



A Doll's House

Study Guide by Course Hero



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👁 Book Basics

AUTHOR

Henrik Ibsen

YEAR PUBLISHED

1879

GENRE

Drama

ABOUT THE TITLE

Nora comes to relate her life to that of a doll, reflecting her husband's treatment of her as a possession who must think and act exactly as he wishes.

📍 In Context

During Ibsen's life, a new social class was on the rise as a result of the Industrial Revolution. This new class set out to shed the old system of aristocracy and nobility, yet this upward-moving middle class precisely retained the Victorian ideals and morals, often referred to as bourgeoisie respectability. This lifestyle insisted on virtue, purity, freedom from debt, and strict adherence to the customs and rules of social propriety. Ibsen sought to expose the social hypocrisy of this concept and inspire a nobility of character he believed would ultimately come from women, working-class men, and individuals "attaining to real liberty."

The society Ibsen lived in misunderstood the true meaning of his dramas, mostly because his ideas were quite radical. For example, the idea of a woman leaving her husband was earthshaking for a society rooted in the stability of patriarchal structure. So audiences tended to believe Ibsen was calling for the destruction of society, when his true goal was suggesting its reconstruction.

Norwegian Government

Norway enjoyed a wide berth of autonomy while under the rule of a Swedish king during Ibsen's lifetime. Although Ibsen as a young man delivered a speech denouncing kings and emperors after being inspired by the French Revolution in 1848, he received a lifetime king's grant to write. With this royal support Ibsen lived abroad beginning in 1866 for most of his adult life. Such grants were possible, as it was a common belief that the government was responsible for lifting culture and society through literature and arts by financially supporting talented writers, artists, and scholars. Ibsen criticized the liberal party for being cheap in investing in cultural efforts.

Popular Theater

The national theater in Norway was on the decline, and the government and private-run theaters that did exist imported plays from Europe. Ibsen was hired by the Norwegian theater in Bergen as a resident playwright and stage manager for the specific purpose of ushering in originally voiced Norwegian dramas. Ibsen failed many times before succeeding in ousting the overly romantic and popular melodramas in fashion at the time. Ibsen's first plays were complexly drawn and written in verse, as was common practice in theater at the time. Ibsen later turned to using sparse dialogue resembling natural speech, an entirely new theatrical device that changed the focus of modern theater.

Influences

Camilla Collett (the founder of Norwegian feminism), German philosophers Hegel, Voltaire, Kierkegaard, and literary critic Georg Brandes (who called for naturalism and realism) were all major influences on Ibsen's work. Brandes was also a personal friend of Ibsen's.

When Ibsen worked for the Norwegian theater, he had the opportunity to travel to Europe for extended theater study. There he observed high-quality productions, including professional performances of Shakespeare, which greatly inspired and helped develop his budding talent.

Laura Kieler, who had written a book based on characters from Ibsen's play *Brand* called *Brand's Daughters: A Picture of Life*, became friends with Ibsen in 1871. In 1876, when her husband developed tuberculosis and had to move to a warmer climate, Kieler borrowed money, committed a forgery, and was eventually caught. Her children were taken from her, and her husband divorced her. Laura Kieler was so distraught she ended up in a mental institution. The scandal was well-known, and Ibsen knew of it when he wrote *A Doll's House*.

Politics

Ibsen gave many political speeches and was decorated with numerous awards and honors during his lifetime. Yet as much as he was involved in politics, Ibsen did not want to be viewed as a puppet, writing for particular political views. He considered

himself more of an artist than a political, social commentator.

Feminism

Feminism became an important issue in many parts of the world, beginning in the middle of the 19th century. The first women's rights conventions in the United States and France were held in 1848. Yet during Ibsen's time, Norwegian women had no right to vote, own property, or borrow money. Women could inherit wealth by 1854, but they did not gain the ability to control their own wealth until the 1890s. It was not until 1882, three years after *A Doll's House* was performed for the first time in Copenhagen, that women in Norway were given access to higher education. In 1884 the first formal women's rights organization was founded (Norwegian Association for Women's Rights), which prioritized the rights to education and work, followed by a focus on gaining the right to vote. Women in Norway voted for the first time in local elections in 1907, one year after Ibsen's death. Then, in 1913, Norway became the first country to allow all women the right to vote.

Ibsen scholars have long cautioned against reading *A Doll's House* as an early feminist play. Some point to a speech Ibsen gave on his 70th birthday, in which he stated that the "woman's cause" was unknown to him, although he did hope to expose what "has ever been a cause of human beings." Nevertheless, letters and other speeches by Ibsen do provide some evidence that Ibsen intended for the play to bring to light the need for women's equality. However, this was just one prong of the worldview Ibsen had, a view more appropriately labeled humanism than feminism.

