggests that it is a falsification. Nora admits that she did falsify the signature, so as to spare her dying father further worry about her (she was pregnant, poor, and had a seriously ill husband). Krogstad explains that the falsification deceives his trust and is also a serious crime. If he told others about it, her notoriety would be ruined, as was his after a similar "incaution," even though he was never arraigned. He entails that what he did was in order to provide for his sick wife, who later died.

Krogstad leaves, and Nora tries to calm herself by decorating the Christmas tree. Torvald comes back home, having seen Krogstad, and guesses that he was there to ask Nora to negotiate on his behalf. Nora asks what Krogstad did in order to get a reputation as an immoral man. Torvald says that he committed a falsification, but was able to avoid accusation by using a "cunning trick." If Krogstad had ever admitted his guilt, Torvald would be willing to trust him, but by continuing to pretend that he never did anything wrong, Krogstad "has lost all moral character." Torvald further states that a parent who lives a lie "poisons" his or her children and causes them to become criminals. Nora is terribly agitated to learn of this notion, which she believes

credulous, and worries that she may be harming her children unknowingly.

Act II

Christine arrives to help Nora repair a dress for a costume party she and Torvald are going to tomorrow. Then Torvald comes home from the bank and Nora entreats with him to establish Krogstad at the bank. She claims she is worried that Krogstad will publish libellous articles about Torvald and ruin his career. Torvald dismisses her fears and explains that although Krogstad is a good worker and seems to have turned his life around, he insists on firing him because Krogstad is not reverential enough to him in front of other bank crew. Torvald goes into his study to do some work.

Next Dr. Rank, a family friend, arrives. Nora talks about asking him for a favor. Then he reveals that he has entered the terminal stage of tuberculosis of the spine (a contemporary floridness for innate syphilis), and that he has always been secretly in love with her. Nora tries to deny the- first divulgence and make light of it, but she is more disturbed by the second. tries clumsily to tell him that she is not in love with him, but loves him dearly as a friend.

Desperate after being fired by Torvald, Krogstad arrives at the house. Nora gets Dr. Rank to go in to Torvald's study, so he does not see Krogstad. When Krogstad comes in he declares he no longer cares about the remaining balance of Nora's loan, but that he will preserve the associated bond in order to blackmail Torvald into not only keeping him employed, but giving him a promotion. Nora explains that she has done her best to persuade her husband, but he refuses to change his mind. Krogstad informs Nora that he has written a letter detailing her crime (fabricate her father's signature of guarantor on the bond) and puts it in Torvald's mailbox, which is locked.

Nora tells Christine of her imbroglio. Christine says that she and Krogstad were in love before she married, and promises that she will try to convince him to acquiesce. Torvald comes in and tries to check his mail, but Nora diverts him by begging him to help her with the dance she has been rehearsing for the costume party, as she is so anxious about performing. She dances so badly and acts so worried that Torvald agrees to spend the whole evening coaching her. When the others go in to dinner, Nora stays behind for a few minutes and envisages suicide to save her husband from the shame of the divulgence of her crime, and more importantly to pre-empt any chivalrous gesture on his part to save her sobriety.

Christine tells Krogstad that she only married her husband because she had no other means to support her sick mother and young siblings, and that she has returned to offer him her love again. She believes that he would not have descended to unscrupulous behavior if he had not been devastated by her jilting and in awful financial inlets. Krogstad is moved and offers to take back his letter to Torvald. However, Christine decides that Torvald should know the truth for the sake of his and Nora's marriage.

Act III

After literally dragging Nora home from the party, Torvald goes to check his mail, but is delayed by Dr. Rank, who has followed them. Dr. Rank chats for a while so as to convey diagonally to Nora that this is a final goodbye, as he has determined that his death is near, but in general terms so that Torvald does not suspect what he is referring to. Dr. Rank leaves, and Torvald recifys his letters. As he reads them Nora steels herself to take her life. Torvald tackles her with Krogstad's letter. UInfuriated, he declares that he is now completely in Krogstad's power—he must capitulate to Krogstad's demands and keep quiet about the whole affair. He rebukes Nora, calling her a fraudulent and unethical woman and telling her she is unfit to raise their children. He says that from now on their marriage will be only a matter of appearances.

A maid enters, delivering a letter to Nora. Krogstad has returned the implicating papers, saying that he contritions his actions. Torvald rejoices that he is saved as he burns the papers. He takes back his jarring words to his wife and tells her that he forgive her. Nora realizes that her husband is not the strong and chivalrous man she thought he was, and that far from loving her, Torvald only really loves himself. What has appeared to be his love for Nora is merely quenching at cognizant himself to be a wonderful husband.

Torvald explains that when a man has forgiven his wife it makes him love her all the more since it reminds him that she is totally dependent on him, like a child. He banishes Nora's excruciate choice made against her compunction for the sake of his health and her years of secret efforts to free them from the consequential obligations and danger of loss of reputation, while preserving his peace of mind, as a mere mistake that she made owing to her foolishness, one of her most captivating dainty dainty traits.

Nora tells Torvald that she is leaving him to live alone so she can find out who she is and what she believes and decide what to do with

her life. She says she has been treated like a doll to play with, first by her father and then by him. Concerned for the family reputation, Torvald insists that she fulfill her duty as a wife and mother, but Nora says that her first duties are to herself, and she cannot be a good mother or wife without learning to be more than a plaything. She affirms that she had expected that he would want to sacrifice his esteem for hers, and that she had planned to kill herself to prevent him from doing so. She now realizes that Torvald is not at all the kind of person she had believed him to be, and that their marriage has been based on mutual delusion and misunderstanding.

Torvald is unable to grasp Nora's point of view, since it so contradicts his own ideas about her mind. Furthermore, he is so egotistical that it would be impossible for him to bear to understand how he appears to her, as egocentric, sanctimonious and more concerned with public esteem than with actual morality. As Nora lets herself out, leaving behind her wedding ring and keys, Torvald remains utterly perplexed by what has happened.

Alternative Ending

It was felt by Ibsen's German agent that the original ending would not play well in German theatres; therefore, for the play's German debut, Ibsen was forced to write an alternative ending for it to be considered acceptable. In this ending, Nora is led to her children after having argued with Torvald. Seeing them, she slumps, and the curtain is brought down. Ibsen later called the ending a discredit to the original play and referred to it as a 'unsophisticated outrage'.

DOLL'S HOUSE – PLOT

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

A Doll's House opens on Christmas Eve. Nora Helmer enters her well-furnished living room—the setting of the entire play—carrying several packages. Torvald Helmer, Nora's husband, comes out of his study when he hears her arrive. He greets her playfully and tenderly, but then upbraids her for spending so much money on Christmas gifts. Their conversation affirms that the Helmers have had to be careful with money for many years, but that Torvald has recently obtained a new position at the bank where he works that will afford them a more comfortable lifestyle.

Helene, the maid, announces that the Helmers' dear friend Dr. Rank has come to visit. At the same time, another unknown visitor has

arrived. To Nora's great surprise, Kristine Linde, a former school friend, comes into the room. The two have not seen each other for years, but Nora mentions having read that Mrs. Linde's husband passed away a few years earlier. Mrs. Linde tells Nora that when her husband died, she was left with no money and no children. Nora tells Mrs. Linde about her first year of marriage to Torvald. She explains that they were very poor and both had to work long hours. Torvald became sick, she adds, and the couple had to travel to Italy so that Torvald could recover.

Nora probes further about Mrs. Linde's life, and Mrs. Linde explains that for years she had to care for her sick mother and her two younger brothers. She states that her mother has passed away, though, and that the brothers are too old to need her. Instead of feeling relief, Mrs. Linde says she feels empty because she has no occupation; she hopes that Torvald may be able to help her prevail employment. Nora promises to speak to Torvald and then affirms a great secret to Mrs. Linde—without Torvald's knowledge, Nora illegally borrowed money for the trip that she and Torvald took to Italy; she told Torvald that the money had come from her father. For years, Nora reveals, she has worked and saved in secret, slowly repaying the mortgage and soon it will be fully repaid.

Krogstad, a low-level employee at the bank where Torvald works, arrives and proceeds into Torvald's study. Nora reacts uneasily to Krogstad's presence, and Dr. Rank, coming out of the study, says Krogstad is "morally sick." Once he has finished meeting with Krogstad, Torvald comes into the living room and says that he can probably employ Mrs. Linde at the bank. Dr. Rank, Torvald, and Mrs. Linde then depart, leaving Nora by herself. Nora's children return with their nanny, Anne-Marie, and Nora plays with them until she notices Krogstad's presence in the room. The two antipodes and Krogstad is divulged to be the source of Nora's secret loan.

Krogstad states that Torvald wants to fire him from his position at the bank and implies to his own poor notoriety. He asks Nora to use her influence to assure that his position remains secure. When she refuses, Krogstad points out that he has in his possession a contract that contains Nora's falsification of her father's signature. Krogstad blackmails Nora, threatening to reveal her crime and to bring shame and disgrace on both Nora and her husband if she does not prevent Torvald from firing him. Krogstad leaves, and when Torvald returns, Nora tries to persuade him not to fire Krogstad, but Torvald will hear

nothing of it. He declares Krogstad an immoral man and states that he feels physically ill in the presence of such people.

Act Two opens on the following day, Christmas. Alone, Nora paces her living room, filled with anxiety. Mrs. Linde arrives and helps sew Nora's costume for the ball that Nora will be attending at her neighbors' home the following evening. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that Dr. Rank has a mortal illness that he inherited from his father. Nora's sceptical behavior leads Mrs. Linde to guess that Dr. Rank is the source of Nora's loan. Nora denies Mrs. Linde's charge but refuses to affirm the source of her distress. Torvald arrives, and Nora again begs him to keep Krogstad employed at the bank, but again Torvald refuses. When Nora presses him, he admits that Krogstad's moral behavior isn't all that bothers him—he dislikes Krogstad's overly familiar attitude. Torvald and Nora argue until Torvald sends the maid to deliver Krogstad's letter of dismissal.

Torvald leaves. Dr. Rank arrives and tells Nora that he knows he is close to death. She attempts to cheer him up and begins to coquette with him. She seems to be preparing to ask him to intercede on her behalf in her struggle with Torvald. Suddenly, Dr. Rank reveals to Nora that he is in love with her. In light of this revelation, Nora refuses to ask Dr. Rank for anything.

