

Nora's Metamorphosis from A Doll Child into A Reasonable Human Being: Reading Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

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Abstract

Henrik Ibsen is deemed to be one of the major Norwegian playwrights of the late 19th century whose famous play *A Doll's House* manifests a wide variety of social and individual concerns, some of which transcend times and ages and thus become all-time contemporary. This paper mainly focuses on one such concern of an individual- Nora Helmar's quest of self-identity- which gets unfolded through many other interrelated social issues that altogether result in her complete transformation. This study identifies how Nora who we notice at the beginning of the play as a naïve and submissive woman, changes herself into an outspoken, autonomous and unyielding human being towards the end of the play. It also attempts to highlight Nora's numerous struggles against the patriarchal hegemony of the society and outlines how these struggles contribute to developing in her a sense of progressive self-awakening which eventually shapes her self-identity as an independent woman, the ultimate destination of her journey of self-discovery. This study finally explores the underlying forces both from within and outside the family working as catalysts behind making Nora a metamorphosed one.

Keywords:
metamorphosis, struggles,
patriarchal hegemony,
self-identity, progressive
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INTRODUCTION

A Doll's House written in 1879 by Henrik Ibsen, is about a couple, Nora Helmer and Torvald Helmer with three children who lead a seemingly pleasant middle class life until individual, economic and social surroundings force a change in the wife's (Nora) attitude towards her marriage, relationship with other characters and social norms. This new outlook about life eventually leads her to leave the family with a view to constructing her own identity, individuality and life independence. Being the

main female character of the play, Nora Helmer spends most of her whole life in a dream world as a doll and as a vapid, passive woman with little personality of her own where her identity has mostly been portrayed as a construct of societal norms and the expectations of others as if she is destined to be the plaything in the hands of other characters. But Nora has always been in quest of forming her self-identity in the light of her own vision and scheme where she seeks individuality and autonomous selfhood through breaking the shackles of typical gender roles of a mother and a wife. In doing so, she also fights against the discrimination and oppression toward women

inflicted by the patriarchal power and attempts to develop counter discourses against the portrayal of the weak images of women. Nora's evolution as an autonomous persona and her journey of self-discovery and transformation mainly evolve around and develop through her distinct interactions and conflicts with other male characters particularly with her husband, Torvald Helmer.

Towards the end of the play, we notice a completely metamorphosed Nora whose process of transformation starts from the beginning of it. In fact, she goes through a good number of struggles and brings forth her own narratives so that she can withstand the patriarchal discrimination and oppression against women and live an independent life. Her struggles include solving her husband's problem by borrowing some money, managing that loan by forging her father's signature to get the surety of the bond, earning money to pay off the debt, showing her resistance by voicing against her husband's domination, setting aside money for future purposes from the monthly living costs and finally leaving the male-dominated family as a result of her profound disappointment towards the society in general and her husband in specific. These disappointing experiences and hard anguishes resulted partly from the untrue system of a loveless marriage and mostly from the power struggles between men and women put her before a dark reality which speaks volume of the overall wretched condition of women in the society. Exasperated by the dominant moral and legal discourses of patriarchy that always underrate and despise women power, Nora decides to move from that restrictive domestic world to the outside world of power, money, and business. She now comes to the understanding that she lives in decorative surroundings as a doll and discovers that she is nothing but a mere tool in her husband's hands. This apprehension basically helps her strive further in order to get back her lost or neglected values in such an orthodox society. Therefore, she leaves her home and children in defiance of the society's oppressive authority and conventions.

This defiance is personal and at the same time socio-political since it poses a potential threat to the society by unsettling its traditional patriarchal structure. Nora's leaving home is the culmination of her transformation through which she turns into a totally different entity, fairly untypical of the then Scandinavian image of a naive woman. And this study endeavors to outline this epic odyssey of Nora's metamorphosis into a reasonable human being whose victory may seem to be a prima facie miracle, but is not altogether unexpected rather hard-earned.

