

Women's Rights in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper deals with Henrik Ibsen's treatment of women's suffering in the male-dominated society in the nineteenth century in which men have most of the power and influence over women. In his masterpiece *A Doll's House*, Ibsen presents a loving and devoted wife who has been abused by her husband for exerting much effort to save but his life. Thus, the audiences and readers are indirectly asked to use their mental faculties to estimate how certain issues such as Women's Rights are significant while watching or reading with their physical eyes the events of the play.

Ibsen's presentation of the women's agony in his drama may stem from his moral responsibility as a dramatist conscious of the main ingredients conducive to peace, dignity, freedom, and all signs of happiness to prevail among his people.

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) is the father of the modern drama and is considered Norway's most notable dramatist, especially after writing his masterpiece *A Doll's House* which is also conducive to his globally fame and it is regarded as his first international success since it has been performed or read mostly all over the world because of its universal subject matter that concerns to the issue of women's rights which was the subject of worldwide discussion at the end of the nineteenth century.

At the beginning of his career, Ibsen writes some romantic plays such as *Love's Comedy* (1862), *Brand* (1865), *The League of Youth* (1869), and *Peer Gynt* (1876). Then he turns his pen to write realistic themes in his plays that deal with realistic subject matters whereby he openly and persistently attacks the international false social values that make people worldwide to psychologically suffer the trauma of losing the sense of human dignity. He starts with *The Pillars of Society* (1877), *A Doll's House* (1879) which is the subject matter of the research paper, *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), and *The Wild Duck* (1884).

In the realistic plays, the unrealistic elements of the earlier romantic plays are replaced by the prose dialogue in which Ibsen has also lowered action to thought because for him the lesson of the play is more important than its action. In this respect, it seems that the Irish famous satirist dramatist George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) who is the father of the drama of ideas and one of Ibsen's contemporaries has been too much affected by Ibsen. To Shaw, the lesson of the play is more important than its unity and plot. The play, in order to stir thought, must have a conflict. Unity is fatal to drama while conflict is

indispensable; no conflict, no drama. Thus, the aim of Shaw's plays is important and it does not matter whether people laugh or not, for he wants to arouse their thinking so that they can willingly amend their thoughts: "When a comedy is performed, it is nothing to me that the spectators laugh: any fool can make an audience laugh. I want to see how many of them, laughing or grave, are in the melting mood."¹

Clearly, Shaw's literary works are consistent with the works of Ibsen whose plays are considered scandalous to many of his era. Ibsen's works examined the realities that lay behind many facades, revealing much that was disquieting to his contemporaries. Hence, Shaw defended Ibsen against his critics when Ibsen's plays were translated into English by "maintaining that the playwright's duty is to be unshaken for the sake of concentrating on ideas".² Probably, Shaw learned from Ibsen how to apply contemporary settings and scenes which helped to promote ideas. Thus, Shaw is determined to tackle in his plays, especially *Arms and the Man* all problems no matter how socially, politically, religiously, or morally they were complicated.

However, in his realistic plays, including *A Doll's House*, Ibsen focuses on social problems of the factual life of his time, concerning domestic themes especially the relationship between husband and wife. His drama is best described by Allardyce Nicoll as he notes:

In the first place, his drama is a domestic drama. ... His aim is to dramatize the life of his own day. He realized perfectly that the long-antiquated emotions of the spectacular plays had nothing in common with ordinary men and women; that the drama, if it was to rise to its pristine greatness, would have to adapt itself to the needs of the present, to be a mirror of the age, and, instead of escaping into romantic fripperies, make itself the stem monitor of the time.³

However, the problem of women's rights was particularly topical in Norway at the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Many books had been published on this critical subject at that time since John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* had been translated in 1869.⁴

Before writing *A Doll's House*, Ibsen was not entirely interested in the issue of women's rights as his heroines such as Svanhild in *Love's Comedy*, Agnes in *Brand* and Solveig in *Peer Gynt* were submissive, coping with their inferior status in the nineteenth-century male-dominated society, but he gradually began to pave the way to write

about this subject in his next plays such as *The League of Youth* when Selma Bratsberg, a minor character in the play, has once protested against her husband when he treats her just like a doll "You dressed me up like a doll; you played with me as one plays with a child".⁵ In his next work *The Pillars of Society*, Ibsen created two more rebellious women, Lona Hessel and Dina Dorf who throughout the events of the play bitterly complain about their inferior position in the male-dominated society which in general degrades them. Thus, the two plays mentioned above can be regarded as the cornerstone of writing his masterpiece *A Doll's House*.

