

# A Doll's House

## Notes

### Lecture 2 – Lecture 9

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#### Context

Henrik Ibsen, considered by many to be the father of modern prose drama, was born in Skien, Norway, on March 20, 1828. He was the second of six children. Ibsen's father was a prominent merchant, but he went bankrupt when Ibsen was eight years old, so Ibsen spent much of his early life living in poverty. From 1851 to 1864, he worked in theaters in Bergen and in what is now Oslo (then called Christiania). At age twenty-one, Ibsen wrote his first play, a five-act tragedy called *Catiline*. Like much of his early work, *Catiline* was written in verse.

In 1858, Ibsen married Suzannah Thoreson, and eventually had one son with her. Ibsen felt that, rather than merely live together, husband and wife should live as equals, free to become their own human beings. (This belief can be seen clearly in *A Doll's House*.) Consequently, Ibsen's critics attacked him for failing to respect the institution of marriage. Like his private life, Ibsen's writing tended to stir up sensitive social issues, and some corners of Norwegian society frowned upon his work. Sensing criticism in Oslo about not only his work but also his private life, Ibsen moved to Italy in 1864 with the support of a traveling grant and a stipend from the Norwegian government. He spent the next twenty-seven years living abroad, mostly in Italy and Germany.

Ibsen's early years as a playwright were not lucrative, but he did gain valuable experience during this time. In 1866, Ibsen published his first major theatrical success, a lyric drama called *Brand*. He followed it with another well-received verse play, *Peer Gynt*. These two works helped solidify Ibsen's reputation as one of the premier Norwegian dramatists of his era. In 1879, while living in Italy, Ibsen published his masterpiece, *A Doll's House*. Unlike *Peer Gynt* and *Brand*, *A Doll's House* was written in prose. It is widely considered a landmark in the development of what soon became a highly prevalent genre of theater—realism, which strives to portray life

accurately and shuns idealized visions of it. In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen employs the themes and structures of classical tragedy while writing in prose about everyday, unexceptional people. *A Doll's House* also manifests Ibsen's concern for women's rights, and for human rights in general.

Ibsen followed *A Doll's House* with two additional plays written in an innovative, realistic mode: *Ghosts*, in 1881, and *An Enemy of the People*, in 1882. Both were successes. Ibsen began to gain international recognition, and his works were produced across Europe and translated into many different languages.

In his later work, Ibsen moved away from realistic drama to tackle questions of a psychological and subconscious nature. Accordingly, symbols began to gain prominence in his plays. Among the works he wrote in this symbolist period are *The Wild Duck* (1884) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890). *Hedda Gabler* was the last play Ibsen wrote while living abroad. In 1891, he returned to Oslo. His later dramas include *The Master Builder* (1892) and *Little Eyolf* (1896). Eventually, a crippling sickness afflicted Ibsen and prevented him from writing. He died on May 23, 1906.

#### *A Note on the Title*

**Though most English translations of the play are titled *A Doll's House*, some scholars believe that “A Doll House” is a more accurate translation of the original Norwegian. They feel that it is more suggestive of the doll-like qualities of the entire cast of characters. Plot Overview**

*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 affectionately, but then chides her for spending so much money on Christmas gifts. Their conversation reveals 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 visitor has arrived, this one unknown. 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 inquires 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 obtain employment. Nora promises to speak to Torvald and then reveals 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 debt, 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 hire 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 converse, and Krogstad is revealed to be the source of Nora's secret loan.

Krogstad states that Torvald wants to fire him from his position at the bank and alludes to his own poor reputation. He asks Nora to use her influence to ensure that his position remains secure. When she refuses, Krogstad points out that he has in his possession a contract that contains Nora's forgery 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 convince 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 suspicious 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 reveal 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 flirt with him. She seems to be preparing to ask him to intervene 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 dismissal. He wants respectability and has changed the terms of the blackmail: he now insists to Nora that not only that he be rehired at the bank but that he be rehired in a higher position. He then puts a letter detailing Nora's debt and forgery in the -Helmers' letterbox. In a panic, Nora tells Mrs. Linde everything, and Mrs. Linde instructs Nora to delay 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 reveals that the two had once deeply in love, but Mrs. Linde left Krogstad for a wealthier man who would enable her to support her family. She tells Krogstad that now that she is free of her own familial obligations 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 revealed.

Soon after Krogstad's departure, 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 outraged. He calls Nora a hypocrite and a liar 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 forged signature). Overjoyed, Torvald attempts to dismiss his past insults, but his harsh words have triggered something in Nora. She declares that despite their eight years of marriage, they do not understand one another. Torvald, Nora asserts, has treated her like a "doll" to be played with and admired. She decides to leave Torvald, declaring that she must "make sense of [her]self and everything around her." She walks out, slamming the door behind her.