METHODS

The descriptive qualitative method has been used in this study in which, we, the researchers tend to describe and analyze certain data and provide interpretations based on related books and articles regarding the subject matter. For this research, we mainly depended on the text *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen as a primary source and other supplementary books and articles related to this play as secondary sources. While collecting data, several procedures were followed. The first step was to go through the play in detail. Secondly, we identified and classified the relevant quotations and paragraphs from the play illustrating the struggles and means through which Nora, the female protagonist of the play became completely transformed from a doll child into an independent and a fully flourished human being. But we chose the data which were much relevant than others in order to make the research paper on-topic and reader-friendly. The third and final step was to scrutinize the secondary materials to relate pertinent ideas with the research theme. Moreover, in order to illustrate Nora's journey, this study judiciously made use of the underlying principles of the famous feminist theory. The feminist theory always upholds the spirit of fighting against gender inequality and at the same time advocates for ensuring equal rights, justice, and fairness for women which we notice in Nora's unwavering and consistent attempt in achieving all or at least

some of them in her life. At the heart of this theory is the idea that women's oppression is deeply rooted in familial, social, political, and legal systems/structures and these discrepancies must be challenged and eventually eliminated by women themselves to taste the true sense of freedom. And Nora's enduring struggles throughout her whole life depicted in *A Doll's House* essentially epitomize this very quintessence of the feminist theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Nora as a Doll Child

In *A Doll's House*, Nora Helmer is portrayed as a timid young woman with a doll like existence who enjoys her life the way her husband, Torvald Helmer wants. But he still views Nora as merely an extravagant woman who wastes money for unimportant things and cannot manage the money for the family. His words "sweet little spendthrift" (Ibsen, 2009: 8) and "extravagant little person" (Ibsen, 2009: 6) largely hold his view about Nora's personality. This is the impression that he always maintains about Nora due to her childish behaviors and actions. At the same time, Nora always craves for money that she thinks, will give her freedom. In fact, money constitutes a major concern for her since she needs money to pay off the debt that she takes from Krogstad. Wiseman (2010) thus mentions that Nora could be excused for trusting Krogstad not to blackmail her, but not recognizing that the loan would have to be repaid is inexcusable and childish. But Nora can never solely be blamed for her childish and whimsical behavior. Torvald's treatment also plays a crucial role in this regard. He always treats Nora as his doll which can be played anytime. Nora is often attributed with childish nicknames such as "sweet little skylark" (Ibsen, 2009: 7), "little song bird" (Ibsen, 2009: 30), "little Nora" (Ibsen, 2009: 6, 31, 32, 34, 40,65,66 and 72), "obstinate little woman" (Ibsen, 2009:31), "precious little singing bird" (Ibsen, 2009:32), "helpless little mortal (Ibsen, 2009: 54), "charming little Capri maiden" (Ibsen, 2009: 63), "charming little darling" (Ibsen, 2009:

64) and "little singing bird" (Ibsen, 2009: 69). The use of the word 'little' in almost all childish nicknames reflects his intention to control Nora by calling her as a little thing and makes her dependent on him. Nora is being treated like a cute little girl and she accepts the epithets without much discontent. Even Torvald goes to the extent of restraining Nora with rules and regulations, much as a father would have to deter a child, forbidding her from pursuing candy and other temporal wishes. The relationship between Nora and Torvald thus exhibits that it is more like father and daughter than husband and wife.

Torvald's treatment of Nora as a small, helpless child makes her more isolated from reality. She moves from her father's home to her husband's where Torvald controls the stage on which Nora is a mere actor who generally believes that this pretend-world is the real one. Actually, Nora represents the womenfolk of her time, who had to be content with their own world without worrying much about the men's world outside the home. This pattern is not entirely her fault, for she has not had any real chance to meet the world outside her home. Nora's doll-like life makes her an alien to any real-life communications. To get rid of the clichéd images of a customary daily living, Nora longs for such a life which emancipates her from these harsh realities.

"Though Nora is treated like a doll child first by her father and then by her husband and is never allowed to evolve as a person, beneath her twittering, girlish exterior is a woman who has the potential to be independent and forceful" (Yuehua, 2009: 83).

Her first challenge to masculine power is her idea to borrow money from Krogstad by forging her father's signature. She considers this decision moral and states,

"Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father's anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that" (Ibsen, 2009: 29).