Author Biography

Henrik Ibsen, born in Skien, Norway, on March 20, 1828, is known as the father of modern drama, and he devoted his life to inspiring individualism in society through his plays. Both loved and loathed by critics and audiences of his time, Ibsen challenged the hypocrisies of the late Victorian era and brought in a new era in dramatic storytelling. The realism of his plays overturned traditional plot structures and incorporated natural speech.

A Doll's House was written and produced in 1879, first in Copenhagen, next in Stockholm, and then in Christiania (now

Oslo) when Ibsen was in his 50s. The play was the second of twelve thematically connected dramas known as *The Ibsen Cycle*, and Ibsen intended them to be read as well as produced. In his mid-career, when he was most successful, Ibsen's plays went directly to bookshops and theaters. When he lived in Italy and Germany, dockworkers would wait for his next play to arrive in Copenhagen by ship. *A Doll's House* had to be reprinted twice within three months of publication and was translated into German, Finnish, English, Polish, Russian, and Italian. The play caused a sensation, bringing Ibsen fame across Europe and America for the first time.

The first English performance of *A Doll's House* took place in London, in March of 1884. Although Torvald Helmer's character was portrayed as an ideal husband and hero, the play was called *Breaking a Butterfly*. The first American production, titled *The Child Wife*, took place in Milwaukee in 1882. Ibsen was forced to rewrite the ending of *A Doll's House* for the first German production (1880) because the actress playing Nora, Hedwig Niemann-Raabe, refused to portray a woman who left her husband. The play was also produced extensively in Germany with Ibsen's original ending, where it was more successful than it had been in Norway.

Before *A Doll's House* became a rallying cry for the feminist movement and an inspiration to up-and-coming writers, Ibsen's critics called him "insane," "subversive," and "immoral," railing against him as though he were trying to destroy the very roots of society. Norwegians became obsessed with the play, discussing it both publicly and privately. While attacking social norms, *A Doll's House* accurately reflected the society that made up its audience. It outraged conservatives but inspired just as many artists and forward thinkers with its new techniques and assertions.

Ibsen often commented about how the source of his ideas and characters derived from experiences he lived through emotionally; however, he constructed fictional situations to explore these emotions. The example of Nora's papa from *A Doll's House* aligns with Ibsen's real-life family tragedy. Ibsen's father, Knud Ibsen, squandered all the wealth, properties, and businesses he had obtained through marrying his wife, Marichen Altenburg, when he took control of the inheritance after her father died. Ibsen was seven years old at the time, aware enough of being reduced to poverty and his family's suffering public humiliation to scar him for life. At age 15, without enough money for further education, Ibsen had to move to Grimstad and work as an apothecary's assistant,

struggling to study for university entrance exams among acquaintances he referred to as "those empty heads with full pockets." Although he did make a few lifelong friends from that painful period of his life, having been pushed out of society helped cultivate Ibsen's skepticism, dislike of clubs and collectives, and tendencies toward a loner position. The result is manifest in his laser focus on the individual who, to him, only found "salvation ... in being true to himself," which is epitomized in *A Doll's House* through the character of Nora.

Today, Ibsen is not only a national hero in Norway, he is also one of the most produced playwrights in the world, second only to Shakespeare. *A Doll's House* is frequently performed in the United States and England, trailing only behind Ibsen's *Ghosts*, which is a rebuttal to critics of *A Doll's House*. The Ibsen Society of America holds conferences to continue and celebrate the playwright's legacy, and numerous theatrical awards in Ibsen's honor are given yearly to aspiring playwrights who show talent, originality, and concern for gender equality and human rights.

Ibsen died on May 23, 1906.

Characters

Nora

Nora is the cheerful wife of Torvald Helmer and mother of their three children. She takes small jobs and scrounges money from Torvald to slowly pay back a loan she took without her husband's consent or knowledge, for a trip his doctors said would save his life. The financial burden wears on Nora's generous and caring attitude, causing resentment and a desire to be respected by her husband and free from the limitations society places on her because she is a woman. Nora's faith in her husband's superior morality unravels over the course of the play. When he removes his affection from her in response to the possibility that she will harm his reputation, and then just as quickly restores it, Nora sees the marriage as a sham. She leaves Torvald, intent on discovering who she really is and what she really believes in.