## Character List

In some editions of *A Doll's House*, the speech prompts refer to the character of Torvald Helmer as "Torvald;" in others, they refer to him as "Helmer." Similarly, in some editions, Mrs. Linde's first name is spelled "Christine" rather than "Kristine."

**Nora** - The protagonist of the play and the wife of Torvald Helmer. Nora initially seems like a playful, naïve child who lacks knowledge of the world outside her home. She does have some worldly experience, however, and the small acts of rebellion in which she engages indicate that she is not as innocent or happy as she appears. She comes to see her position in her marriage with increasing clarity and finds the strength to free herself from her oppressive situation.

**Torvald Helmer** - 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 patronizing. He does not view Nora as an equal but rather as a plaything or doll to be teased and admired. In general, Torvald is overly concerned with his place and status in society, and he allows his emotions to be swayed heavily by the prospect of society's respect and the fear of society's scorn.

**Krogstad** - A lawyer who went to school with Torvald and holds a subordinate position at Torvald's bank. Krogstad's character is contradictory: though his bad deeds seem to stem from a desire to protect his children from scorn, he is perfectly willing to use unethical tactics to achieve his goals. His willingness to allow Nora to suffer is despicable, but his claims to feel sympathy for her and the hard circumstances of his own life compel us to sympathize with him to some degree.

**Mrs. Linde** - 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. Also, we learn that Mrs. Linde took responsibility for her sick parent, whereas Nora abandoned her father when he was ill.

**Dr. Rank** - 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 stoic acceptance of his 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 imminent death out of respect for Torvald's distaste for ugliness.

**Bob, Emmy, and Ivar** - 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 corrupt them, Nora acts on her belief that the quality of parenting strongly influences a child's development.

**Anne-Marie** - 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 subservient 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 coddled, pampered, and patronized.

As the play progresses, Nora reveals that she is not just a "silly girl," as Torvald calls her. That she understands the business details related to the debt she incurred 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 fierce 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 trauma that follows do not change Nora's nature; they open her eyes to her unfulfilled and underappreciated potential. "I have been performing tricks for you,

Torvald,” she says during her climactic confrontation 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 deception and forgery is the final catalyst 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 defies Torvald in small yet meaningful ways—by eating macaroons and then lying to him about it, for instance. She also swears, apparently just for the pleasure she derives from minor rebellion against societal standards. As the drama unfolds, and as Nora’s awareness of the truth about her life grows, her need for rebellion escalates, culminating 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 envision himself as Nora’s savior, 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 seizes 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 fastidious, 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 childish 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 offended by Krogstad’s failure to pay him the proper respect.

Torvald is very conscious of other people’s perceptions 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 deception. 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*

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 reputation. 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: forgery of signatures. Though he did break the law, Krogstad’s crime was relatively minor, but society has saddled him with the stigma of being a criminal and prohibited him from moving beyond his past. Additionally, Krogstad’s claim that his immoral behavior began when Mrs. Linde abandoned 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 perception of him as a despicable character.

## Themes, Motifs & 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 bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women of all economic classes in his society. In general, the play’s female characters exemplify Nora’s assertion (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 abandon 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 dictates that Torvald be the marriage’s dominant partner. Torvald issues decrees 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 deception, the attitudes of Torvald—and society—leave Nora vulnerable to Krogstad’s blackmail.

Nora’s abandonment of her children can also be interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice. Despite Nora’s great love for her children—manifested 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 obligated 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 depravity. Dr. Rank implies 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 obligated 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, abandoned 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 debt to her parent to demonstrate the complexity and reciprocal nature of familial obligations.

### The Unreliability of Appearances

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 undercut. 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, benevolent husband, reveals 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 simpering, 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 villainous Krogstad repents 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 instability of appearances within the Helmer household at the play's end results from Torvald's devotion to an image at the expense of the creation of true happiness. Because Torvald craves 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 denial 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 evolves 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 debt, because she will have the opportunity to devote 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 twists and turns depend upon the writing and reading of letters, which function within the play as the subtext that reveals 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 promissory 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 imminent 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 proclaims, "Torvald is so fastidious, 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 initiates 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**

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 dance. 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 "dishevelled."

#### New Year's Day

The action of the play is set at Christmastime, 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 debt 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.

### **A Doll's House: Individual freedom of Nora**

Individual freedom is a fundamental theme of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Through the character of Nora Ibsen shows the necessity of individual freedom. Without it one can't flourish oneself and establish oneself as equal partner with other (Nora – Helmer relationship). The protagonist, Nora always wants to be an independent person. Though she got her success, she paid a good price for herself liberty. The present paper investigates and discusses how Nora led her life before achieving her self-liberty and her passion for individual freedom.