Now, Nora does no longer say yes to every demand that Torvald wishes to be satisfied. When she returns from her triumphant dance,

Torvald contemplates his wife's beauty and feels a strong sexual attraction, only to be shocked that she is unwilling to gratify his sexual desire for her. Nora thus opposes his authority by repelling his sexual advances and says "Go away, Torvald! You must let me go. I won't" (Ibsen, 2009: 65). Nora is fully aware of her beauty and knows how to manipulate her sexual power over Torvald and over Dr. Rank to her own gains in an impeccable way. But at the beginning, Torvald tends to materialize Nora's body by treating her as a pretty object that gives him pleasure. With carnal desire in mind, he frequently reminds Nora of paying attention to her appearance and warns her not to "ruin [her] dear eyes and [her] pretty little hands" (Ibsen, 2009: 13) by overwork. He claims right over her body as she is "[his] dearest treasure" and "the beauty that is [his], all [his] very own" (Ibsen, 2009: 8). When she understands that her husband always looks down upon her as a mere object, she openly confronts him and the patriarchal ideology that he and her father represent and states:

"When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you....I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours....When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman-just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald....You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life....But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls" (Ibsen, 2009: 74).

Nora starts exhibiting signs of change and expressing feeling of boredom as she says that her life is "unspeakably empty" (Ibsen, 2009: 12). *A Doll's House* thus challenges contemporary misconceptions about women and details how Nora transforms from a doll, a possession, whose sole purpose is to entertain her husband, into an individual human being. Nora realizes that she is

not a doll anymore with the so called sacred duties of a wife and mother, but before all else she is "a reasonable human being" (Ibsen, 2009: 76) with duties to herself. That is why Nora decides to show her resistance by speaking up about her true feelings to Torvald when everything does not happen as she wishes.

Loveless Marriage

A Doll's House outlines Nora's archetypal journey of self-revelations and a change in her marriage with Torvald Helmer from the typical Victorian "happy" family controlled by a male wage earner to the new woman that Nora turns out to be when she leaves her family in pursuit of her identity. Nora's action and voice are now felt and heard from the private sphere (home) into the public sphere (man's world). In reality, "the marriage institution in the nineteenth century mainly restricted women's liberty and they were viewed as men's properties, and dependent on men for emotional support or practical advice" (DÜZGÜN, 2018: 87).

Nora's relationship with her husband can be seen as twisted or uneven since there is an odd child-parent dynamic that sometimes exists between them. Nora views Torvald as her god and he through his words and actions, has accepted, and even embraced that role, remaining an aloof, didactic figure throughout the play. And Ibsen underscores this gap, isolation, and secrecy between Nora and her husband through the mention of Torvald's study door which virtually represents "both the barriers that cut Torvald and Nora off from each other and the means by which Nora hopes to hide her secrets" (Lavender, 2008:121). For Torvald, his study door acts as a buffer between the professional life that engages him and the family life in which he takes very little interest. He has no relationship of any kind with his children, so when they arrive, he makes an excuse for a hasty exit telling that "the place will only be bearable for a mother now" (Ibsen, 2009: 23). Nora's activities trigger interest in Torvald only when they directly concern him. In that case, he takes part in scenes merely to lend his voice of moral authority and says that he

“can’t be disturbed” (Ibsen, 2009: 4). Actually, Torvald’s relationship to Nora does not really extend beyond the satisfaction of possession and he views Nora as less than human, a mere pet and calls her “my little lark”, and “my squirrel” (Ibsen, 2009: 4). Nora subconsciously acquiesces to Torvald’s possessive nature. He often identifies Nora as “a silly girl” owing to her timid personality though her timidity quickly and progressively starts changing to aggressiveness and adventurous undertakings with which she now can do anything to achieve her goals. She takes a loan in order to fund sufficient amount of money to treat her husband. After securing the loan, she understands the debt implications of the loan and works hard to pay back the money. This is a positive development in her character that depicts a determined and brave Nora completely different from the woman previously defined by Torvald Helmer as “a silly woman”.