Once Dr. Rank leaves, Krogstad arrives and demands an explanation for his redundancy. He wants respectability and has changed the terms of the extortion: he now insists to Nora that not only that he be recruited at the bank but that he be recruited in a higher position. He then puts a letter detailing Nora's mortgage and falsification in the -Helmers' letterbox. In a panic, Nora tells Mrs. Linde everything, and Mrs. Linde instructs Nora to detain Torvald from opening the letter as long as possible while she goes to speak with Krogstad. In order to distract Torvald from the letterbox, Nora begins to practice the tarantella she will perform at that evening's costume party. In her agitated emotional state, she dances wildly and violently, displeasing Torvald. Nora manages to make Torvald promise not to open his mail until after she performs at the party. Mrs. Linde soon returns and says that she has left Krogstad a note but that he will be gone until the following evening.

The next night, as the costume party takes place upstairs, Krogstad meets Mrs. Linde in the Helmers' living room. Their conversation affirms that the two had once deeply in love, but Mrs. Linde left Krogstad for a affluentier man who would enable her to support her family. She tells Krogstad that now that she is free of her own pert

constraints and wishes to be with Krogstad and care for his children. Krogstad is overjoyed and says he will demand his letter back before Torvald can read it and learn Nora's secret. Mrs. Linde, however, insists he leave the letter, because she believes both Torvald and Nora will be better off once the truth has been divulged.

Soon after Krogstad's evacuation, Nora and Torvald enter, back from the costume ball. After saying goodnight to Mrs. Linde, Torvald tells Nora how desirable she looked as she danced. Dr. Rank, who was also at the party and has come to say goodnight, promptly interrupts Torvald's advances on Nora. After Dr. Rank leaves, Torvald finds in his letterbox two of Dr. Rank's visiting cards, each with a black cross above the name. Nora knows Dr. Rank's cards constitute his announcement that he will soon die, and she informs Torvald of this fact. She then insists that Torvald read Krogstad's letter.

Torvald reads the letter and is infuriated. He calls Nora a impostor and a falsifier and complains that she has ruined his happiness. He declares that she will not be allowed to raise their children. Helene then brings in a letter. Torvald opens it and discovers that Krogstad has returned Nora's contract (which contains the feign signature). Overjoyed, Torvald attempts to dismiss his past insults, but his despotic words have spark something in Nora. She declares that despite their eight years of marriage, they do not understand one another. Torvald, Nora propounds, has evaluate her like a "doll" to be played with and admired. She decides to leave Torvald, declaring that she must "make sense of herself and everything around her." She walks out, denouncing the door behind her.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Nora

Nora is the protagonist of the play and the wife of Torvald Helmer. Nora initially seems like a playful, naive child who lacks knowledge of the world outside her home. She does have some worldly experience, however, and the small acts of nutiny in which she seizes stipulate that she is not as innocent or happy as she appears. She comes to see her position in her marriage with increasing lucidity and finds the strength to free herself from her muggy situation.

Torvald Helmer

Torvald Helmer is the Nora's husband. Torvald delights in his new position at the bank, just as he delights in his position of authority as a

husband. He treats Nora like a child, in a manner that is both kind and condescension. He does not view Nora as an equal but rather as a plaything or doll to be chaffed and admired. In general, Torvald is overly concerned with his place and status in society, and he allows his emotions to be undulated heavily by the anticipation of society's respect and the fear of society's derision.

Krogstad

Krogstad is a lawyer who went to school with Torvald and holds a auxiliary position at Torvald's bank. Krogstad's character is antithetical: though his bad deeds seem to stem from a desire to protect his children from derision, he is perfectly willing to use unscrupulous man oeuvres to achieve his goals. His willingness to allow Nora to suffer is loathsome, but his claims to feel sympathy for her and the hard circumstances of his own life impel us to sympathize with him to some degree.

Mrs. Linde

Mrs. Linde is Nora's childhood friend. Kristine Linde is a practical, down-to-earth woman, and her sensible worldview highlights Nora's somewhat childlike outlook on life. Mrs. Linde's account of her life of poverty underscores the prerogative nature of the life that Nora leads. Also, we learn that Mrs. Linde took responsibility for her sick parent, whereas Nora relinquished her father when he was ill.

Dr. Rank

Dr. Rank is Torvald's best friend. Dr. Rank stands out as the one character in the play who is by and large unconcerned with what others think of him. He is also notable for his phlegmatic acceptance of nemesis fate. Unlike Torvald and Nora, Dr. Rank admits to the diseased nature (literally, in his case) of his life. For the most part, he avoids talking to Torvald about his impending death out of respect for Torvald's repugnance for ugliness.

Bob, Emmy, and Lvar

Bob, Emmy and Ivar are Nora and Torvald's three small children. In her brief interaction with her children, Nora shows herself to be a loving mother. When she later refuses to spend time with her children because she fears she may morally suborn them, Nora acts on her belief that the quality of parenting strongly impacts a child's development.

Anne-Marie

Annie-Marie is the Helmers' nanny. Though Ibsen doesn't fully develop her character, Anne-Marie seems to be a kindly woman who has genuine affection for Nora. She had to give up her own daughter in order to take the nursing job offered by Nora's father. Thus, she shares with Nora and Mrs. Linde the act of sacrificing her own happiness out of economic necessity.

Nora's Father

Though Nora's father is dead before the action of the play begins, the characters refer to him throughout the play. Though she clearly loves and admires her father, Nora also comes to blame him for contributing to her acquiescent position in life.

ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nora Helmer

At the beginning of *A Doll's House*, Nora seems completely happy. She responds affectionately to Torvald's teasing, speaks with excitement about the extra money his new job will provide, and takes pleasure in the company of her children and friends. She does not seem to mind her doll-like existence, in which she is pampered, overindulged, and be gracious.

As the play progresses, Nora affirms that she is not just a "silly girl," as Torvald calls her. That she understands the business details related to the mortgage she sustained taking out a loan to preserve Torvald's health indicates that she is intelligent and possesses capacities beyond mere wifehood. Her description of her years of secret labor undertaken to pay off her debt shows her ferocious determination and ambition. Additionally, the fact that she was willing to break the law in order to ensure Torvald's health shows her courage.

Krogstad's blackmail and the agony that follows do not change Nora's nature; they open her eyes to her unfulfilled and ungratifying potential. "I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald," she says during her climactic clash with him. Nora comes to realize that in addition to her literal dancing and singing tricks, she has been putting on a show throughout her marriage. She has pretended to be someone she is not in order to fulfill the role that Torvald, her father, and society at large have expected of her.

Torvald's severe and selfish reaction after learning of Nora's duplicity and falsification is the final agitator for Nora's awakening. But even in the first act, Nora shows that she is not totally unaware that

her life is at odds with her true personality. She flouts Torvald in small yet meaningful ways—by eating macaroons and then lying to him about it, for precedent. She also swears, apparently just for the pleasure she procured from minor muting against societal standards. As the drama unfolds, and as Nora's awareness of the truth about her life grows, her need for muting intensifies crowning in her walking out on her husband and children to find independence.

Torvald Helmer

Torvald embraces the belief that a man's role in marriage is to protect and guide his wife. He clearly enjoys the idea that Nora needs his guidance, and he interacts with her as a father would. He instructs her with trite, moralistic sayings, such as:

"A home that depends on loans and debt is not beautiful because it is not free." He is also eager to teach Nora the dance she performs at the costume party. Torvald likes to envisage himself as Nora's liberator, asking her after the party, "[D]o you know that I've often wished you were facing some terrible dangers so that I could risk life and limb, risk everything, for your sake?"

Although Torvald elinches the power in his relationship with Nora and refers to her as a "girl," it seems that Torvald is actually the weaker and more childlike character. Dr. Rank's explanation for not wanting Torvald to enter his sickroom—"Torvald is so punctilious, he cannot face up to anything ugly"—suggests that Dr. Rank feels Torvald must be sheltered like a child from the realities of the world. Furthermore, Torvald reveals himself to be childishly petty at times. His real objection to working with Krogstad stems not from -deficiencies in Krogstad's moral character but, rather, Krogstad's overly friendly and familiar behavior. Torvald's decision to fire Krogstad stems ultimately from the fact that he feels threatened and aggrieved by Krogstad's failure to pay him the proper respect.

Torvald is very conscious of other people's discernments of him and of his standing in the community. His explanation for rejecting Nora's request that Krogstad be kept on at the office—that retaining Krogstad would make him "a laughing stock before the entire staff"—shows that he prioritizes his reputation over his wife's desires. Torvald further demonstrates his deep need for society's respect in his reaction to Nora's mendacity. Although he says that Nora has ruined his happiness and will not be allowed to raise the children, he insists that she remain in the house because his chief concern is saving "the appearance" of their household.

Krogstad

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

Krogstad is the antagonist in *A Doll's House*, but he is not necessarily a villain. Though his willingness to allow Nora's torment to continue is cruel, Krogstad is not without sympathy for her. As he says, "Even money-lenders, hacks, well, a man like me, can have a little of what you call feeling, you know." He visits Nora to check on her, and he discourages her from committing suicide. Moreover, Krogstad has reasonable motives for behaving as he does: he wants to keep his job at the bank in order to spare his children from the hardships that come with a spoiled notoriety. Unlike Torvald, who seems to desire respect for selfish reasons, Krogstad desires it for his family's sake.

Like Nora, Krogstad is a person who has been wronged by society, and both Nora and Krogstad have committed the same crime: falsification of signatures. Though he did break the law, Krogstad's crime was relatively minor, but society has encumbered him with the stain of being a criminal and prohibited him from moving beyond his past. Additionally, Krogstad's claim that his immoral behavior began when Mrs. Linde relinquished him for a man with money so she could provide for her family makes it possible for us to understand Krogstad as a victim of circumstances. One could argue that society forced Mrs. Linde away from Krogstad and thus prompted his crime. Though society's unfair treatment of Krogstad does not justify his actions, it does align him more closely with Nora and therefore tempers our discoment of him as a loathsome character.