#### **Life of Nora before her revolution:**

Actually Nora is literally trapped in Torvald's family. She hasn't been happy in her marriage, living as a "doll-wife" for Torvald. They never have any serious conversations. As Helmer's wife, she is expected to obey his wishes. Even she suppresses her desire to please him. Helmer forbids her to have macaroons though this conflicts with her freedom. Helmer wants to keep her wife attractive. She had to obey Helmer which took place during the fancy dress party. She wants to stay at the party and enjoys herself but Helmer forces her to go back home early after tarantella dance. Actually Helmer's motive was to sex with her. Thus he controls her life. When Nora refused, he reacted with the word won't! won't! He reminds her duty as a wife. The repetition of the word "won't" shows his anger. In this way she was treated by her husband. Helmer expects to be obeyed when he wants to make love to her, regardless of whether she wants it or not.

All these examples reveal an imbalance in the power distribution between Nora and Torvald. Helmer is the dominant authority. Their conflict is reflected even in letterbox episode. Nora is unable to see her letter. The letterbox is locked and Helmer possesses the key. This implies that Nora does not have the freedom to see her own letters without going Torvald. As a married woman, she was not allowed to work and had to depend on her husband to pay off her debts. She has to use to flattery to manage a job for Mrs. Linde. It seems that Nora was passive and had no individual opinion. Her own opinions are shaped by her father and her husband.

**Passion for freedom:**

Nora had great passion for freedom. She suppressed it because she was eagerly waiting for a miracle. Nora reveals to Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde that she would love to say, "Damn" to her husband. She seems to be willing to go against the tradition that women are not supposed to use coarse language. However, as soon as her husband appears, she tells Dr. Rank, who is encouraging her to say it, to keep quiet. This incident demonstrates Nora's freedom to say whatever she wishes. Nora also requested Dr. Rank to share some Macaroons. Then Dr. Rank reminds her about her husband. She said that he would not tell her anything. Even she said that she didn't care him. It is revealed that in order to pay off debts, Nora manages to get quite a bit of copying to do. Nora tells Mrs. Linde that it is almost like being a man. She enjoys working. She is forced to do it secretly because of social tradition. This shows her love for self liberation. At the end of the play, she told Torvald that she hasn't been happy in her marriage. She decides to be free from the rules that have been imposed upon her. When Torvald tells her duty as a wife and a mother. Nora says that she is first and foremost a human being.

Ibsen creates a female protagonist who chooses to leave her family to gain freedom. Nora believes that Torvald's new managerial position at the bank will solve all of her troubles and make her free. She says "Oh, Christina, I feel so light-hearted and happy. Its delightful to have lots of money, and no need to worry about things, isn't it?"(Ibsen 36). This incident shows that Nora was always freedom loving.

As a stereotypical wife, Nora did not work outside. As a result, she did not know the outside world. Torvald used this chance to rule over her. Being ignorant of the external world, Nora was compelled to take what Torvald imposed upon her in the name of love. Social convention interrupts her to achieve self-liberty. To control Nora, Helmer said, " Oh,in your blind inexperience"(Ibsen 166) Being a home maker, Nora had to depend on her husband for money. Torvald controlled the economy of his family. So it was easy for him to subjugate Nora by dint of his economic power. Thus societal expectations and monetary needs have influenced Nora's life.

Social convention clearly shows the rule of gender, more specifically the role of husband and wife. As a wife Nora is expected to obey his husband's wishes and tries to please him. The event of Macaroons shows that she has no freedom of choice. Her choice of freedom thus interrupts by Torvald. Nora wears the fancy dress according to the direction of Helmer. She wants to stay at party but Helmer forces her to go back home early after tarantella dance. He wants to have sex with her. Even he became angry, when she refused his appeal. This reveals that women are not supposed to have the freedom to decide when to have sexual intercourse. Helmer's authoritative mentality is responsible for this.

Relationship between Nora and Helmer is not based on equal power distribution. As a result Helmer is the dominant partner who hinders the freedom of Nora. This typical power imbalance conflicts with Nora's freedom.

It is a conventional for a woman to be passive and have no individual opinion. Nora utters "But our house has been nothing but a playroom. Here I have been your doll-wife as I used to be papa's doll-child" (Ibsen 164).

Nora's own opinions are to a certain extent, shaped by her father and her husband. Nora says that at home her father had to tell what her father thought. She kept quiet about her different opinion. She was her father's doll. In this way patriarchal society hinders her freedom of expression. After her marriage her opinions are shaped by Torvald.

Women are never thought of as an independent individual. They are thought of as mothers, wives and daughters. Nora's decision to abandon her husband and children to discover her real self. Torvald tried to convince her in the name of social rules.

Torvald is the stereotypically strong husband while Nora is little sky lark. Torvald used bird image for addressing Nora. In the first act, Torvald refers to Nora as his little feather brains, his little scatter brain and his squirrel sulking. Thus he depicts the weakness of Nora. It is seen that if a person heard his weakness continuously she started to believe that she / he is weak. It is a way to control a person which Torvald used.