Torvald’s idea of marriage is one of fantasy. Before the costume party Torvald wants his wife, Nora, to dress up “as a Neapolitan fisher-girl” (Ibsen, 2009: 35). She dresses her up accordingly because that’s what he wants her to be. Throughout the play, Torvald constantly refers to his wife as something to be admired. During the party, he describes her as a “dream of loveliness” and says she’s “worth looking at” (Ibsen, 2009: 62). Torvald looks at Nora and admires her but he doesn’t love her. He seems to need her to become sexually aroused by his wife. However, Nora is not a passive recipient of her husband’s manipulative power for she attempts to subvert the traditional middle-class family structure in which it is Nora, a woman, who works and earns money by doing needlework and copying documents secretly. She tells Mrs Linde, her childhood friend, that she gets pleasure from being able to earn her own money: “many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man” (Ibsen, 2009: 16).

Gilman (1974) suggests that Ibsen’s major concern is the struggle for self-realization. In its central movement, *A Doll’s House* is a drama of

preparation, pitched beyond sexual difference, a play of encounter with the obstacles . . . that act to prevent us from knowing ourselves and the world (65). Simply, Nora’s obstacle is her uneven marriage which prevents her from becoming fully human. When Torvald explains Krogstad’s moral failings to Nora telling that he is poisoning his own children with lies and pretense, Nora finds it analogous to her case since her sin (borrowing money by forging her father’s signature) is the same as Krogstad’s. This is the first time when we notice that Nora withdraws her hand and goes to the other side of the Christmas tree distancing herself from Torvald while simultaneously hinting at the fact that she takes the moral judgment about Krogstad very seriously. As Northam (1965) posits, “Nora now believes that she is corrupt because of her deceitfulness; she is terrified to think that she may corrupt and poison her own children” (102). But at the same time, she also begins to doubt Torvald’s moral grounding: “Deprave my little children.....? Poison my home? It’s not true. It can’t possibly be true” (Ibsen, 2009: 33).

“Although suspicion nags her, Nora’s refusal to accept the moral verdict against her is an act of paramount importance. For the first time, she questions her husband and dares to think for herself” (Lavender, 2008:120).

The collapse of this long standing mythology about her husband propels Nora to go along her journey to become a true human being.

Nora’s responsibilities are wide-ranging and besides her role as a mother, she also acts as a father in her family since Torvald does very little for his children. Almost all the fathers in *A Doll’s House* have negatively been portrayed with an intention to depict the carelessness and negligence of the patriarchal authority towards family.

“It’s true that Nora and Torvald have no ideal marriage; they don’t even seem to have a real marriage. They have a power system, where Nora lets Torvald believe he is in control. Torvald paints this illusion of his wife being his mistress and Nora plays along with his game. They’re both playing roles in what society views as a true marriage. They’re stuck in a loveless situation that will only end with the sound of a door slamming shut”

(Kussman, 2018).

Nora thus summarizes what their marriage is all about and says,

“I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald” (Ibsen, 2009: 75).

Confrontation and Conflicts with Other Characters

Nora's involvement in conflicts and confrontations with other characters has solidified her personality. The first instance of this affront occurs in the first act, when the audience discovers that Nora for the sake of her husband's treatment, has forged her father's signature in order to get a loan. This Nora greatly differs from the initial image of an immature Nora who while conversing with Torvald states “I would never dream of doing anything you didn't want me to” and “I can't get along a bit without your help” (Ibsen, 2009: 31). But now, she knows how to take an independent decision without consulting her husband and how to earn the money needed to pay back the loan. This is a blatant disregard for the then existing laws which never allowed any woman to undertake such attempt, no matter how noble the cause is. As a result, she is in a dilemma running through the subconscious part of her mind which is too strenuous for her to deal with, although she believes that what she has done for her husband is well-timed and needed. Finney (1997) argues that Nora's much rehearsal of and obsessions about the tarantella are signals of a woman close to going frantic. This madness also indicates that Nora is a more complicated woman than the naive “doll” she was portrayed at the start of the play. In fact, this forgery and the eventual and expected reaction from Torvald open Nora's eyes to her underappreciated and unfulfilled potential which leads her to adopt a different personality, always unsolicited and unwelcome by Torvald, her father and the entire society. This inner trauma paves the way for her mental growth and eventually leashes her to a sort of self-recognition, self-identity and self-determination. Basically, this conflict definitely

represents Nora's endless struggle against the society's futile and imposed rules when and where women do not have the right to stand against the notions of their husbands, no matter what happens. But Nora proves otherwise and demonstrates that her personal feelings and growth are more important than the decrees, which the society imposes on her.