Furthermore, Ibsen was deeply affected by a real story which had sparked his interest in writing *A Doll's House* when he refers to one of his acquaintances named Laura Petersen, a young Norwegian girl whom Ibsen took a great fancy to her as he called her as his "skylark".⁶ Laura's tragic story started when she married in 1872 a Danish teacher named Victor Kieler who in 1876 suffered from tuberculosis, a serious infectious disease that forced him to go to a warmer climate so that he can be cured according to a doctor's advice. Since the married couple was poor and Victor, the husband, became fearfully frantic at any mention of money, Laura secretly borrowed money – as Nora, does in the play- from a friend of hers so that she can afford for the expenses of the impending trip to Italy where her husband may regain his health. Laura arranged the loan provided that she has to pay the debt after two years exactly in 1878. However, the trip to Italy in 1876 proved success as her husband regained health and Laura later did her best to raise money for the repayment but she failed and her friend who lent her the money had himself fallen into a desperate financial strait. Thus she forged a cheque to earn money from a bank but also her attempt had also failed because the bank had discovered the forgery and refused payment. As a result, Laura was led astray and had no way except telling the truth to her husband who as soon as he heard the story, he denied the fact that she did it for his sake and then treated her as a fraud and deprived her other children as well, thinking that her existence will spoil them. Thus, Laura's life became cruelly shattered and eventually she suffered a nervous breakdown that led her to spend a month at a public asylum where she found herself among lunatics. Being recovered from her mental shock, the asylum discharged her and Victor reluctantly agreed to take her back for children's sake. However this factual tragic story apparently affects Ibsen too much and crystallizes in him the idea of prejudice of some men towards the hasty false behavior of some women, pushing

him to write an outspoken remark in his "Notes for a Modern Tragedy" on October 19, 1978:

There are two kinds of moral laws,
two kinds of conscience, one for men,
quite different, for women. They don't
understand each other; but in practical life,
woman is judged by masculine law, as
though she weren't a woman but a man.⁷

It is a matter of fact that literature is the mirror of the society which reflects the spirit of the age when it reveals, for example, the faults of some people in an attractive way to make others while having entertainment through reading or watching a play, for example, aware of the dangers of the others' mistakes in order to avoid falling in such faults. Laura is just like the female major character, Nora, in *A Doll's House*, who does well when she exerts efforts to help her husband but she does it in a way that does not satisfy him. Thus, one can conclude that she has no idea about what is right and what is wrong in life as she wrongly follows her heart not mind and this is the very thing that causes her downfall especially she is a woman living in a community ruled by men.

She has committed forgery, which is her pride;
for she has done it out of love for her husband,
to save his life. But this husband of hers takes
his standpoint, conventionally honourable.⁸

However, the appearance of the play came as a shock to some of European people who incline to particular beliefs of the existing social customs and ethics, concerning motherhood. Halvdan Koht, an early biographer of Ibsen, says that the play "exploded like a bomb into contemporary life,"⁹ and it "pronounced a death sentence on accepted social ethics".¹⁰ Furthermore, Koht expresses a grave concern about the terrible behavior of Nora when she leaves her children, saying that "I was shocked in a way that was completely unexpected"¹¹ that Nora as a loving and devoted mother "should not leave her children".¹²

Though, the extent of Nora's hasty behaviour of leaving not only her house but also her children and husband for ever came as a shock to some people, it apparently because of the sudden bad treatment of Helmer, her husband, which makes her feel very upset due to his prejudice and pride. In fact, Nora has suffered a lot after Helmer knew the truth of forgery and borrowing money, forgetting her actions were

only to save his life. As a result, Nora has been abused by her husband instead of honoured for her good deed as she thought. Nora's secret behaviour of forgery and borrowing money without informing her husband who is "frightfully strict about such matters," (I. p.36)¹³ and leaving her children and husband at the end of the play are for some extent connected with melodrama because a lot of exciting and sad events occur throughout the play in which characters' emotions are exaggerated. Helmer asserts that Nora has melodramatic characteristics she inherits from her father when she decides to leave the house forever at the end of the play, saying "Oh, don't be melodramatic. Your father was always ready with that kind of remark" (III.p.94). Thus, melodrama as a romantic genre leaves its impression on the play, pushing readers or spectators to discern that Ibsen when writing the play intends to show them some romantic aspects of certain characters in order to find fault with them.