Actually Torvald treats Nora like a child for example as a child forbidden by her mother from eating candy. Nora hides macaroons from Torvald. Acting as a parent-husband Torvald controls her easily.

Nora's self deception prevents her from understanding the social prejudices that limit her independence. Nora does not initially question her situation. Even she sees her husband's possessiveness as an expression of his love for her. Torvald loves me beyond words. He would feel jealous if she even mentioned any of her old friends back home. So of course she dropped that. In this way, to some extent, she is also responsible for her subjugation.

#### **Why she departs from Torvald's home:**

In Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* the protagonist took a crucial decision to leave her family. Nora decides to leave because she understood that she had lived in illusion so many years in Torvald's home. So she wants to face reality.

Comforts can often blind someone from the real truth. It is very true in Nora's case. She is utterly trapped in domestic comfort. She gets everything in her doll's house. She eventually loses touch with the outside world and consequently realises truth. When Torvald chastises her because of her lies, she finally notices that she is confined. She is not truly loved. Nora recognized that she had lost sight of the truth. So she takes a radical action. Torvald told about her ignorance of the world. She replied that she didn't have an experience. But now she is going to make out who is right the world or she. It is the realization that forces Nora to take such a radical action.

Nora was expecting for a miracle. The miracle was that her husband would save her from the coming danger. She thought that Torvald would forgive her for her forgery. When she saw its opposite scenario, she revolted against her husband and left him. She always obeyed his wishes and tried to please him because of the expectation of a miracle from him. She says "I have so patiently all these eight years; for of course I saw clearly enough that miracles don't happen everyday"(Ibsen 170). She was sure that Torvald would step forward to take the blame on himself.

Nora found that she had no identity. Her identity is shaped by her husband and father. Then she revolts against her husband who represents patriarchal society. Being deprived of speech, action

and performance, she decided to leave Torvald. When her forgery was revealed, Nora found that her relation with her husband is not mutual. She also found an imbalance in the power distribution between her husband and her. Helmer is the dominant partner. Nora finally realized that for eight years she did not understand her husband at all. She has made nothing out of her life because she has been constantly living in the shadow of men. She has been deprived of her freedom to grow to become an individual. She says that Helmer and her father have done her a great wrong. So she decides to leave Helmer and her children in order to experience the world.

Actually Nora wants to discover who she really is. She wants to educate herself. At the same time she wants to gain experience and knowledge to find out things like religion and morality. She is not content with any second hand experience or what is written in books. She is willing to break up her marriage to fulfil her sacred duty. These things help her to take decision to depart from Torvald's family. When Nora learns that her marriage was not effective, she decided to leave Torvald. Her marriage was playful wedlock.

In *A Doll's House* Nora's independent nature is a direct contrast with the tyrannical authority of Torvald. Nora and Torvald are not truthful to each other. When Torvald is proved as disloyal and ungrateful, Nora departs from his home.

### **Self-awakening:**

In acts 3 Nora's illusions about her family life are shattered by Helmer's selfish and insensitive reaction to the news of Nora's forgery. He said, "oh, what an awful awakening!" In all these eight years she who was my pride and joy a hypocrite, alien worse, worse – a criminal! How infinity disgusting it all is! The shame!"(Ibsen 154). Helmer's outburst grows her self-awakening. It is not until she sees the truth of Torvald's character. She finally breaks free as a lark from his grasp. Her long expected miracle never took place because of Torvald's selfish character. In fact, he said that no man would sacrifice his honour for his criminal wife. She finally comes to a much longer understanding of women's plight. She replies "thousands of women have". This four words statement shows that she had many achievement and she is worthy of a larger award than what she has been given. Thus Nora discovers her situation in Torvald's family.

Moreover Nora found that society norms and forms are also against a woman. So she refused to believe these social norms. She said "I don't believe in that anymore. I believe that, before all else, I am a human being, as much as you are or at least that I should try to become one. I know that most people agree with you, Torvald and that they say in book. But henceforth I can't be satisfied with what most people say, and what is in books".(Ibsen 168) I have to think over this things myself and try to understand them.

### **Pain of getting individual freedom:**

Her departure from Torvald's family will help Nora to gain her freedom as an individual. Though the Kristine's statement we got the idea of Nora's coming future. Kristine said that she had to work for living. Christine had worked all day long which was her only joy. She was completely alone in the world. Actually Nora lost her husband children, social status and security but she gained her freedom as an individual.

The ending of the plays makes the situation ambiguous. We are unsure that she will return to her husband's home or not. But she proves it clearly that she failed to flourish herself in Torvald's house. Through the weapon of resistance one can establish one's identity and equal right. Nora's actions and decisions prove that only the resistance can establish a person's true identity.