Nora's transformation should never be viewed as unbelievable or too sudden. She starts getting acquainted with all the harsh realities of the outside world through her frequent yet necessitated interactions with other characters and thus becomes seasoned enough to confront them. That is why when she learns of Krogstad's blackmail, she remains unmoved and puts on a determined look to overcome such. But while gathering experience, Nora has not altogether ignored her inborn innocence. This is quite evident in her choice to divulge her secret to Mrs. Linde that appears to be more the brag of a kid than the actions of a mature adult. Nora's innocent and immature interpretation of the law that the law would not prosecute a forgery carried out in the name of a good intention like love reinforces the idea that Nora is basically unapprised of the ways of the real world. Still, it is apparent that Nora is at least partly aware that her doll-like life is not the only choice. When pressed about whether she will ever tell her husband about the loan, she replies that she will, in time. For now, she believes that telling him would upset the balance in her home which also greatly speaks of her sense of maturity. But everything is changing when Nora realizes that her husband does not care about what she has done for him as he only cares about himself. From that moment, she chooses to be formal with him. She says that from the beginning of their marriage, they never have a serious conversation. Nora realizes that she has been greatly wronged, first by her father and then by her husband, who treats her like a doll. As a result, the gap between Nora and other characters, particularly Torvald Helmer, continues to widen until it reaches the culmination with Nora leaving her husband as

part of her mission of self-discovery and progressive awakening.

Eslamie (2015) states that Nora primarily resorts to two major attitudes to deal with her conflicts, one is compensation made through sacrifices for the family members, the other is the constructing the sense of superiority over people like her maid and family's intimate friend Rank. Nora at the same time tries to fortify her personality by displaying autonomous decisions, firm behaviors, and solid actions. She is no more a victim of the power struggles orchestrated by the patriarchal society; she becomes a revolution of all time against the circumstances under which women usually live throughout the world.

“The conflicts of power struggle in *A Doll's House* have become more and more intense as the play progresses because of the gradual unfolding of the female's strength of control in the gender relationships and her struggle against the males' control. As a result, the male protagonists begin to lose their dominant position and fall into inner-doubts about their self-worth as men” (Yuehua, 2009:85).

Towards the end of the play, the frustration of the males in their exercise of ideological power is quite palpable. Torvald now becomes confused about his role in the patriarchal realm he has painstakingly established which eventually empowers Nora to develop as a full-fledged human being thus coming out of the image of a doll.

Invasion of the Outside World

Nora is now fully exposed to the outside world since it invades Nora's home in the form of Mrs. Linde and then Krogstad. The arrival of Christine also brings with it a clash of two different worlds and conceptions of womanhood. Christine is forced to work outside the home since she has lost her husband and therefore, presented as seemingly the opposite to Nora who has been “denied the opportunity of undertaking paid employment” and because of that finds herself “pushed back more and more into an ornamental role” (Dennis & Skilton, 1987:259), that is, with no role in society or in the home either. Christine's earning opportunity ignites the same urge in Nora and she feels the need of economic

freedom in order to think of herself independently. Here, Peterson (1989) can rightly be mentioned who says that “the freedom she has in mind is very different from the concept her middle-class female contemporaries had, since for them freedom was achieved through marriage and maintenance by a man” (120). In this respect, Nora's key assertion: “that before all else I am a reasonable human being” (Ibsen, 2009: 76), shows her anxieties which detaches Nora willfully from the roles and duties imposed on her by her condition as a woman. Trevor May's (1987) words depict this situation as follows:

“Women can never stand on the same ground as men, since the latter may have professions and marriage, while marriage or professions must be the alternative for women.[...] Nature has placed them at disadvantage in any struggle” (158).