IMPORTANT THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Sacrificial Role of Women

In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen paints a denuded picture of the atoning role held by women of all economic classes in his society. In general, the play's female characters epitomize Nora's submission (spoken to Torvald in Act Three) that even though men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have." In order to support her mother and two brothers, Mrs. Linde found it necessary to abandon Krogstad, her true—but penniless—love, and marry a richer man. The nanny had to renounce her own child to support herself by working as Nora's (and then as Nora's children's) caretaker. As she tells Nora, the

nanny considers herself lucky to have found the job, since she was "a poor girl who'd been led astray."

Though Nora is economically advantaged in comparison to the play's other female characters, she nevertheless leads a difficult life because society edicts that Torvald be the marriage's dominant partner. Torvald issues commandment and condescends to Nora, and Nora must hide her loan from him because she knows Torvald could never accept the idea that his wife (or any other woman) had helped save his life. Furthermore, she must work in secret to pay off her loan because it is illegal for a woman to obtain a loan without her husband's permission. By motivating Nora's treachery, the attitudes of Torvald—and society—leave Nora endangered to Krogstad's blackmail.

Nora's jilting of her children can also be interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice. Despite Nora's great love for her children—betrayed by her interaction with them and her great fear of corrupting them—she chooses to leave them. Nora truly believes that the nanny will be a better mother and that leaving her children is in their best interest.

Parental and Filial Obligations

Nora, Torvald, and Dr. Rank each express the belief that a parent is constrained to be honest and upstanding, because a parent's immorality is passed on to his or her children like a disease. In fact, Dr. Rank does have a disease that is the result of his father's perversion. Dr. Rank implicates that his father's immorality—his many affairs with women—led him to contract a venereal disease that he passed on to his son, causing Dr. Rank to suffer for his father's misdeeds. Torvald voices the idea that one's parents determine one's moral character when he tells Nora, "Nearly all young criminals had lying -mothers." He also refuses to allow Nora to interact with their children after he learns of her deceit, for fear that she will corrupt them.

Yet, the play suggests that children too are constrained to protect their parents. Nora recognized this obligation, but she ignored it, choosing to be with—and sacrifice herself for—her sick husband instead of her sick father. Mrs. Linde, on the other hand, renounced her hopes of being with Krogstad and undertook years of labor in order to tend to her sick mother. Ibsen does not pass judgment on either woman's decision, but he does use the idea of a child's mortgage to her parent to demonstrate the convolution and requited nature of familial obligations.

The Unreliability of Appearances

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

Over the course of *A Doll's House*, appearances prove to be misleading veneers that mask the reality of the play's characters and situations. Our first impressions of Nora, Torvald, and Krogstad are all eventually impair. Nora initially seems a silly, childish woman, but as the play progresses, we see that she is intelligent, motivated, and, by the play's conclusion, a strong-willed, independent thinker. Torvald, though he plays the part of the strong, tenderhearted husband, affirms himself to be cowardly, petty, and selfish when he fears that Krogstad may expose him to scandal. Krogstad too reveals himself to be a much more sympathetic and merciful character than he first appears to be. The play's climax is largely a matter of resolving identity confusion—we see Krogstad as an earnest lover, Nora as an intelligent, brave woman, and Torvald as a tittering sad man.

Situations too are misinterpreted both by us and by the characters. The seeming hatred between Mrs. Linde and Krogstad turns out to be love. Nora's creditor turns out to be Krogstad and not, as we and Mrs. Linde suppose, Dr. Rank. Dr. Rank, to Nora's and our surprise, confesses that he is in love with her. The seemingly iniquitous Krogstad laments and returns Nora's contract to her, while the seemingly kindhearted Mrs. Linde ceases to help Nora and forces Torvald's discovery of Nora's secret.

The unpredictability of appearances within the Helmer household at the play's end results from Torvald's fidelity to an image at the expense of the creation of true happiness. Because Torvald yearns for respect from his employees, friends, and wife, status and image are important to him. Any disrespect—when Nora calls him petty and when Krogstad calls him by his first name, for example—angers Torvald greatly. By the end of the play, we see that Torvald's obsession with controlling his home's appearance and his repeated suppression and refutation of reality have harmed his family and his happiness irreparably.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Nora's Definition of Freedom

Nora's understanding of the meaning of freedom yields over the course of the play. In the first act, she believes that she will be totally "free" as soon as she has repaid her mortgage, because she will have

the opportunity to allocate herself fully to her domestic responsibilities. After Krogstad blackmails her, however, she reconsiders her conception of freedom and questions whether she is happy in Torvald's house, subjected to his orders and edicts. By the end of the play, Nora seeks a new kind of freedom. She wishes to be relieved of her familial obligations in order to pursue her own ambitions, beliefs, and identity.

Letters

Many of the plot's crumples and turns depend upon the writing and reading of letters, which function within the play as the subtext that affirms the true, unpleasant nature of situations obscured by Torvald and Nora's efforts at beautification. Krogstad writes two letters: the first reveals Nora's crime of forgery to Torvald; the second retracts his blackmail threat and returns Nora's consigned note. The first letter, which Krogstad places in Torvald's letterbox near the end of Act Two, represents the truth about Nora's past and initiates the inevitable dissolution of her marriage—as Nora says immediately after Krogstad leaves it, "We are lost." Nora's attempts to stall Torvald from reading the letter represent her continued denial of the true nature of her marriage. The second letter releases Nora from her obligation to Krogstad and represents her release from her obligation to Torvald. Upon reading it, Torvald attempts to return to his and Nora's previous denial of reality, but Nora recognizes that the letters have done more than expose her actions to Torvald; they have exposed the truth about Torvald's selfishness, and she can no longer participate in the illusion of a happy marriage.

Dr. Rank's method of communicating his impending death is to leave his calling card marked with a black cross in Torvald's letterbox. In an earlier conversation with Nora, Dr. Rank reveals his understanding of Torvald's unwillingness to accept reality when he reveals, "Torvald is so scrupulous, he cannot face up to anything ugly." By leaving his calling card as a death notice, Dr. Rank politely attempts to keep Torvald from the "ugly" truth. Other letters include Mrs. Linde's note to Krogstad, which novices her -life-changing meeting with him, and Torvald's letter of dismissal to Krogstad.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

The Christmas Tree

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

The Christmas tree, a festive object meant to serve a decorative purpose, symbolizes Nora's position in her household as a plaything who is pleasing to look at and adds charm to the home. There are several parallels drawn between Nora and the Christmas tree in the play. Just as Nora instructs the maid that the children cannot see the tree until it has been decorated, she tells Torvald that no one can see her in her dress until the evening of the abrade. Also, at the beginning of the second act, after Nora's psychological condition has begun to erode, the stage directions indicate that the Christmas tree is correspondingly "imkempt."

New Year's Day

The action of the play is set at Christmas time, and Nora and Torvald both look forward to New Year's as the start of a new, happier phase in their lives. In the new year, Torvald will start his new job, and he anticipates with excitement the extra money and admiration the job will bring him. Nora also looks forward to Torvald's new job, because she will finally be able to repay her secret mortgage to Krogstad. By the end of the play; however, the nature of the new start that New Year's represents for Torvald and Nora has changed dramatically. They both must become new people and face radically changed ways of living. Hence, the new year comes to mark the beginning of a truly new and different period in both their lives and their personalities.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Act One Summary

From the opening of the play to the announcement of Dr. Rank's and Mrs. Linde's arrivals. It is Christmas Eve. Nora Helmer enters the house with packages and a Christmas tree. She pays the porter double what she owes him and eats some macaroons. Her husband, Torvald Helmer, comes out of his study and addresses Nora with tenderness and authority, calling her his "skylark" and his "squirrel." Nora tells Torvald that she wants to show him what she has bought, and Torvald teases her for being a profligate. Nora replies that she and Torvald can afford to be unthrifty, since Torvald's new position at the bank means he will earn a large salary. Torvald replies that he will not take over that position until after the new year begins. When Nora argues that they can spend on credit until Torvald is paid, Torvald scolds her, reminding her that if something were to happen to make them unable to pay off their loan, they would be in trouble. He concludes by saying that he hates debts because "[a] home that depends on loans and debts is not beautiful

because it is not free." Nora finally acquiesces and says, "Everything as you wish, Torvald."

Witnessing Nora's surly disappointment, Torvald tries to cheer up his wife by offering her money to spend for Christmas. Nora becomes fervent again and thanks him profusely. She then shows him all the gifts she has purchased for their children. Torvald asks Nora what she would like for Christmas, and at first, Nora replies that she doesn't need a gift. It becomes apparent that she is hesitant to tell Torvald what she wants, and finally she says that she would just like some money so that she can pick out the perfect thing and buy it herself.

Torvald again accuses Nora of being wasteful, arguing that wastefulness with money runs in her family and that she inherited the trait from her father. But, he says, he loves his "lovely little singing bird" just the way she is, and he wouldn't want her to change.

Torvald then asks Nora if she has given in to her sweet tooth that day. Nora ardent repudiates Torvald's suggestion and continues her refutation even when Torvald specifically asks if she has eaten any macaroons. Torvald finally renounces his questions, respecting her word.

The two discuss that evening's Christmas festivities and the invitation of Dr. Rank to dinner. Torvald says Dr. Rank knows that he is always welcome and therefore doesn't need to be invited. Nevertheless, Torvald tells Nora, he will invite Dr. Rank when he visits that morning. Torvald and Nora then return to their discussion of how wonderful it is that Torvald has a secure income and a good job.

Torvald recalls the events of the previous Christmas, when Nora shut herself up in a room until very late every night for three weeks to make Christmas trinkets. He remarks that he had never been so bored in his life. He also accentuates that Nora had very little to show for all of her drugges when she was finished. Nora reminds her husband that she can't be blamed for the cat getting into the room and destroying all her hard work. Torvald again expresses happiness that they are financially better off than they were before.

The doorbell rings and the maid, Helene, announces that Dr. Rank has arrived to see Torvald and that there is a lady caller as well.