Torvald

Torvald is the condescending husband of Nora. He feels it is his duty to provide a moral reality for his wife, including how she should think, feel, behave, and act. He instructs her in how to manage the children, how to dress and eat, and how to spend his money. He believes she needs such constant guidance because he considers her to be intellectually inferior and childish. All the while, however, he delights in her beauty. Torvald resents Nora's deceased father for what he sees as negative character traits his wife has inherited, without realizing that he is similar to the man he criticizes. When Torvald catches Nora in an act he finds morally reprehensible, his ugliness and narrow perspective rise to the surface, but he remains blind to these faults. As Nora leaves, he is adrift in confusion and despair.

Krogstad

Through employment in a bank, Krogstad is vying for a chance to regain his reputation in society after being caught and ruined for a crime he committed in the past. Society has been unforgiving to Krogstad. His current desperation drives him to blackmail Nora, even though it goes against his nature. It is Christine offering him a second chance that saves him. His happiness at her offer proves he is not motivated by money or desire to win respect from society. Rather, he needs love, honesty, and understanding, and these things redeem him.

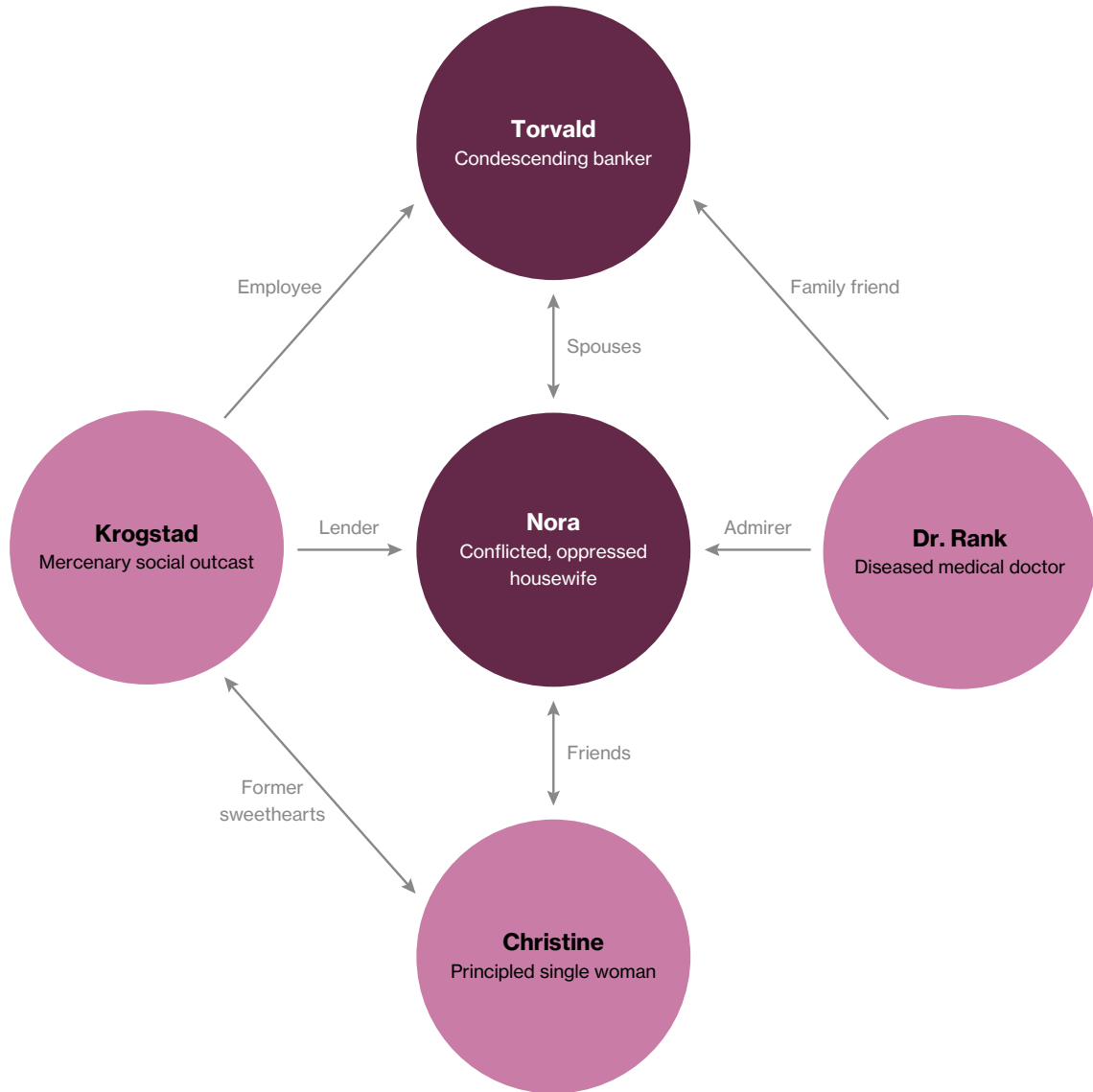
Christine

Christine, lonely and tired, arrives on Nora's doorstep in search of a reason to live. Having chosen money over love in her marriage, she now finds herself without means or family life. She tries to steer her friend Nora from making bad choices and losing all she has. She wishes for Nora to have a future based on honesty and understanding. Christine acts as an impetus for Nora's revelation that she must seek self-awareness and independence. At the same time, Christine reverses her misfortune and finds love, purpose, and a second chance.