Not only does Nora appear to be a romantic character from the early beginning of the play but also Krogstad, Helmer's old friend, who behaves like a typical villain in a melodrama when Ibsen makes him the moving spirit of the most evil actions of the play as he wickedly drives a wedge between Helmer and Nora after he felt frustrated and angry due to the inability of Nora to pay off her debt. In fact, Krogstad tries to get back his debt and to achieve his personal interests at the same time through threatening the psychologically tortured Nora to make her enforce her husband to let him stay in his position in the bank. By doing so, Krogstad appears to be extortionist and an exploitative figure who commits the crime of obtaining things by using force or threat. However, the exploitation of Krogstad to such a delicate woman like Nora is by itself one of melodramatic elements as Ronald Gray puts it: "The manipulation of legal niceties against uniformed young women is another device characteristic of villains in melodrama."¹⁴

Despite the fact that Helmer seems rather cruel and ungrateful to scold Nora for her secret actions without telling him, he is by some means right because in the early beginning of the play he resolutely refuses the idea of borrowing money and reminds her of how he feels about this when Nora suggests to borrow some money to cover the expenses of some stuff for Christmas as he says "No debts! Never borrow! A home that is founded on debts and borrowing can never be a place of freedom and beauty," (I.p.25). Moreover, Nora does not tell the truth to Helmer that she has committed a forgery while borrowing the money from Krogstad, claiming that the money is from her father

and this is a lie which pushes Helmer after knowing the truth while reading Krogstad's first letter at the end of the play not only calling her "a hypocrite, a liar – worse, worse – a criminal!"(III.p.93), but depriving her of her children by telling her that: "the children shall be taken out of your hands. I dare no longer entrust them to you" (III.p.94). Besides, Helmer mentions that they should be separated from each other but at the same time they "must appear to be living together just as before. Only *appear*, of course." (Ibid).

It is a matter of fact that lying is something terrible which seems steeping Nora to the extent that she feels it is something absolutely essential to obtain things she tries to have or enjoy. Nora does not only lie about the forgery and the borrowing of money but she lies from the early beginning of the play when she tells her husband that she does not eat macaroons as she promises him previously "No, Torvald – I promise you, honestly-!"(I.p.27) but in fact she has already eaten a couple as the play tells us; "She takes from her pocket a bag containing macaroons and eats a couple." (I.p.23). In addition, at a meeting in her house with Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde, two friends of the family, Nora offers a small macaroon to Dr. Rank who immediately amazed at the sight of macaroons in her hand, astonishingly saying; "Macaroons! I say! I thought they were forbidden here" (I.p.40). Once again Nora lies when she replies seriously that "these are some Christine gave me," (Ibid) while the truth is that Christine has no relationship with them. Moreover, Nora also lies when she confirms to Krogstad that the bond (I.O.U) ¹⁵ has been signed by her father as a security for the debt "He did sign it" (I.p.47) but in fact she does forge the signature of her father after his death.

Obviously, Nora is so weak that she cannot obtain what she desires for only through relying on fraud and subtle deception. Besides, Nora is also a dreamer since she has a romantic view of the happiness she desires for when she resorts to illusions about achieving a happier life for her and the family so that she can escape from her cruel surroundings when she dreams of her husband's new job in the New Year as a manager of a bank where he can get a big salary which will bring them as a family a lot of money and enable them to do whatever they like as she reveals to Linde that:

Oh, you can imagine how happy we are!
He's joining the bank in the New Year,
and he'll be getting a big salary, and lots
of percentages too. From now on we'll be
able to live quite differently – we'll be able

to do whatever we want. (I.p.30).

In general when some people are, for example, in agony, sadness, and misery they unconsciously escape into dreams by experiencing imaginary events in their minds or deliberately into illusions or daydreams of things they would like to happen, but unfortunately in *A Doll's House* Nora who is keen to see her dreams of achieving a happy life through getting a big salary she finally realizes that her dreams go in vain.