Analysis

The transaction between Nora and the porter that opens *A Doll's House* immediately puts the spotlight on money, which emerges as one of the forces driving the play's squabbles as it draws lines between genders, classes, and moral standards. Though Nora indebted the porter fifty ones (a Norwegian unit of currency), she gives him twice that amount, indubitably because she is used with the holiday spirit. While Nora likes to spend and allows the idea of buying presents

to block out financial concerns, Torvald holds a more realistic view of money, jokingly calling Nora a prfligate and telling her that she is completely foolish when it comes to financial matters.

Torvald's assertion that Nora's lack of understanding of money matters is the result of her gender ("Nora, my Nora, that is just like a woman") reveals his detrimented viewpoint on gender roles. Torvald believes a wife's role is to beautify the home, not only through proper management of domestic life but also through proper behavior and appearance. He quickly makes it known that appearances are very important to him, and that Nora is like an trinket or trophy that serves to beautify his home and his notoriety.

Torvald's bidding on calling Nora by affectionately petite names conjures her helplessness and her vulnerability on him. The only time that Torvald calls Nora by her actual name is when he is scolding her. When he is greeting or adoring her, however, he calls her by childish animal nicknames such as "my little skylark" and "my squirrel." By placing her within such a system of names, Torvald not only propounds "his power over Nora but also imbrute her to a degree. When he implies that Nora is comparable to the "little birds that like to squander money," Torvald suggests that Nora lacks some fundamental male ability to deal properly with financial matters. Though Torvald accuses Nora of being irresponsible with money, he gives her more in order to watch her happy reaction. This act shows that Torvald amuses himself by manipulating his wife's feelings. Nora is like Torvald's doll—she decorates his home and pleases him by being a dependent figure with whose emotions he can toy.

In addition to being something of a doll to Torvald, Nora is also like a child to him. He shows himself to be competing with Nora's father for Nora's loyalty. In a sense, by keeping Nora dependent upon and deferential to him, Torvald plays the role of Nora's second father. He treats her like a child, doling out money to her and attempting to instruct her in the ways of the world. Nora's gift selections—a sword and a horse for her male children and a doll for her daughter—show that she buttresses the antiquated gender roles that hold her in acquiescent to Torvald. Nora sees her daughter the same way she has likely been treated all of her life—as a doll.

Act One, Continued

Summary

From the beginning of Nora's conversation with Mrs. Linde to Nora's promise to talk to Torvald about finding Mrs. Linde work. Nora greets the female visitor hesitantly; and the visitor realizes that Nora does not remember her. Finally, Nora recognizes the woman as her childhood friend, Kristine Linde and remarks that Mrs. Linde has changed since they last met nine or ten years earlier. Mrs. Linde says that she has just arrived by steamer that day. Nora remarks that Mrs. Linde

looks paler and thinner than she remembered and apologizes copiously for not writing three years earlier, when she read in the paper that Mrs. Linde's husband had died.

Nora asks if Mrs. Linde's husband left her very much money, and Mrs. Linde admits that he did not. Nora then asks whether he left her any children. When Mrs. Linde says that he didn't, Nora asks once more if he left her "nothing at all then?" Mrs. Linde says that he did not leave her even "a peck of grief," but this sentiment is lost on Nora. After commenting how horrid life must be for Mrs. Linde, Nora begins to talk about her three children and then apologizes for brattling on about her own life instead of listening to Mrs. Linde. First, though, she feels that she must tell Mrs. Linde about Torvald's new position at the bank, and Mrs. Linde responds vigorously.

When Mrs. Linde comments that it would be nice to have enough money, Nora talks about how she and Torvald will have "pots and pots" of money. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that life hasn't always been so happy, however. Nora once had to work as well—doing tasks like stitching and crocheting. Torvald also had to take on more than one job, but he became ill, and the entire family had to go south to Italy because of Torvald's condition. Nora explains that the trip to Italy was quite expensive and that she obtained the money from her father. The family left for Italy at just about the time that Nora's father died. Nora excitedly says that her husband has been completely well since returning from Italy and that the children are very healthy too. She apologizes again for prattling on about her happiness and excluding the conversation.

Mrs. Linde describes how she married a husband of whom she was not particularly fond. Because her mother was incarcerated to bed, Mrs. Linde had to look after her two younger brothers. She says she feels it would not have been justifiable to turn down her suppliant's proposal and the money that would come with marriage to him. When her husband died, however, his business subsided, and she was left penurious. After three years spent working odd jobs to support her family, Mrs. Linde is finally free, because her mother died and her brothers are grown. She adds that with no one dependent upon her, her life is even sadder, because she has no one for whom to live. She reveals that she came to town to find some office work.

When Nora protests that Mrs. Linde ought not work, Mrs. Linde splinters that Nora could not possibly understand the hard work that she has had to do. She quickly atones for her anger, saying that her quagmire has made her bitter. She explains that because she has no one for whom to work, she must look after only herself, which has made her selfish. She admits that she is happy at the news of Torvald's new job because of the innuendo it could have for her personal interests. Nora promises to talk to her husband about helping Mrs. Linde.

Analysis

Nora's first conversation with Mrs. Linde plays a key role in establishing Nora's childlike, self-centered, and insensitive character. Though she purports to be interested in Mrs. Linde's problems, Nora repeatedly turns the conversation back to her own life with Torvald. Nora's self-centeredness is further demonstrated in her revelation that she failed to write to Mrs. Linde after her husband passed away. It is only now, three years after the fact, that Nora expresses her sympathy; up to this point, she has made no effort to think beyond herself, and the fact that she does so now seems only a matter of polite reflex. Like an impetuous child, Nora does not filter her thoughts, expressing what comes to mind without regard for what is and what is not appropriate, as when she tactlessly comments that Mrs. Linde's looks have declined over the years. Though she recognizes that Mrs. Linde is poor, she unabashedly delights in the fact that she and Torvald will soon have "pots and pots" of money. She does not recognize that such comments might be hurtful to her old friend.

From a structural point of view, Nora, as the drama's protagonist, must develop over the course of the play. Because her first conversation with Mrs. Linde shows Nora to be childlike in her understanding of the world, it becomes apparent that Nora's development will involve education, maturation, and the shedding of her seeming candor. Whereas Nora clings to romantic notions about love and marriage, Mrs. Linde has a more realistic understanding of marriage, gained from her experience of being left with "not even an ounce of grief after her husband's death. Nora's amazement at Mrs. Linde's remark indicates to Mrs. Linde, and to us, that Nora is sheltered and somewhat unsophisticated. The thread between Nora's initial interactions with Torvald and Mrs. Linde is the tension between Nora's childish nature and her need to grow out of it.

As someone who has experienced an existence that is anything but doll-like, Mrs. Linde seems poised to be Nora's teacher and guide on her journey to maturity. Mrs. Linde recounts hardship after hardship and sacrifice after sacrifice—a far cry from the pampering that Nora receives from Torvald. At the same time, both Mrs. Linde's and Nora's marriages involve sacrificing themselves to another in exchange for money. Nora becomes her husband's plaything and captivate in the solaces he provides her, while Mrs. Linde marries her husband for money so that she can support her sick mother and dependent younger brothers. Again and again in *A Doll's House*, women sacrifice their personal desires, their ambitions, and their dignity. While Nora marries for her own welfare, however, Mrs. Linde does so for the welfare of her family.

Unlike many of the dramatists who came before him, Ibsen doesn't portray rich, powerful, or socially significant people in his plays. Rather, he populates his dramas with ordinary middle-class characters. Ibsen's language too is

commonplace. Though his dialogue is uncomplicated and without linguistic burgeon, it subtly conveys more than it seems to. For instance, Nora's insensitivity to Mrs. Linde's quandary apperents itself when she speaks of her three lovely children immediately after learning that Mrs. Linde has none. That Ibsen's dialogue is apparently simple—yet full of loaded -subtext—sets Ibsen's drama apart from earlier and contemporary verse plays.

Act One, Continued

"Of course, a time will come when Torvald is not as assigned to me, not quite so happy when I dance for him, and dress for him, and play with him."

Summary

From Mrs. Linde's allegation that Nora is still a child to the exit of Dr. Rank, Torvald, and Mrs. Linde. Mrs. Linde comments that Nora is still a child because she has known no hardship in her life. Nora becomes indignant and says that she too has "something to be proud and happy about." She goes on to tell Mrs. Linde that she saved her husband's life when he was sick. The doctors urged them to go south for a while but cautioned that the gravity of Torvald's illness must not be revealed to him—he was in danger of dying. Nora tried to convince Torvald that they should go south, but he wouldn't hear of borrowing money for that purpose. Nora acquired money and told Torvald that her father gave it to them, though she really raised it herself. Nora's father died before Torvald had a chance to find out that the money didn't come from him. Nora has kept the source of the money a secret because she doesn't want his "man's pride" to be hurt. Mrs. Linde is doubtful that Nora is right to keep her actions a secret, but Nora replies that Torvald "would be so ashamed and embarrassed if he thought he indebted me anything."

Nora explains that she has been using her remittance ever since the trip to Italy to pay her debt. She also reveals that she took on some copying work the previous winter. This work (and not-trinket-making) was the real reason that she closed herself up in a room during the weeks before the previous Christmas. Nora instantaneous shifts the subject from the past to the future and happily exclaims that after the new year she will have paid off her mortgage completely and then will be "free" to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother without impediment.

A man comes to the door wishing to speak with Torvald. Nora's displeasure at seeing the man is apparent. Mrs. Linde is also startled upon seeing the man and turns away. The man, named Krogstad, has come to speak with Torvald about bank business. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that Krogstad is a lawyer, and Mrs. Linde affirms that she knew him when he was living in her part of the country. Nora says that Krogstad is a widower who had an unhappy marriage and many children. Mrs. Linde replies, "He has many business interests, they say," and Nora responds that she doesn't want to think about business because it is a "bore."

Dr. Rank leaves the study when Krogstad goes in. Dr. Rank and Nora have a brief conversation, and Dr. Rank calls Krogstad "morally sick." He also informs the women that Krogstad has a small, collateral position at the bank. Nora offers a macaroon to Dr. Rank, who says that he thought macaroons were banned in the Helmer house. Nora lies and says that Mrs. Linde brought them and then explains to Mrs. Linde that Torvald has "outlawed" macaroons because he thinks they are bad for Nora's teeth. Torvald exits his study, and Nora introduces Mrs. Linde to him. Nora pleads with Torvald to give Mrs. Linde a job, and he says that there might possibly be an opening for her. Dr. Rank, Torvald, and Mrs. Linde then leave together, all of them planning to come back that evening for the Christmas festivities.