Nora feels the necessity of leaving her family to begin to think and act as an independent being. When Nora tells Torvald that she does not understand the society in which she lives, she virtually hints at the ideas that “women's attachment to the family-private realm is a cultural construct; on the contrary, it is a condition arbitrarily imposed on them” (Ortín, 2009:138).

Realization about Herself

It is important to notice that Nora for the first time leaves the confines of the one room in the entire play to join the party. When she leaves the room for a short period of time in order to exchange her party dress for everyday clothing, this is her first sole venture out of the room. This step prophesies her final exit. Nora comes to the realization that, before she can be a wife, she must first determine her position in the world. She departs as an awakened soul, resolute to become a full-fledged individual rather than the toy in the hands of men in her life. The image of Nora as a seemingly cheerful, innocent “angel of the home” soon turns to an experienced human being. Instead of refusing to adhere to Krogstad's demands and taking up the issue for himself, Torvald accuses Nora of ruining his life and declares that he never sacrifices his honor for a

loved one. It comes as a blow to Nora and a thought of committing suicide ripples through her mind though in the next moment, she reshapes her thoughts and thinks that this is not a man worth dying for. The realization that Torvald does not reciprocate her strong feelings causes a change in her. Torvald's "little squirrel" (Ibsen, 2009: 4, 5 and 38) and singing skylark, as he has termed her on numerous occasions in the play, turns unemotional and silent after noticing her husband's real face. She is now torn apart with recurring thoughts about her futile past and starts reflecting on her life with Torvald, with her father and even religion. In search of a meaningful life, she decides to disregard her duties as a mother and wife so that she can fulfill the duties she has to herself.

A Doll's House reveals the limitations of freedom that women have in the domestic spheres. They neither have any voice in decision making nor have the right to do whatever they like. In the domestic arena, the strong patriarchal power compels women to act as mere wives and the complement of men. The same thing happens to Nora who does not seem to enjoy the right to express her true feelings to Torvald. Moreover, she has been portrayed with weaker images like the incompetence in doing domestic work, the failure in money management and ineptitude in taking care of her children. But Nora substantiates otherwise regarding all the accusations and demonstrates that she is capable enough of accomplishing anything that a man can do. Surprisingly, till the end of the play, her husband retains the same idea about her and still calls Nora with the terms "my frightened little singing-bird" and "a hunted dove" (Ibsen, 2009: 72), which imply that Nora is a person who is weak and needs someone to cling on. At this point, Nora recognizes that she "had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children" (Ibsen, 2009: 78). This realization forces Nora to step into the real world where she ceases to be a doll. She seats with Torvald at the table in order to "face facts". She now sounds authoritative and does not allow him to speak until she has finished what she intends to tell. For

the first time, she is quite expressive and unequivocally states that before tonight, they have never understood each other. In over eight years of marriage, they have never before sat down to have a serious discussion. Nora recognizes that "their marriage has been a doll marriage: he a doll husband, she a doll wife and their children destined to be doll children" (Wiseman, 2010). She gets an adequate perception of herself and comes to the awareness that she is not merely born to satisfy societal and others' expectations; rather she has much more to give to herself. Nora simultaneously reminisces about her roles as a mother and a wife and believes that she should feel proud of what she has done for the family. Eventually, events uncover the real image of Nora's husband, different of what she has envisaged at the start of the play. Nora is very vocal now and says that she has been greatly mistreated by both her father and her husband. She must first educate herself before she can educate the children. This is why, she concludes, she is going to leave him. But Torvald Helmer here accuses her of neglecting her "most sacred duties" (Ibsen, 2009: 76) as wife and mother, refusing to acknowledge Nora's opinion that her duty to herself as a reasonable human being is at least as sacred. In order to be free and discover her own nature as a human being in a society that she does not understand, she decides to break up her marriage. On the one hand, her disillusionment is personal as regards her husband's reaction and on the other hand, it is social in which women are reduced to non-entities. Ortín (2009) opines that "the only wonderful thing that happens in the end is when she gains the courage to begin a new life outside patriarchal seclusion" (138). On a different note, by exemplifying how a female character like Nora achieves her own independence and definition as an autonomous human being, women need to break out of patriarchal schemes to allow their own independent selves to flourish. Her apparently uncertain new life has already been on the way, and hopes are very thin that Torvald will rise to the challenge anytime soon. So far she has been in the state of an imposed fantasy inflicted

on by the societal norms and power. She is no longer willing to be an object or an agent of fantasy. She is now well capable of differentiating between fantasy and reality.