Despite the fact, that Ibsen's realistic characters sometimes appear types in a melodrama since Ibsen uses a lot of exciting and sad episodes throughout the events of the play but they are mostly individuals because they "are never fully understood until the final curtain has fallen"¹⁶. The best example of this case is when Nora surprisingly leaves everything behind her, including her children, the dearest thing in life for a loving and devoted mother, when she forever slams the door of the house behind her after she realizes that her husband is not a real man as he claims. When writing the play, it seems that Ibsen is fully aware of the French technique in the well-made play in which suspense and surprises are commonly used.

Truly Ibsen has accurately portrayed the melodramatic characteristics and the realistic ones when he makes Nora and Krogstad appear as melodramatic characters at the beginning of the play and then he successfully changes them to be realistic ones at the end of it in order to make his play appear to be a realistic one, handling contemporary social problems. Moreover, too much emphasis is obviously placed not only on melodrama but also on heredity when Ibsen from the early beginning of the play makes Helmer blame Nora that she is an extravagant person just like her father who "always on the look-out for some way to get money, but as soon as you have any it just runs through your fingers and you never know where it's gone"(I.p.26). Then Helmer confirms to Nora that extravagance is something inherited because "it's in your blood. Yes, yes, yes, these things are hereditary" (I.p.27). Moreover, Ibsen does not only successfully affirm the characteristics of melodrama and heredity in the play but he also implicates the effects of the dangerous environment on Nora when the latter has been victimized because once she exerted much efforts to spare the life of her sick husband. Being rebuked and insulted by her husband, Nora is disillusioned with Helmer's love when she realizes that his love is not as true as she thinks as well as she discovers that he is the hypocrite not her as he used to

call her earlier. After reading Krogstad's threatening letter, Helmer does not keep his word of advocating her as he previously promises her. In fact, he does not only reproach her abruptly but also he keeps her away from her three children. Helmer's horrific actions against Nora really ignite her emotions of having very strong feelings of hostility towards him and she no longer loves him "Oh, Torvald, it hurts me terribly to have to say it, because you've always been so kind to me. But I can't help it. I don't love you any longer" (III.p.101).

However, heredity and environment are the important dominating factors related to naturalism which leave their imprints on the development of characters such as Krogstad, Nora, and also on Dr, Rank who suffers a terrible disease that he has inherited from his dissolute father. This horrible hereditary illness is mentioned by Nora while talking to Mrs. Linde as she feels pity for him: "But he's got a terrible disease - he's got spinal tuberculosis, poor man. His father was a frightful creature who kept mistress and so on. As a result Dr Rank has been sickly ever since he was a child – you understand" (II.p.57). Furthermore, this awful fact is confirmed by Dr. Rank himself when he bitterly complains about the oppression of fathers towards their sons since it is not his fault to have such fatal disease but his father's fault and he is the victim who must unwillingly suffer and pay at the same time the price of his father's sins as he says: "With death on my hands? And all this to atone for someone else's sin? Is there justice in that? ... My poor innocent spine must pay for the fun my father had as a gay young lieutenant" (II.p.65).

Thus, one can easily conclude that the influence of heredity and environment are so great throughout the events of the play especially on Nora that she becomes under high pressure whether she performs her duty as a devoted wife to save her sick husband who hates borrowing money or to yield to her community's current customs that prevent wives from taking their part in helping their relatives since according to their traditions the duty of a woman is determined to only being a wife and a mother. Being a devoted wife, Nora selects the critical choice of risk-taking which might have undesirable results if her husband knows the truth of forgery and borrowing money even though these actions were made for the sake of him. It seems that Ibsen indirectly intends to say that it is not only the fault of Nora to behave against the will of her husband but also the fault of the latter when she is helpless and forced to do so since there is no choice left to her.

Helmer from the early beginning shows a great love to Nora when he treats her as a loving doll as he, for example, calls her names such as

"little bird", "little Nora", "songbird", "lark", and "squirrel" and the like. His endearing nicknames make Nora feel that Helmer does love her. Besides, when Nora keeps thinking secretly about unpleasant things that might happen to them, including their children, if Helmer does not keep Krogstad's place at the bank, Helmer says in a very proud way especially when he recognizes Nora's worries that "Let what will happen, happen. When the real crisis comes, you will not find me lacking in strength or courage. I am man enough to bear the burden for us both" (II.p.63). Moreover, Helmer sometimes brags about his support to her to the extent that he is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of her if something terrible threatens her "Nora, often I wish some terrible danger might threaten you, so that I could offer my life and my blood, everything, for your sake" (III.p. 92).