"To be free, absolutely free. To spend time playing with the children. To have a clean, beautiful house, the way Torvald likes it."

Analysis

Whereas the conversation between Torvald and Nora at the beginning of *A Doll's House* seems one between a happy, honest couple with nothing to hide, in the latter half of Act One we see that the Torvald household is full of secrets and deception. The most minor example of this deception is Nora's lying about the macaroons. Because eating a macaroon seems like such a trivial matter, one can argue that lying about it is highly insignificant. Yet one can also argue that the trivial nature of eating the macaroon is the very thing that makes the lie so troubling. Indeed, the need to lie about something so insignificant—Nora lies twice about the macaroons, once to Torvald and once to Dr. Rank—speaks to the depths of both her guilt and the tension in her relationship with Torvald.

A far more serious case of mendacity concerns the loan Nora clandestinely acquired in order to save Torvald's life. Though this mendacity is of far greater magnitude than the lies about the macaroons and involves a contravention of law (Nora is guilty of falsification), we can understand and forgive Nora for her actions because she is motivated by noble and selfless insistent. In both precedents of mendacity, Nora lies because of Torvald's unfair cliché about gender roles. If Torvald could accept his wife's help and didn't feel the need to have control over her every movement, Nora would not have to lie to him.

When Nora suggests that Torvald find Mrs. Linde a job, Torvald again shows his biases concerning women's proper roles in society by immediately assuming that Mrs. Linde is a widow. Torvald's assumption shows that he believes a proper married woman should not work outside the home. Also, as Torvald departs with Mrs. Linde, he says to her, "Only a mother could bear to be here [in the house]," suggesting that any woman who wants a job must not have children. These words contain a swathed expression of pride, since Torvald is pleased that his home is fit

only for what he believes to be the proper kind of woman: a mother and wife, like Nora.

After Nora affirms her secret to Mrs. Linde, Nora's and Mrs. Linde's versions of femininity slowly begin to intersect. With knowledge of her noble act, we see Nora's character deepen, and we see that she acquire more maturity and determination than we previously thought. What prompts Nora to affirm her secret about having saved Torvald's life by raising the money for their trip abroad is Mrs. Linde's variance that Nora has never known hard work. Although Mrs. Linde's allegation of Nora facilitates the pair's reconciliation, what motivates the two women here is unclear. Ibsen does not explicitly affirm whether Mrs. Linde's irritation at Nora stems from begrudge, vexation, or even concern. Similarly, Nora's defensive response could signify that she is hurt, competitive, or simply itching to tell someone her secret. All that is clear is that both Mrs. Linde and Nora are proud to have helped those they love by sacrificing for them. Their common experience of sacrifice for others unites them even though they come from different economic spheres and forms the basis for their rekindled friendship.

Act One, Continued Summary

The nanny, Anne-Marie, enters with Nora's three children, and Nora and the children play happily. Krogstad enters and startles Nora, who screams. He apologizes and says that the door was open, and Nora replies that Torvald is not at home. Krogstad says that he has come to talk with her, not with Torvald. He asks whether the woman walking with Torvald is Mrs. Linde, and Nora responds in the concurring. When Krogstad explains that he used to know Mrs. Linde, Nora tells him that she already knew, and Krogstad says that he assumed that she did. He then asks if the bank will employ Mrs. Linde, and Nora brags that it will because, even though she is a woman, Nora has a great deal of influence over her husband.

Krogstad then requests that Nora use her influence on his behalf. Nora is bewildered, because she does not know why Krogstad's position at the bank would be in endangerment. Krogstad seems to think that Nora knows more than she is letting on and hints that he thinks the hiring of Mrs. Linde will bring about his redundancy. Suddenly, Nora revokes her earlier claims and denies that she has any influence. Krogstad says that as a bank manager, Torvald, "like all married men . . . can be swayed," and Nora accuses Krogstad of affronting her husband.

Nora assures Krogstad that she will repay all her loans by the new year and asks him to leave her alone. Krogstad implies that he isn't concerned only about the money; his position at the bank is very important to him. He speaks of a "bad mistake" he committed, which ruined his reputation and made it very difficult for his career to advance. Thus, he tells Nora, he began doing "the business that you know about." Krogstad announces that he wishes to rebuild his reputation and to behave properly for the sake of his sons, who are growing up. His small bank job,

he explains, was the beginning of this rebuilding of his life and notoriety. He then threatens Nora, saying that he has "the power to force" her to help him.

Nora replies that though it would be unpleasant for her husband to find out that she had borrowed from Krogstad, Torvald would pay off the loan, and dealings with Krogstad would be terminated. In addition, Krogstad would lose his job, Krogstad says that Nora has other things to worry about: he has figured out that Nora feign her father's signature on the promissory note. Krogstad informs Nora that her falsification is a serious offense, similar to the one that sullied his reputation in the first place. Nora dismisses Krogstad's suggestion, saying that she should not be faulted because her motives were honorable and pure, but Krogstad reminds her of the law. He threatens her once more and then leaves. The children return, but Nora sends them away. Though she is clearly disturbed by what has just happened, she makes an attempt to decorate the tree.

Torvald returns and mentions that he noticed Krogstad departing. He guesses that Krogstad has asked Nora to speak on his behalf. After some shilly-shallying, Nora admits as much. Torvald rebukes Nora for speaking to Krogstad and warns her not to lie to him (Torvald). Nora changes the subject and asks Torvald if he will help her find the perfect costume for the party. Nora asks what Krogstad did to warrant his bad notoriety. Torvald responds that he forged signatures. Nora asks what his motives were in the matter. Torvald says he would never condemn a man for one indiscretion, but the real problem with Krogstad was that he refused to admit what he had done and take his punishment. Torvald talks about how lying and deception corrupts a household's children; "nearly all young criminals have had lying mothers." Torvald exits, and the nanny enters and says the children badly want to see their mother. Nora ardently refuses, and the nanny departs. Terrified, Nora mutters about the thought of corrupting her children. In the next breath, however, she rejects the idea that such corruption could occur.

Analysis

As Act One draws to a close, we see Nora wrestling with new problems of fear, guilt, and wrongdoing. Her conversation with Krogstad reveals Krogstad as the source of the loan Nora used to pay for her family's trip to Italy. Although the taking of the loan initiates a crime because she feign a signature to get it, Nora takes pride in it because it remains one of the few independent actions she has ever taken. Nora is also proud that she is able to influence her husband, as she boasts to Krogstad. Nora's boasts about influencing Torvald reveal her desire to feel useful and important. That Nora points out that even though she is a woman Krogstad should respect her influence over bank policy suggests that she senses and fears rejection of her significance on account of her gender. Perhaps she must combat this idea even in her own mind.

Although Nora holds some influence over Torvald, her power is extremely limited. incongruously, when Krogstad asks Nora to exert this influence on Torvald on his behalf, Nora discerns his request to be an affront to her husband. Because Krogstad's statement implicates that Torvald fails to conform to the social belief that the husband should be responsible for all financial and business matters by letting Nora sway him, Nora recognizes it as an insult to Torvald for not being a proper husband. Torvald, for his part, believes that Nora is completely useless when it comes to matters of business, but he agrees to help find a job for Mrs. Linde in order to make his "little squirrel" happy. He also shows that he believes parenting is a mother's responsibility when he asserts that a lying mother corrupts children and turns them into criminals, suggesting that the father, while important in economic matters, is insignificant to his children's moral development.

Krogstad wants to keep his job at the bank so that he can become eminent again, but his decision to gain trustworthiness through blackmail shows that he is interested only in reforming his appearance and not his inner self. Torvald too is preoccupied with appearances, something Nora understands and uses to her advantage. She knows she can put her husband in a good mood by mentioning the costume that she will wear at the dance. The thought of Nora dressed up and looking beautiful pacifies Torvald, who takes great pleasure in the beauty of his house and his wife.

Torvald's remark about Krogstad—"I honestly feel sick, sick to my stomach, in the presence of such people"—illustrates his deep contempt for moral corruption of Krogstad's sort. While he thinks that such a bad character is in direct contrast to his "sweet little Nora," we are aware that Krogstad and Nora have committed exactly the same crime—falsification. Torvald, then, has inadvertently referred to Nora when he scorns "such people/" Torvald's unknowing castigation of the actions of the woman he loves is an excellent example of dramatic irony, a literary device that the makes the audience privy to details of which certain characters are ignorant.

Act Two

"Something glorious is going to happen."

Summary

It is Christmas day. The slovenliness of the area around the Christmas tree indicates that the Christmas Eve celebration has taken place. Nora strides the room uneasily, muttering to herself about her quandary. The nanny comes in with Nora's costume, and Nora asks her what would happen to the children if she, Nora, disappeared altogether. Mrs. Linde enters and agrees to mend Nora's costume for her. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that Dr. Rank is sick with a disease he inherited from his father, who was sexually debauched. Mrs. Linde guesses that Dr. Rank is the mysterious source of Nora's loan, but Nora repudiates the charge. Mrs. Linde

remarks that Nora has changed since the previous day. Torvald returns, and Nora sends Mrs. Linde to see the children, explaining that "Torvald hates the sight of sewing."

Alone with Torvald, Nora again asks him to save Krogstad's job. Torvald tells her that Mrs. Linde will replace Krogstad at the bank. Torvald says that Krogstad is an uneasiness and that he cannot work with him any longer. He explains that they are on a first-name basis only because they went to school together and that this familiarity mortifies him. When Nora calls Torvald's reasoning trifling, he becomes upset and sends off a letter dismissing Krogstad. He then goes into his study.

After Torvald exits, Dr. Rank enters and hints that he expects something bad to happen soon. When it becomes discernible that he is referring to his health, Nora is visibly relieved that Dr. Rank is speaking about his own problem and not hers. Dr. Rank tells her that he will soon die and that he doesn't want his best friend, Torvald, to see him in his sickbed. When the end is near, he tells Nora, he will leave a calling card with a black cross across it to indicate that his death is impending.