Hollowness of the Apparent Moral Values

Since the beginning of the play, Torvald's activities seem to distance Nora without accommodating her in the realm of reality. He only makes use of her by placing the excuses of religion and then morality, both of which Nora agnostically rejects by explaining that she has never had a chance to examine and embrace these things on her own and, as a result, she does not know if she agrees with these principles and comments that she does not "believe that any longer" (Ibsen, 2009: 76). Torvald first protests that Nora is not even considering about "what people will say" (Ibsen, 2009: 76) showing himself once again a morally shallow person who is more concerned with appearance than substance. Nora realizes Torvald's moral superficiality and hypocrisy. His lofty principles have never amounted to anything more than mere selfishness and solely concern for his reputation. Actually, his true concern is not for moral righteousness but the appearance of it. In contrast, Nora exhibits actual decency when, after flirting with Dr. Rank in a desperate effort to get the amount she needs to pay off Krogstad, she rejects his enamored advances toward her. The doll Nora might attain a favor through erotic flattery, but "the heroic woman underneath, the woman of fundamentally sound principles . . . puts a stop to the nonsense when it begins to offend her sense of rightness" (Northam, 1965: 105). Nora will not trade one sin for another. Instead, she asks the maid to "bring in the lamp," evicting the alluring darkness of the scene, and then she "goes over to the stove" (Ibsen, 2009: 46) to purify herself of what she now apprehends was a transgression. Nora hysterically tries to get rid of the remorse of sin in preparation for the eventual cost she is going to pay in her life.

When Nora's husband's true image is finally exposed, she feels devastated inside. She now feels ashamed of the forgery she has done to

save her husband's life and thinks why women go to the extent of sacrificing their honor for the sake of their husbands' welfare. This major shift in her viewpoints symbolized by her uncontrolled movement in tarantella virtually foreshadows her breaking free from Torvald. She recognizes that she has known nothing but what the men in her life have stated to her; she has not been able to live or even think for herself. In her disillusionment she says,

"You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me" (Ibsen, 2009: 74).

Now she shows her antipathy not only towards individuals, but also to the whole patriarchal system. That is why we notice her firm utterances when Torvald tries to teach her moral values.

"I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that" (Ibsen, 2009: 77).

Her decision "I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I" (Ibsen, 2009: 77) is an assertion of her robust willpower and steadfastness to fight against this male-dominated world. However, Nora clearly knows that fighting against the male-dominated world and the patriarchal system single-handedly is not an easy task. For this reason,

"she chooses her own way of fighting for the maintenance of her identity and dignity-- to leave her home and try her luck in the society, making the bewildered Torvald a rather sympathetic figure" (Yuehua, 2009:84).

Actually, women in *A Doll's House* have never given up their fight in the struggle for gender power. They are, as a matter of fact, more thoughtful and tenacious in their tenacity of claiming their share of power. To a certain extent, they seem tougher in character and will power, with a deeper insight compared to their counterparts. Being empowered by that inborn insight, Nora now starts exerting her control over almost everything and everyone, including her husband.

"The Nora we have observed during the play

has not seemed a passive creature wholly molded by others. Ibsen has depicted her as willingly playing the doll game to her own advantage” (Johnston, 1989:16).

This is the real reflection of her inner world other than what she tells Mrs. Linde about the concealment. She just wants others to know that she is not a superficial creature, but a strong woman who can handle the situation all alone, just like a man. The reason why she decides to leave her family is because she wants to find a better life. Nora strictly ignores her husband's wishes to be a good mother and wife thus ignoring the society itself. She now learns how to assert her opinion regarding important things like completing her duties to herself and trying to live autonomously by learning what happens in the real world. Nora thus becomes a symbol throughout the world, for women fighting for liberation and equality. She is also a symbol for female actors, both of what is possible and of how much they still have to fight for. When Henrik Ibsen's Nora Helmer first takes off her wedding ring, empties her purse and slams the door, it causes a huge sensation. This desperate act is a necessary step to adulthood after a lifetime of allowing men to define her identity which has so far been a disturbing mix of cunning and naiveté. This departure has long been due for Nora to get rid of all these authoritarian nuisances since there has always been something unpleasant hidden behind all her chirpiness.