As long as confidence is concerned, Nora is no longer trusts Helmer despite all his former allegations and revelations of love to her because she previously feels that if he knows the harsh reality of forgery and borrowing money he would not stand by her. Thus she left the house to keep face because she knows very well that she will be dismissed if she does not go by herself since she sadly confides her worries to Mrs. Linde that "if anything else should happen to me – so that I wasn't here any longer – "(II.p.74). Moreover, Nora believes that the faults she has committed are because of him and it would be a "miracle" if Helmer admits the responsibility for her faults, thus she tells Linde; "it's wonderful really, in a way – sitting here and waiting for the miracle to happen" (II.p.79), because she also knows very well in her deep emotions that he is not a man enough to admit that he is the cause of all her tragedy when she tries her best to let Mrs. Linde understand that "If anyone should try to take the blame, and say it was all his fault – you understand - ?" (II.p.74). It seems that Ibsen is very clever in choosing words accurately when he selects, for example, the word "miracle" several times on the tongue of Nora because "miracle" as a word is usually connected with a wonderful and surprising event that is believed to be caused by God. Nora now is absolutely certain that her husband would not support her if something terrible happens to her as he frequently claims because she takes it to heart that his love to her is not real but only for his convenience, so it would be a "miracle" if he takes the blame.

When the miracle is doomed to failure, Nora's earlier assessments and expectations of Helmer's bravery towards admitting responsibility for her previous actions prove to be true as she speaks frankly to Helmer, telling him that "It happened this evening, when the miracle

failed to happen. It was then I realized you weren't the man I'd thought you to be" (III.p.101). In fact, Nora stays calm for a long time, waiting for Helmer to confirm his love and devotion by giving up his pride and confessing his guilt, saying:

I've waited so patiently, for eight whole years – well, good heavens, I'm not such a fool as to suppose that miracles occur every day. Then this dreadful thing happened to me, and then I knew: "Now the miracle will take place!" When Krogstad's letter was lying over there, it never occurred to me for a moment that you would let that man trample over you. I knew that you would say to him: "publish the facts to the world!" ... Then I was certain that you would step forward and take all the blame on yourself, and say: "I am the one who is guilty" (III.p.101-102)!

Thus Nora begins to reject the authority of her husband. She does not only revolt against him but also against her male-dominated society as well when she defends indirectly women, including herself, because she believes that they are also human beings, just like men, having their own entities and feelings. Besides, she opposes Helmer because he degrades her status to only a wife and mother when he tells her that "First and foremost you are a wife and mother"(III.p.100), by telling him "I don't believe that any longer. I believe that I am first and foremost a human being, like you" (Ibid). Moreover, she also rebels against the traditions of her society which prevent women from taking their part in standing side by side with men so that they would together overcome their problems:

I've learned now that certain laws are different from what I'd imagined them to be; but I can't accept that such laws can be right. Has a woman really not the right to spare her dying father pain, or save her husband's life? I can't believe that.

(III.p.101).

For his part, Helmer seems to be a selfish narrow-minded man who cares only about himself, and not about other people, including his wife. His pride and self-aggrandizement push him to be indifferent to the suffering of Nora and at the same time he appears to be interested only in taking care of his dignity and brilliant future when he explains that Nora has shattered his hopes, dreams and future as a result of her

previous deeds: "Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined my whole future." (III.p.93). Thus his frequent earlier speeches of protecting his wife if something bad happens to her are just illusions. Furthermore, he is not such an idealist that he cannot see the problems that wrap his wife in order to take over and find solutions for them prudently, especially Nora's love to him is so great that she loved him "more than anything else in the world"(III.p.93). On the contrary, Helmer complicates the problem as he scolds not only Nora who honestly asserts the fact that she who implements the actions of forgery and borrowing money after reading Krogstad's first letter, but also her father when he accuses him of not having religion, morals, and sense of duty and it is he who bequeaths all his bad characteristics to her: "all your father's recklessness and instability – be quiet! – I repeat, all your father's recklessness and instability he has handed on to you! No religion, no morals, no sense of duty (III.p.93)!"