Dr. Rank

Dr. Rank, a close friend of Nora and Torvald, diagnoses not only the physical conditions but also the moral ailments of those around him. He, like Torvald, believes that morality or immorality is inherited both physically (nature) and through upbringing (nurture). However, Dr. Rank ultimately turns out to contrast Torvald's self-delusion of moral superiority. Dr. Rank sees reality. He faces his impending death and admits his feelings to Nora, making Torvald the only character in the play who remains in the dark about his own true nature.

Character Map



- Main Character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character

Full Character List

Character	Description
Nora	Nora Helmer is the wife who leaves her husband, Torvald, when she realizes he does not truly know or love her but only treats her as a cherished doll.
Torvald	Torvald Helmer is the husband who is left by his wife, Nora, because he fails to see her for who she really is or to realize he is not as good a man as he thinks he is.
Krogstad	Nils Krogstad is the lender who blackmails Nora in order to keep his job at the bank where Torvald is manager.
Christine	Mrs. Christine Linde is a childhood friend who encourages Nora to be honest with Torvald and embrace her role as his wife. (This character's name is spelled Kristine in some editions of the play.)
Dr. Rank	Dr. Rank is the family friend who loves Nora.
Anne-Marie	Anne-Marie is the children's nurse.
Bob	Bob is Nora and Torvald's son.
Emmy	Emmy is Nora and Torvald's daughter.
Housemaid	Nora and Torvald's housekeeper is named Helene.
Ivar	Ivar is Nora and Torvald's son.

Plot Summary

The play is presented in three acts, all of which take place in the parlor of an upper-middle-class household. It begins with the entrance of Nora Helmer, a young, happy wife and mother of three children, followed by a porter toting a Christmas tree. Her husband, Torvald, calls out to her from his office, checking to see if his "little squirrel" has come home; then he asks not to be disturbed. A little while later, the audience sees the

affectionate couple interact for the first time. Torvald believes his wife is wasteful with money and teases Nora for spending too much, but he understands she has extra expenses at Christmas time. This establishes their relationship: Nora begs, Torvald indulges. Nora excitedly shows Torvald her presents for the children and requests money wrapped in paper for her own Christmas present. Torvald has no idea Nora needs money for a loan she borrowed without his consent: she has been working in secret to pay back her lender.

A childhood friend of Nora's drops by, and the two women discuss how their lives have changed since they last saw each other ten years ago. Christine is now a childless widow, worn out and overworked. Nora brags about Torvald's new position at the bank and offers to convince him to hire Christine. Nora then describes how she saved Torvald's life early in their marriage by providing the money they needed to spend a year in Italy. She lies in saying that she inherited the money from her father. When Christine offends Nora by suggesting she's had an easy life, Nora divulges that she took out a loan without Torvald's consent to pay for the trip and must secretly pay it back. Christine calls Nora "mad" and "imprudent," but Nora refuses to tell her who loaned her the money.

Then another person from the Helmers' past arrives at the home. Once part of Torvald's social circle and now working far below him at the bank, Nils Krogstad arrives to meet with Torvald. Krogstad's presence makes Nora and Christine nervous, and it is soon revealed that Krogstad is Nora's moneylender. Dr. Rank, a close friend of Torvald and Nora, comes into the parlor after passing Krogstad in the hall. He gossips about Krogstad's bad reputation for being a crooked lawyer caught up in a scandal years ago. Torvald meets Christine and says he is willing to give her a position at the bank. Torvald, Dr. Rank, and Christine leave Nora as the children arrive with their nurse.

Krogstad slips back into the house and catches Nora by surprise. He suspects Torvald will replace him at the bank with Christine, whom he has known from the past. Krogstad wants Nora to influence Torvald to let him keep his post at the bank. He threatens to tell Torvald about the loan as a means to fight for his position. When Nora refuses, Krogstad reminds her that she has committed fraud by forging her father's signature as surety for the loan. Krogstad explains to Nora that by dating the loan five days after her father's death, she has committed an illegal act. He assures her she will be found guilty if he takes her to court.