Shutting the Door: Completion of Nora's Metamorphosis

The final scene of the play is important in that it shows the change in the power relations between Torvald Helmer and Nora. In this scene, “[t]he sound of a door shutting is heard from below,” which implies Nora's leaving the house. Torvald thus “sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands” (Ibsen, 2009: 80). This alteration in Nora's and Torvald's positions is significant since until the final scene, Nora is restricted to the domestic sphere to deal with domestic affairs. Torvald, on the other hand, is seen occupying the public sphere where he works and earns money. However, Nora and her

husband change roles for this time. It is Torvald who is left in the domestic zone and put into a fragile position. Sitting on the chair, he screams dreadfully after his wife. On the other hand, Nora is shown as a strong-minded, rational being who negates her part as a compliant and noble wife and mother. While leaving the tyrannical domestic sphere, she clarifies to her husband why she has decided to leave him and states,

“I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now” (Ibsen, 2009: 75).

Seeing Nora quite adamant, Torvald softens his age-long, strict, patriarchal voice, promises to “become a different man” and offers to fill “the abyss” that has opened between them (Ibsen, 2009: 75). Nora, on the other hand, does not believe that they can start a new relationship afresh based on equal power relations, and says that he can change only if “[his] doll is taken away from [him]” (Ibsen, 2009:78). Therefore, she finally departs and rejects to be a puppet regulated and structured by the patriarchal authorities governing the spheres of domesticity, morality, and religion. In the end,

“she claims that she has stopped believing in miracles but the road we know she will tread, the road she has already chosen to follow, promises to lead her inexorably to the greatest miracle of all: the fully realized human being” (Lavender,2008:126).

Actually, Nora's leaving the house is her declaration of independence which left people of Scandinavia “pale with excitement, arguing, quarrelling, and challenging” (Templeton, 1997: 112). Nora's character fascinates everyone because at that time in Scandinavia, she represented such an act that the majority of women feared to take.

Nora basically “offers women spectators' identity spaces to negotiate a meaningful life space” and by “imaginatively inhabiting the role of Nora, women on the cusp of new social identities were able to explore possible futures and the consequences of possible actions” (Hollidge and Tompkins, 2000: 20-23).

Finally, Nora's transformation into an independent identity transcends the local

Scandinavian context to reach a global perspective thus providing a universal, contemporary framework for many such stories of new Noras to be created.

CONCLUSION

A Doll's House entails Nora's slow yet steady metamorphosis from a doll child into an autonomous human being. This progressive awakening comes at the cost of numerous struggles that Nora has experienced at every stage of her life. These struggles which greatly contribute to shaping her identity and individuality speak volume of her resolute determination to fight against the discrimination and oppression towards women inflicted by the strong patriarchal force. Nora's identities previously shaped by the male dominated society as a compassionate mother, an obedient daughter, and a dutiful wife are used to restrict both her individual and economic freedoms by trapping her in the domestic arena. That is why she endeavors to assert her true ability in that she is capable enough of doing anything if she is given opportunities. In doing so, she attempts to produce counter discourses against the portrayal of women's weak images. Nora's struggles have thus become the symbols of independence since she breaks the rules which limit her movements in domestic and social life. At the end of the play, her decision to leave the family is the collective aftermath of profound disappointment and anguish resulted from the treatment she has received from her father, her husband and the society. Moreover, Nora now recognizes the very fragile bonding of her relationship with other members of the family and the futility of a tedious life she has led throughout. Hence, she decides to form a new individual self by rejecting the identity imposed by the male-dominated society. Her challenge against patriarchal oppression, ultimately, disrupts the patriarchal hegemony and heralds a chance of transformation for other women both at the personal and social levels.

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