Besides, it seems that Helmer has his own self-styled idealism which urges him not to be indebted to anyone and one can imagine what a horrible thing for Helmer would be if the debt is carried out by a woman who is considered an inferior creature, just in the case of Nora, since, according to the European traditions of the nineteenth century, men in general were considered superior and infallible who were never wrong, finding it difficult to shake off their sense of social inferiority to women who were regarded as inferior to them. Thus, women at that time used to be just like slaves to their husbands, obeying their commands without question and it was the women who were always to blame and it was the men who were always right. This fact is confirmed by Nora who tells Helmer that he always right about whatever he does; "Oh, you're always right, whatever you do"(III.p.87).

It seems that Ibsen throughout the events of the play reveals the slavery of women when he indirectly criticizes women rights abuses as he makes Nora at the end of the play felt very depressed about her position of being just like a slave who has no right to oppose her master or of being look like a doll which is handed over from a person to another as she makes it clear to Helmer that he has never loved her for her own personality but only for fun as she says:

It's the truth, Torvald. When I lived with Papa, he used to tell me what he thought about everything, so that I never had any opinions but his. And if I did have any of my own, I kept them quiet, because he

wouldn't have liked them. He called me his little doll, and he played with me just the way I played with my dolls. Then I came here to live in your house –" (III.p.98).

The domination of men in the nineteenth century over women is clearly portrayed by Ibsen when he makes Nora, after being disillusioned by Helmer's bad treatment, accusing not only her father but also her husband of being taught her only faults and it is they who make her just like a (parasite) who gets money or other things from other people without doing anything in return and it was their severe mistake that she had done nothing to her life:

Now I look back on it, it's as if I've been living here like a pauper, from hand to mouth. I performed tricks for you, and you gave me food and drink. But that was how you wanted it. You and Papa have done me a great wrong. It's your fault that I have done nothing with my life.... (III.p.98).

In addition, Nora has indirectly criticized anew her society's customs concerning marriage and domestic upbringing that shape the whole life of the community's individuals in the nineteenth century when she expresses great concern not only at her life but also children's: "But our home has never been anything but a playroom. I've been your doll-wife, just as used to be papa's doll-child. And the children have been my dolls. (Ibid).

By dealing with the current nineteenth-century social problems concerning familial life, including marriage, *A Doll's House* is regarded as a realistic play whose theme is a direct challenge not only to the authority and domination of man in the family but also to the whole traditions of that time concerning women status. Ibsen has successfully makes Nora the true voice of the revolting woman when she takes her romantic dress off and puts on her realistic one as she firmly decides to leave her husband and children. She boldly tells her husband that a wife's sacred duty is not only restricted to her children and husband but also towards herself: "I have another duty which is equally sacred ... My duty towards myself" (III.p.100). Actually Nora wants to leave everything she has behind her after being shocked by her husband's abuse, not only to educate herself far away from Helmer who previously offers to educate her but also to have her own independence

as she eagerly desires to rely only on her own so that she will not need help or money from anyone even her husband. She frankly tells Helmer that he is not the suitable man to educate her and reveals at the same time the reason that stands behind her leaving when she explains that: "Oh, Torvald, you're not the man to educate me into being the right wife for you. ... I must educate myself. And you can't help me with that. It's something I must do by myself. That's why I'm leaving you" (III.p.99).

Truly, Ibsen has effectively depicted the real image of courageous defiance of women by making Nora the spokeswoman of the females as she does not only prove her own personality against the repression of her society but also she does pave the way at the same time for future women emancipation. Despite all Helmer's objections and entreaties to Nora in order to persuade her not to abandon him, she absolutely refuses, believing that Helmer is not more than a "stranger" whom she cannot live with him anymore "Torvald, in that moment I realized that for eight years I had been living here with a complete stranger, and had borne him three children - ! Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself to pieces" (III.p.102)! In fact Nora was living in an illusion as she was deluding herself all the years she had spent with Helmer into believing that it would all come right in the end, hoping that her husband who was rather ungrateful might be changed for the better. Yet, Nora's illusions about Helmer represent an outlet for her to escape the harsh reality of her husband, besides; these illusions have to some extent provided her with some morale support so that she could endure the painful and difficult situation of the cruel environment around her, created by her husband and the current conventions.