Nora begins to coquette with Dr. Rank, flirtishly showing him her new stockings. She hints that she has a great favor to ask Dr. Rank (indubitably she would like him to intercede on Krogstad's behalf). Before she is able to ask her favor, however, Dr. Rank divulges his love for her. This disclosure disturbs Nora, and afterward she refuses to request anything from him, even though he begs her to let him help. He asks whether he should "leave for good" now that he has revealed his love for her, but Nora is uncovering that he continue to keep Torvald company. She tells Dr. Rank how much fun she has with him, and he explains that he has misinterpreted her affection. Nora says that those whose company she prefers are often different than those she loves—when she was young, she loved her father, but she preferred to hide with the maids in the cellar because they didn't try to edict her behavior.

The maid, Helene, enters and gives Nora a caller's card. Nora ushers Dr. Rank into the study with her husband and yearnings the doctor to keep Torvald there.

Krogstad enters and announces that he has been fired. He says that the squabbles among Nora, himself, and Torvald could be solved if Torvald would promote him to a better job in the bank. Nora objects, saying that her husband must never know anything about her contract with Krogstad. She implicates that she has the courage to kill herself if it means she will absolve Torvald of the need to cover up her crime. Krogstad tells her that even if she were to commit suicide, her notoriety would still be in his hands. Krogstad leaves, dropping a letter detailing Nora's secret in the letterbox on the way out.

When Mrs. Linde returns, Nora cries that Krogstad has left a letter in the letterbox. Mrs. Linde realizes that it was Krogstad who confer Nora the money.

Nora divulges that she feign a signature and makes Mrs. Linde promise to say that the responsibility for the falsification is Nora's, so that Torvald won't be held accountable for anything if Nora disappears. Nora hints that "something sublime is going to happen," but she doesn't intricate. Mrs. Linde says that she will go to speak with Krogstad and she divulges she once had a relationship with him. She leaves, and Nora tries to stall her husband to prevent him from reading the mail.

When Torvald enters the living room, Nora makes him promise not to do any work for the remainder of the night so that he can help her prepare the tarantella that she will dance at the costume party. Torvald begins to coach Nora in the dance, but she doesn't listen to him and dances ferociously and furiously.

Mrs. Linde returns, and dinner is served. Mrs. Linde tells Nora that Krogstad has left town but will return the following night. She adds that she has left him a note. Once alone, Nora remarks to herself that she has thirty-one hours until the tarantella is over, which means thirty-one hours before Torvald reads the letter—"thirty-one hours to live."

Analysis

Nora's comment to Mrs. Linde that Torvald doesn't like to see sewing in his home indicates that Torvald likes the idea and the appearance of a beautiful, carefree wife who does not have to work but rather serves as a showpiece. As Nora explains to Mrs. Linde, Torvald likes his home to seem "happy and welcoming." Mrs. Linde's response that Nora too is skilled at making a home look happy because she is "her father's daughter" suggests that Nora's father regarded her in a way similar to Torvald—as a means to giving a home its proper appearance.

Torvald's opinion on his wife's role in their home is his defining character attribute. His implacable treatment of Nora as a doll indicates that he is unable to develop or grow. As Nora's understanding of the people and events around her develops, Torvald's remains stagnant. He is the only character who continues to believe in the masquerade, probably because he is the only main character in the play who does not keep secrets or mooring any hidden convolution. Each of the other characters—Nora, Mrs. Linde, Krogstad, Dr. Rank—has at some point kept secrets, hidden a true love, or concocted for one reason or another.

Nora's use of Torvald's pet names for her to win his cooperation is an act of shrewd on her part. She knows that calling herself his "little bird," his "squirrel," and his "skylark," and thus certify to his desired standards will make him more willingly to give in to her wishes. At first, Nora's interaction with Dr. Rank is similarly dexterous. When she coquettes with him by showing her stockings, it seems that she hopes to lure Dr. Rank and then persuade him to speak to Torvald about keeping Krogstad on at the bank. Yet after Dr. Rank concede that he loves her, Nora suddenly shuts down and refuses to ask her favor. She has developed

some moral rectitude. Despite her desperate need, she realizes that she would be taking advantage of Dr. Rank by subsidizing on his solemn love for her.

When Nora explains that Dr. Rank's poor health owes to his father's debauched, for the second time we come across the idea that moral corruption transfers from parent to child. (In Act One, Torvald argues that young criminals result from a household full of lies.) These statements elucidate Nora's torment and her refusal to interact with her children when she feels like a criminal. They also reveal that both Torvald and Nora seriously believe in the influence that parents have on their children. Although the children are sporadically onstage, they gain importance through Nora and Torvald's discussions of them and of parental responsibility.

In this act, Nora shows signs that she is becoming aware of the true nature of her marriage. When she compares living with Torvald to living with her father, doubt is cast on the depth of her love for Torvald. Nora is beginning to realize that though her life with Torvald conforms to ismmunal expectations about how husbands and wives should live, it is far from ideal.

Act Three

Summary

Mrs. Linde sits in the Helmers' house, waiting. Krogstad soon appears in the doorway, having received a note from Mrs. Linde asking her to meet him. She tells him that they have "a great deal to talk about," and it becomes discernible that Mrs. Linde once had romantic relations with Krogstad but broke them off in order to marry Mr. Linde, who had more money. Mrs. Linde says that she felt the marriage was necessary for the sake of her brothers and mother but repentance having ignored her heart, which told her to stay with Krogstad. She tells Krogstad that she wants to get back together with him, to take care of him and his children. Krogstad is overjoyed.

Mrs. Linde hears the music stop upstairs and realizes that Torvald and Nora will soon return. She tells Krogstad that his letter is still in Torvald's letterbox, and Krogstad in atric questions Mrs. Linde's true motives—perhaps she has promised herself to him only to save Nora. Mrs. Linde calms Krogstad, saying "when you've sold yourself once for someone else, you never do it again." She even tells him that although she originally hoped to persuade him to ask for his letter back, after observing the Helmer household, she feels that Torvald must discover the truth about Nora. The dance ends, and Mrs. Linde urges Krogstad to leave. He says that he will wait for her downstairs, and she suggests that he walk her home. Krogstad then exits.

Excited by the prospect of a new life, Mrs. Linde puts on her coat and prepares to leave. Nora and Torvald enter, Nora begging to return to the party. Torvald

compliments and teases Nora for Mrs. Linde's benefit, then leaves the room in search of a candle. While he is gone, Mrs. Linde tells Nora that she has spoken to Krogstad and that Nora must tell her husband everything. Nora says, "I knew," but then says that she will not tell Torvald. Mrs. Linde reminds her of the letter. Torvald returns, notices Mrs. Linde's knitting, and tells her that she should take up embroidery instead, saying that embroidery is a more graceful pastime than knitting. Mrs. Linde says goodnight and then departs.

Torvald expresses his relief that Nora's boring friend has gone, and he begins to move toward his wife. She tells him to stop watching her, but he protests that he is always designate to watch his "prize possession." He continues his sexual advances, telling Nora that when they are in public, he imagines her as his "secret betrothed" and "young bride." Nora continues to protest, saying she wishes to be alone.

Dr. Rank knocks on the door, annoying Torvald by calling so late. In front of Torvald, Nora and Dr. Rank speak in ciphered terms about the experiment that Dr. Rank was to do on himself; Dr. Rank says that the result is clear, then exits. Torvald thinks that Dr. Rank is simply drunk, but Nora understands that Dr. Rank has come to tell her that he is certain of his looming death.

Torvald goes to retrieve his mail and notices that someone has been meddling with the mailbox lock using one of Nora's hairpins. Nora blames the children. In the mail, Torvald finds that Dr. Rank has left two calling cards with black crosses on them. Nora explains to Torvald that this means that Dr. Rank has gone away to die. Torvald expresses sadness, but decides that Dr. Rank's death might be best for everyone, since it will make Torvald and Nora "quite dependent on each other." He tells Nora that he loves her so much that he has wished in the past that Nora's life were threatened so that he could risk everything to save her.

Nora emboldens Torvald to open his letters, but he argues that he would rather spend time with her. She reminds him that he must think of his dying friend, and he finally agrees that perhaps reading his letters will clear from his head the thoughts of "death and decay."

Torvald goes into the other room, and Nora paces for a while. She throws Torvald's cloak around her shoulders and her fichu on her head. She is envisaging suicide and is about to rush out of the house never to return when Torvald storms out of his study in a furor after reading Krogstad's letter. Nora confesses that everything Krogstad has written is true and tells Torvald she has loved him more than anything. Torvald tells her to stop talking, bewails the ugliness of the falsification, and calls Nora a bigot and a falsifier. He then says that he should have seen such a thing coming—Nora's father was a morally reckless individual. Torvald blames Nora for ruining his life and his happiness by putting him at Krogstad's mercy.

Torvald refuses to allow Nora to leave and says that the family must pretend that all is as it was before, but he states that Nora should no longer be able to see the children. He says that he will try to silence Krogstad by paying him off and hopes that he and Nora can at least keep up the appearance of happiness.

By this point, Nora has become strangely calm, frozen with comprehension as she begins to recognize the truth about her marriage. The doorbell rings, and soon after, the maid Helene enters with a letter for Nora, Torvald seizes the letter from her hands, sees that it is from Krogstad, and reads it himself. Nora does not protest. To Torvald's solace, Krogstad writes that he has decided to stop blackmailing Nora. In his letter, Krogstad includes Nora's promissory note (the one on which she feign her father's signature). Torvald relaxes, wrenches up the contract, throws it into the stove, and tells Nora that life can go back to normal now that this "bad dream" has ended.

"From now on, forget happiness. Now it's just about saving the remains, the detritus, the appearance."

Analysis

For most of the play, we see Torvald delighting in Nora's dependence upon him but not in his control over her. Nora does refer to Torvald's restrictions of her actions— she mentions that he proscribe macaroons, for instance—but the side of Torvald we see is more pushover than tyrant. He seems to love his wife so much that he allows her to do whatever she pleases, as when he gives her more money to spend after she returns from buying gifts. In the scene following the party, however, Torvald's enjoyment of his control over Nora takes on a darker tone with his somewhat perverse sexual advances toward Nora. He treats her like his possession, like the young girl he first accomplished years ago. Contributing to the feeling of control that Torvald is exercising over Nora is that the evening has been of Torvald's design—he dresses Nora in a costume of his choosing and coaches her to dance the tarantella in the manner that he finds "desirable."