On the other hand, Nora remains steadfast and firm in her belief that she has done the right thing when supporting previously her husband and of revolting presently against everything that surrounds her. Thus she would not be deceived any longer by her narrow-minded husband who pleads with her not to leave home as they can even live at least as "brother and sister" (III.p.103). Actually, Nora is changed to be a realistic woman after being a romantic one. Thus she wants to hear no more of the cheap and false words from her husband as she used to do throughout her eight-year marriage. Moreover, she does not want more illusions, dreams, and lies. All she wants from Helmer and herself to face the truth: "Just listen to what I have to say. You and I have got to face facts, Torvald" (III.p.97). By saying so, she undoubtedly wants Helmer to accept the fact of what she has earlier

done as being true and inevitable since there was no one except her to save his life, besides he must face the truth that their relationship has ended. Nora is wisely contented with her thinking that Helmer could not be changed because he is a self-centered husband who is only concerned with his own wants and needs and never thinks about his wife who has suffered a lot because of him and the best example for that is when Helmer becomes very cheerful while reading the second letter sent by Krogstad in which the latter returned the I.O.U. to Nora and made apology at the same time for troubling them as he utters a cry of joy, shouting: "Nora! Nora! No – I must read it once more. Yes, yes, it's true! I am saved! Nora, I am saved" (III.p.95)! Helmer's last words (I am saved! Nora, I am saved) prove again Helmer's arrogance and selfishness that he cares only about himself and these words at the same time came just like an avalanche falling down on the poor heart of Nora who stands worried and suspicious, wondering surprisingly and depressingly about her status as a wife deserved to be loved and respected as she asks him "What about me" (Ibid). Thus it would be impossible for Helmer after this horrible situation to restore Nora to her previous obedience because she is by now completely changed.

It is a matter of fact that marriage is not only a relationship between a husband and wife but also a sacred relationship between them in which there should be moral obligations of interest, cooperation, respect, understanding, and protection in order to make each one of them happy and capable of conducting a balanced life. In the case of Nora who sacrificed too much to endure the heavy burden of her responsibility as a loving and devoted wife who had made every effort to recover her husband's health is now facing her husband's ingratitude and denial that cause her a lot of difficulty and worry, pushing her not only to hate and desert her husband but also to scorn the customs of her society at that time which allow the husband to free himself from any obligations towards his wife: "Listen, Torvald. When a wife leaves her husband's house, as I'm doing now, I'm told that according to the law he is freed of any obligations towards her. In any case, I release you from any such obligations" (III.p.103).

However, it is Helmer's duty as a loving husband as he frequently claims at the beginning of the play to look after his wife and protect her interests. But unfortunately his idealism prevents him from doing so because he has no readiness to give up his "honour" even for the woman he loves when he explains that to Nora "But no man can be expected to sacrifice his honour, even for the person he loves" (III.p.102). After hearing Helmer's words mentioned above, Nora

becomes so frustrated and hopeless that she does not hope any change or improvement concerning Helmer's beliefs and behaviour and it would be impossible for her to get reunited with him. Nora still believes of miracles when Helmer asks her if there is any way to bring back together, she answers him while picking up her suitcase "Then the miracle of miracles would have to happen" (III.p.104). According to her recent tragic experience she has gained due to her bitter life with her husband, Nora confidently desires for change not only for herself but also for Helmer, besides, she would not believe in miracles anymore: "You and I would both have to change so much that – oh, Torvald, I don't believe in miracles any longer" (Ibid). By leaving the house, Nora is determined to fight her way free from Helmer's psychological imprisonment by breaking up his handcuffs and throwing off the shackles of marriage as well which according to her horrible experience is no more than a cage that she hates to see herself locked up in it and by which Helmer imprisons his tweeting lark for a long time. She explains to Helmer who intends to "believe in miracles"(III.p.104), at the end of the play "That life together between us two could become a marriage. Goodbye" (Ibid). By uttering these words, Nora slams the street door behind her as the play tells us that "The street door is slammed shut downstairs" (Ibid), which means that Nora is no longer a prisoner, slave, and doll. The critic Thomas F. Van Lean has effectively compared the setting of the play which is the living-room to a prison from which Nora; "the lark" flies away to the outside world where she can gain her freedom:

As a result, the setting comes to represent not only a milieu but also a prison, the cage in which Helmer confines his twittering lark. In the last act, when "from below is heard the reverberation of a heavy door closing," the significance of Nora's release from her husband and his world gains the added implication of the shattered box, the burst cage, the sudden coming into existence of the freedom of the outside world where the lark can try her wings.¹⁷

By writing this play, it seems that Ibsen does not only want to show the real disgusting image of the social domestic conflicts of his time but also he wants to tell a real message to the world that man can be changed as he makes two of his major characters (Krogstad and Nora) changed to the better at the end of the play. Thus, it is clear that the aim of Ibsen as a revolutionary writer is social

reformation and change. Moreover, Ibsen would seem to be one of the most revolutionary spirits in the theatre of revolt in which he decisively strives for reforming and changing man. In this respect, Ibsen seems that he looks like the expressionists whose concern is man because it is man himself who is responsible for his problems that he can change the world if he sets himself free from his self-enslavement, or as Oscar G. Brockett points out that:

Man is always the center of the
expressionist's interest. He is seen
as being capable of nobility and as
a creature who strives for greatness.
But industrialism and science have
Kept man's eyes on the ground and
have reduced him to machine like
creature through the ideals of mass
production and conformity of behavior.¹⁸

It is true that when Helmer treats Nora badly, he is just like industrialism which degrades man to machine-like creature, forgetting that Nora is a human being having a limited patience and it would be difficult for her to stay calm especially after all abuses and tortures she faces which are carried out by her husband. However, the play is by itself a big coup against both the overly strict authoritarian rule of men over women and the current traditions concerning women's rights as the play starts out as a reaction against existing convention of the nineteenth century. As long as women's rights are concerned Ibsen firmly protested that he worked for the Women's Rights movement when he was invited in 1898, nineteen years after he wrote *A Doll's House*, to address the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights in Christiania, by saying:

I have never written any play to further
a social purpose. ... but I must decline the
honour of being said to have worked for the
Women's Rights movement. I am not even
very sure what Women's Rights really are.¹⁹

Really Ibsen's drama can be regarded as a message to all humanity to take care of the equality of sexes (male and female) which makes them have the same status, rights, and responsibilities in society where they live in order to achieve happiness not only for them but also for the upcoming generations.

Notes

- 1- George Bernard Shaw, "*Preface to Plays Pleasant*," in George Bernard Shaw, *Arms and the Man* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1973). P.7.
- 2- <http://www.pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/gynt.pdf>.
- 3- Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama: An Historical Survey from the Beginning to the Present Time* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1957), p. 340.
- 4- Michael Meyer, "Introduction" to Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), p.11.
- 5- www.megaessays.com.
- 6- Michael Meyer, "Introduction" to Henrik Ibsen, *A doll's House*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), p.12.
- 7- Ibid. p.12-13
- 8- Ibid. p.13.
- 9- <http://www.theguardian.com>.
- 10- Ibid.
- 11- Ibid.
- 12- Ibid.
- 13- Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), I.,p.36. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in my text.
- 14- Ronald Gray, *Ibsen-A Dissenting View: A Study of the Last Twelve Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.44.
- 15- An I.O.U is a written promise that someone will pay back some money that he has borrowed. I.O.U is also an abbreviation for "I owe you".
- 16- Alan. S. Downer, *The British Drama: A Handbook and Brief Chronicle* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1950), p.300.
- 17- Thomas F. Van Lean, *The Idiom of Drama* (Ithace, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p.44.
- 18- Oscar G. Brockett, *The Theater: An Introduction* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p.298.
- 19- Michael Meyer, "Introduction" to Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), p.21.

حقوق المرأة في مسرحية هنريك أبسن البيت اللعبة

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المستخلص

يعني هذا البحث بمعالجة هنريك أبسن لمعاناة النساء في المجتمع المهيمن عليه من قبل الرجال في القرن التاسع عشر حيث يمتلك الرجال اغلب السلطة والتأثير على النساء عنما قدم ابسن في مسرحيته البيت للعبة الزوجة الغيورة والمحبة التي ظلمت لانها بذلت جهدا كبيرا فقط لانقاذ حياته. لهذا يسأل الكاتب المشاهدين وألقراء بصورة غير مباشرة لاستخدام قدراتهم العقلية ليقدروا كيف ان قضايا معينة مثل حقوق المرأة مهمة بينما يتفرجون او يقرؤن بأمر أعينهم أحداث المسرحية.

أن تقديم أبسن لألام النساء في مسرحيته ربما ينبع من مسؤوليته الاخلاقية بأعتبره كاتباً مسرحياً مدركاً للمقومات الرئيسية المفضية الى السلام، الكرامة، الحرية، وكل سمات السعادة لتسود بين كل الناس.