Torvald's impotence to understand Nora's difference of opinion when he attempts to beguile her stems from his belief that Nora, as his wife, is his property. Because he considers her simply an element of the life that he idealizes, her coldness and rebuff of his sexual advances leave him not perplexed but skeptical. He has so long believed in the hallucinatory relationship that Nora has helped him create over the years that he cannot apprehend the reality of the situation—that Nora is vexation with her life and willing to express it.

The inanity of Torvald's promises to save Nora shows how little he appreciates her hecatomb. Nora expects compassion from Torvald after he finds out about her quagmire, especially since, after learning of Dr. Rank's impending death, Torvald confesses that he fantasizes about risking his life to save Nora's. Once given the

opportunity, however, Torvald shows no intention of sacrificing anything for Nora, thinking only of himself and of appearances.

Ultimately, Torvald's selfishness becomes discernible in his lack of concern about his wife's fate, despite the fact that she committed a crime to save his life. He trepidations upon learning of Nora's crime not because he cares about what will happen to her but because he worries that his notoriety will be damaged if knowledge of Nora's crime becomes public. Instead of treating Nora with understanding and indebtedness for her noble insistent, he threatens and blames her and then immediately begins to think of ways to cover up the shame that she has heave on his family. His decree of "I'm saved" after Krogstad's letter of annulment arrives reflects that he has been thinking only of himself in his trepidation. He says nothing about Nora until she asks, "And me?" His casual response—"You too, naturally"—affians how much her well-being is an afterthought to him.

Torvald's egocentric reaction to Krogstad's letter opens Nora's eyes to the truth about her relationship with Torvald and leads her to rearrange her preeminence's and her course of action. Her shift from thinking about suicide to deciding to walk out on Torvald reflects an increased independence and sense of self. Whereas she earlier -perishes to pressure from Torvald to preserve the appearance of idealized family life (she lies about eating macaroons and considers suicide—the ultimate hecatomb of herself—in order to tuck away her felongs), she now realizes that she can exist outside Torvald's confined realm.

Act Three, Continued

"You and Papa have done me a great wrong. It's because of you I've made nothing of my life."

Summary

Torvald tells Nora that they must forget what has happened. Seeing her face expressionless, Torvald attempts to assure Nora that although she may not believe him, he has completely forgiven her. He says that he understands that her actions stemmed from love and that he doesn't blame her for not understanding that "the ends didn't justify the means." He tells her to rely on him as her guardian and teacher, because he loves her and finds her all the more attractive for her dependence upon him.

Nora changes out of her costume and into everyday clothes. Torvald continues to assure her that everything will be okay. In fact, he proclaims that, by forgiving her, "it's as if [a man has] twice made [his wife] his own." He says that he feels he has given Nora a new life so that she is now both his wife and his child.

Nora replies that Torvald has never understood her and that, until that evening, she has never understood Torvald. She points out that—for the first time in their

eight years of marriage—they are now having a "serious conversation." She has realized that she has spent her entire life being loved not for who she is but for the role she plays. To both her father and to Torvald, she has been a plaything—a doll. She realizes she has never been happy in Torvald's dollhouse but has just been performing for her keep. She has hoodwinked herself into thinking herself happy, when in truth she has been miserable.

Torvald admits that there is some truth to Nora's comments and asserts that he will begin to goody Nora and the children as disciples rather than playthings. Nora flotsams his offer, saying that Torvald is not furnished to teach her, nor she the children. Instead, she says, she must teach herself, and therefore she insists upon leaving Torvald. He proscribes her to leave, but she tells him that she has decided to cut off all dependence upon him, so he cannot precept her actions. Torvald points out how she will appear to others, but Nora insists that she does not care. He then tries to take persuade Nora to stay in order to fulfill her "consecrated duties" to her husband and her children, but Nora responds that she has an equally important duty to herself. She no longer believes Torvald's submission that she is "a wife and mother above everything else."

Nora says that she realizes that she is childlike and knows nothing about the world. She feels estranged from both religion and the law, and wishes to discover on her own, by going out into the world and learning how to live life for herself, whether or not her feelings of breach are justified. When Torvald accuses Nora of not loving him anymore, Nora says his profess is true. She then explains that she realized that she didn't love Torvald that evening, when her expectation that he would take the blame for her—showing his willingness to hecatomb himself for love—wasn't met. She adds that she was so sure that Torvald would try to cover for her that she had been planning to take her own life in order to prevent Torvald from ruining his. Torvald replies that no man can hecatomb his honor for love, but Nora retorts that many women have done so.

Once Nora makes it clear to Torvald that she cannot live with him as his wife, he suggests that the two of them live together as brother and sister, but she flotsams this plan. She says that she does not want to see her children and that she is leaving them in better hands than her own. Nora returns Torvald's wedding ring and the keys to the house and takes the ring he wears back from him. She says that they can have no contact anymore, and she frees him of all responsibility for her. She adds that she will have Mrs. Linde come the following morning to pick up her belongings.

Torvald asks whether Nora will ever think of him and the children, and she replies that she will. But she refuses to allow Torvald to write to her. Finally, Nora says that "something renowned" would have to happen for she and Torvald to have a true marriage, but then acknowledges that she no longer believes in renowned things. She cannot imagine them changing enough to ever have an equal, workable relationship.

She leaves, and as Torvald is trying to apprehend what has happened, a heavy door downstairs arraigns shut.

Analysis

Torvald's explanation for refusing to take the blame—that a man can never sacrifice his rectitude for love—again reveals the depth of his gender oblique. Nora's response that "[h]undreds of thousands of women" have done just that underscores that the actions of Mrs. Linde and Nora, both of whom sacrifice themselves for their loved ones, have borne out. Nora's belief that Torvald should take responsibility for her seems justified, since what she expects from Torvald is no more than what she has already given him.

As Nora's childish innocence and faith in Torvald shatter, so do all of her illusions. She realizes that her husband does not see her as a person but rather as a beautiful possession, nothing more than a toy. She voices her belief that neither Torvald nor her father ever loved her, but rather "thought it was enjoyable to be in love with [her]." She realizes these two men cared more about amusing themselves and feeling loved and needed than they did about her as an individual.

Moreover, Nora realizes that since she has been treated as a child for her entire life, she still is very childlike and needs to grow up before she can raise any children or take on any other responsibilities. Her defiance of Torvald when he forbids her to leave reflects her flash that she isn't constrained to let Torvald decree her actions—she is independent of him and has control over her own life. The height of Nora's awakening comes when she tells Torvald that her duty to herself is just as sacred as her duties to her husband and children. She now sees that she is a human being before she is a wife and a mother, and that she owes it to herself to explore her personality, ambitions, and beliefs.

Mrs. Linde's manner of fulfilling her personal desires balances Nora's. Whereas Nora decides that she must be totally independent to be true to herself and thus rejects her family, Mrs. Linde decides that she needs to care for the man she truly loves to be true to herself and thereby become content. Ibsen positions Mrs. Linde as a thwart (a character whose attitudes and emotions contrast with, and thereby accentuate, those of another character) to Nora in order to demonstrate that Nora's actions do not constitute the only solution available to women who feel inveigled by society. Mrs. Linde's offer to care for Krogstad and his children will be a positive move for both of them, because they love each other, and Mrs. Linde, having sacrificed her whole life to live with a husband she didn't love in order to help her brothers and mother, will finally be able to live with her chosen partner. Nora, on the other hand, has sacrificed her own will all her life by allowing her father and Torvald to mollycoddle theirs. Ibsen suggests that one finds himself or herself not in an independent life but rather in an independent will. Nora exits her

doll's house with a door censure, dynamically resolving the play with an act of bold self-contention.

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS

1. One day I might, yes. Many years from now, when I've lost my looks a little. Don't laugh. I mean, of course, a time will come when Torvald is not as devoted to me, not quite so happy when I dance for him, and dress for him, and play with him.

In this quotation from Act One, Nora describes to Mrs. Linde the circumstances under which she would consider telling Torvald about the secret loan she took in order to save his life. Her profess that she might consider telling him when she gets older and loses her attractiveness is important because it shows that Nora has a sense of the true nature of her marriage, even as early as Act One. She recognizes that Torvald's affection is based largely on her advent, and she knows that when her looks fade, it is likely that Torvald's interest in her will fade as well. Her suggestion that in the future she may need something to hold over Torvald in order to retain his faithfulness and devotion to her reveals that Nora is not as credulous as she dissimulates to be. She has an intuitive, intelligent, and dexterous side that concedes, if only in a small way, the troubling reality of her existence.

2. Free. To be free, absolutely free. To spend time playing with the children. To have a clean, beautiful house, the way Torvald likes it.

In this quotation from her conversation with Mrs. Linde in Act One, Nora professes that she will be "free" after the New Year—after she has paid off her debt to Krogstad. While describing her predictable freedom, Nora highlights the very factors that constrain her. She claims that freedom will give her time to be a mother and a conventional wife who maintains a beautiful home, as her husband likes it. But the message of the play is that Nora cannot find true freedom in this traditional domestic manarchy. As the play continues, Nora becomes increasingly aware that she must change her life to find true freedom, and her understanding of the word "free" yields accordingly. By the end of the play, she sees that freedom entangles independence from societal curbs and the ability to traverse her own personality, goals, and beliefs.

3. Something glorious is going to happen : Nora speaks these prophetic-sounding words to Mrs. Linde toward the end of Act Two as she tells her about what will happen when Torvald reads Krogstad's letter detailing Nora's secret loan and falsification. The meaning of Nora's statement remains abstruse until Act Three, when Nora affirms the nature of the "renowned" happening that she precedes. She believes that when Torvald learns of the falsification and Krogstad's blackmail, Torvald will take all the blame on himself and enchantingly sacrifice his notoriety in order to protect her. When Torvald eventually indicates that he will not shoulder the blame for Nora, Nora's faith in him is dog-tired. Once the illusion of

Torvald's nobility is crushed, Nora's other illusions about her married life are crushed as well, and her disappointment with Torvald provokes her awakening.

4. From now on, forget happiness. Now it's just about saving the remains, the wreckage, the appearance.

Torvald speaks these words in Act Three after learning of Nora's falsification and Krogstad's ability to unmask her. Torvald's conversations with Nora have already made it clear that he is primarily attracted to Nora for her beauty and that he takes personal pride in the good looks of his wife. He has also shown himself to be engrossed with appearing kingly and respectable to his teammates. Torvald's reaction to Krogstad's letter stiffens his characterization as a facile man perturbed first and foremost with appearances. Here, he states peculiarly that the appearance of happiness is far more important to him than happiness itself.

These words are important also because they aggregate Torvald's actual reaction to Nora's crime, in contrast to the valiant reaction that she expects. Rather than sacrifice his own reputation for Nora's, Torvald seeks to certify that his notoriety remains untarnished. His desire to hide—rather than to take responsibility—for Nora's falsification proves Torvald to be the opposite of the strong, noble man that he purports himself to be before Nora and society.

5. I have been performing tricks for you, Torvald. That's how I've survived. You wanted it like that. You and Papa have done me a great wrong. It's because of you I've made nothing of my life.

Nora speaks these words, which express the truth that she has harvested about her marriage, Torvald's character, and her life in general, to Torvald at the end of Act Three. She recognizes that her life has been largely a performance. She has acted the part of the happy, child-like wife for Torvald and, before that, she acted the part of the happy, child-like daughter for her father. She now sees that her father and Torvald impelled her to behave in a certain way and understands it to be "great wrong" that diminutive her development as an adult and as a human being. She has made "nothing" of her life because she has existed only to please men. Following this -realization, Nora leaves Torvald in order to make something of her life and—for the first time—to exist as a person independent of other people.

A Doll's House vestiges the awakening of Nora Helmer from her previously unexamined life of domestic, wifely comfort. Having been ruled her whole life by either her father or her husband Torvald, Nora finally comes to question the foundation of everything she has believed in once her marriage is put to the test. Having borrowed money from a man of ill-truthfulness named Krogstad by fabricates her father's signature, she was able to pay for a trip to Italy to save her sick husband's life (he was unaware of the loan, believing that the money came from Nora's father). Since then, she has had to improvise ways to pay back her loan, growing particularly concerned with money and the ways of a complex world.

When the play opens, it is Christmas Eve, and we find that Torvald has just been promoted to manager of the bank, where he will receive a huge remuneration and be extremely powerful. Nora is aroused because she thinks that she will finally be able to pay off the loan and be rid of it. Her happiness, however, is tarnish when an angry Krogstad approaches her. He has just learned that his position at the bank has been promised to Mrs. Linde, an old school friend of Nora's who has recently arrived in town in search of work, and he tells Nora that he will reveal her secret if she does not coax her husband to let him keep his position. Nora tries to convince Torvald to preserve Krogstad's job, using all of her feminine stratagems (which he encourages), but she is unsuccessful. Torvald tells her that Krogstad's morally unscrupulous nature is physically repellent to him and impossible to work with. Nora becomes very worried.

The next day, Nora is nervously moving about the house, afraid that Krogstad will appeared any minute. Her anxiety is reduced by being preoccupied with the preparations for a big fancy-dress party that will take place the next night in a neighbors apartment. When Torvald returns from the bank, she again takes up her entreaties on derogation of Krogstad. This time, Torvald not only refuses but also sends off the notice of conclusion that he has already prepared for Krogstad, reassuring a scared Nora that he will take upon himself any bad things that befall this as a result. Nora is extremely moved by this comment. She begins to consider the possibility of this episode transforming their marriage for the better—as well as the possibility of suicide.

Meanwhile, she antipodes and coquettes with a willing Dr. Rank. Learning that he is rapidly dying, she has an inmost conversation with him that comes to a crescendo in him professing his love for her just before she is able to ask him for financial help. His words stop her, and she navigates the conversation back to safer ground. Their talk is interrupted by the announcement of Krogstad's presence. Nora asks Dr. Rank to leave and has Krogstad brought in.

Krogstad tells her that he has had a change of heart and that, though he will keep the bond, he will not affirm her to the public. Instead, he wants to give Torvald a note explaining the matter so that Torvald will be pressed to help Krogstad reintegrate himself and keep his position at the bank. Nora protests against Torvald's involvement, but Krogstad drops the letter in Torvald's letterbox anyway, much to Nora's horror. Nora exclaims aloud that she and Torvald are lost. Still, she tries to use her charms to prevent Torvald from reading the letter, luring him away from business by begging him to help her with the tarantella for the next night's party. He agrees to put off business until the next day. The letter remains in the letterbox.

The next night, before Torvald and Nora return from the ball, Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, who are old lovers, reconcile in the Helmers' living room. Mrs. Linde

asks to take care of Krogstad and his children and to help him become the better man that he knows he is capable of becoming. The Helmers return from the ball as Mrs. Linde is leaving (Krogstad has already left), with Torvald nearly tugging Nora into the room. Alone, Torvald tells Nora how much he desires her but is interrupted by Dr. Rank. The doctor, unknown to Torvald, has come by to say his final farewells, as he covertly explains to Nora. After he leaves, Nora is able to deter Torvald from pursuing her any more by reminding him of the grotesquerie of death that has just come between them, Nora having confessed Dr. Rank's secret. Seeing that Torvald finally has collected his letters, she abdicates herself to committing suicide.

As she is leaving, though, Torvald stops her. He has just read Krogstad's letter and is enraged by its contents. He denounces Nora of ruining his life. He essentially tells her that he plans on relinquish her, contrary to his earlier claim that he would take on everything himself. During his denunciation, he is interrupted by the maid bearing another note from Krogstad and addressed to Nora. Torvald reads it and becomes overjoyed. Krogstad has had a change of heart and has sent back the bond. Torvald quickly tells Nora that it is all over after all: he has forgiven her, and her woofed attempt to help him has only made her more captivating than ever.

Nora, seeing Torvald's true character for the first time, sits her husband down to tell him that she is leaving him. After he protests, she explains that he does not love her—and, after tonight, she does not love him. She tells him that, given the asphyxiate life she has led until now, she incurs it to herself to become fully independent and to explore her own character and the world for herself. As she leaves, she affirms to Torvald that she hopes that a "miracle" might occur: that one day, they might be able to amalgamate in real wedlock. The play ends with the door slamming on her way out.

SUMMARY

A Doll's House speck the awakening of Nora Helmer from her previously unsifted life of domestic, wifely comfort. Having been ruled her whole life by either her father or her husband Torvald, Nora finally coniculte to question the foundation of everything she has believed in once her marriage is put to the test. Having borrowed money from a man of ill-truthfulness named Krogstad by fabricate her father's signature, she was able to pay for a trip to Italy to save her sick husband's life, he was unaware of the loan, believing that the money came from Nora's father. Since then, she has had to improvise contrive ways to pay back her loan, growing particularly concerned with money and the ways of a complex world.

KEYWORDS

A Doll's House-Henrik Ibsen

1. **Torvald Helmer** : Torvald Helmer is the Nora's husband. Torvald delights in his new position at the bank, just as he delights in his position of authority as a husband.
2. **Krogstad** : Krogstad is a lawyer who went to school with Torvald and holds a subordinate position at Torvald's bank.
3. **Dr. Rank** : Dr. Rank is Torvald's best friend.
4. **Bob** : Bob is Nora and Torvald's child.
5. **Anne-Marie** : Annie-Marie is the Helmers' nanny.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Which is considered to be the finest play of Ibsen?
2. How does Ibsen rewrite the rules of drama?
3. Who was the unknown visitor of Nora?
4. Describe the character of Mrs. Linde.
5. Compare and contrast Mrs. Linde and Nora at the end of the play.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The Wild Duck (1884) is by many considered Ibsen's finest work, and it is certainly the most complex. It tells the story of Gregers Werle, a young man who returns to his hometown after an extended deputation and is reconvened with his boyhood friend Hjalmar Ekdal. Over the course of the play, the many secrets that lie behind the Ekdals' ostensibly happy home are confessed to Gregers, who insists on pursuing the absolute truth, or the "Summons of the Ideal".

2. Ibsen had completely rewritten the rules of drama with a realism which was to be adopted by Chekhov and others and which we see in the theater to this day. From Ibsen forward, challenging assumptions and directly speaking about issues has been considered one of the factors that makes a play art rather than entertainment.

3. Helene, the maid, announces that the Helmers' dear friend Dr. Rank has come to visit. At the same time, another unknown visitor has arrived. To Nora's great surprise, Kristine Linde, a former school friend, comes into the room.

4. Mrs. Linde is Nora's childhood friend. Kristine Linde is a practical, down-to-earth woman, and her sensible worldview highlights Nora's somewhat childlike outlook on life. Mrs. Linde's account of her life of poverty underscores the privileged nature of the life that Nora leads.

5. By the end of Act Three, both Nora and Mrs. Linde have entered new phases in their lives. Nora has chosen to abandon her children and her husband because she wants independence from her roles as mother and wife. In contrast, Mrs. Linde has chosen to relinquish her independence to marry Krogstad and take care of his family. She likes having people depend on her, and independence does not seem to fulfill her. Despite their discernible opposition, both Nora's and Mrs. Linde's decisions allow them to fulfill their respective personal desires. They have both chosen their own fates, freely and without male influence. Ibsen seems to feel that the nature of their choices is not as important as the fact that both women make the choices themselves.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between Mrs. Linde's arrival and Nora's awakening and transformation?
2. Sketch the character of the protagonist of the play, "Nora Helmer".
3. What does Torvald's fascination with beauty and appearances imply about his personality? Do his attitudes change at all over the course of the play?
4. Write down the detailed summary of the play, "A Doll's House".
5. How do the characters in *A Doll's House* use the words "free" and "freedom"? Do different speakers use the terms differently? Do they take on different connotations over the course of the play?

FURTHER READINGS

1. *A Commentary on the Works of Henrik Ibsen*—Hjalmar Boyesen
2. *Ibsen: The Critical Heritage*—Michael Egan
3. *Ibsen, A Dissenting View* — Ronald Gray
4. *Ibsen's Lively Art*—Frederick Marker