When Torvald returns, Nora tries to persuade him not to fire Krogstad, but Torvald is resolute. To him, Krogstad is a scoundrel whose presence makes Torvald physically ill. The next day, Nora tries again, infuriating Torvald into firing Krogstad immediately instead of waiting until the New Year. Increasingly desperate, Nora considers asking Dr. Rank for help, but changes her mind when the doctor confesses his love for her. Krogstad returns to tell Nora he has decided not to expose her publicly, only to Torvald. He drops a letter about the loan and forgery into a locked letterbox outside of Torvald's office, to which Torvald has the sole key.

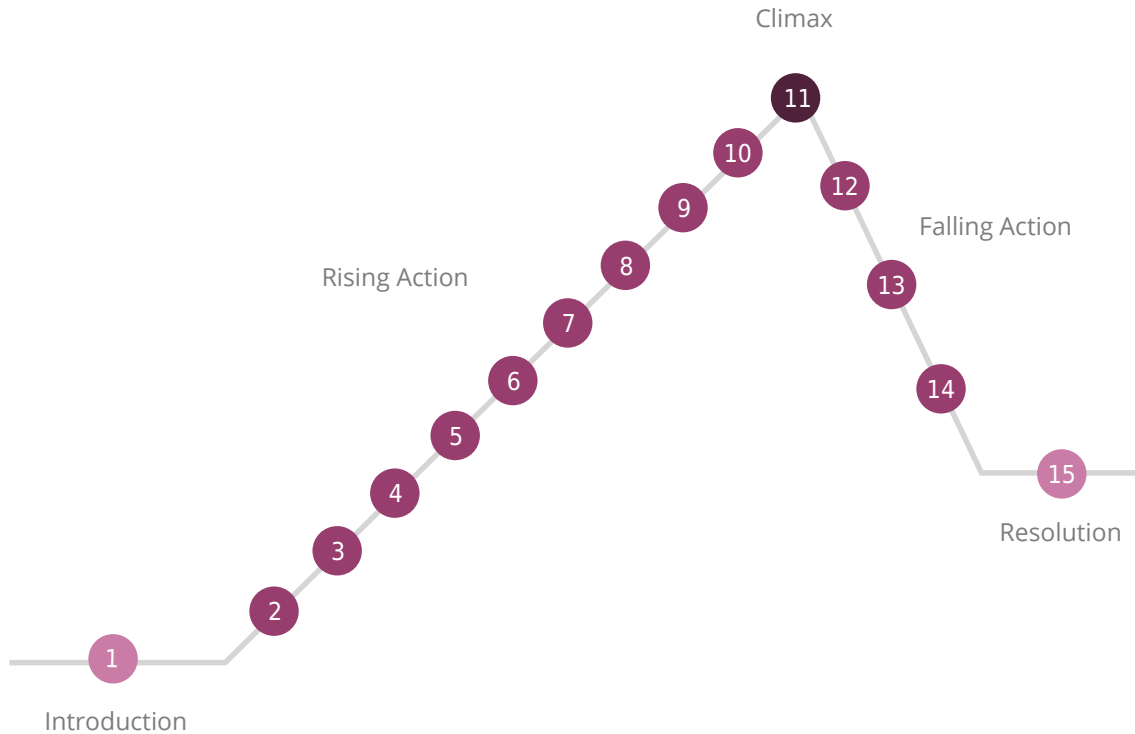
In a panic Nora tells Christine that Krogstad is her moneylender. Eager to help, Christine rushes out to convince Krogstad to recall the letter. To distract Torvald from reading the letter, Nora begs him to help her rehearse a dance for an upcoming costume party. Torvald, under the misconception Nora fears Krogstad will take revenge on Torvald for firing him, suspects Krogstad has left a letter in the box, but he agrees to wait to read it until after the party. Torvald promises Nora that whatever happens, he will share every burden with her as a true husband should. Nora finds hope in his words.

While Nora and Torvald are upstairs at the neighbor's party, Christine meets privately with Krogstad. She expresses her desire to begin a new relationship with him even though she chose another man with better prospects when they were younger. Joyous at the idea of a second chance with Christine, Krogstad offers to recall his letter to Torvald, but Christine tells him not to, believing honesty will bring complete understanding into Nora and Torvald's marriage. Later that night, when Torvald reads Krogstad's letter revealing the loan and forgery, he completely repudiates his wife, saying they will only appear as if they are still married; that he will allow her to live in his house, but he will not allow her to bring up the children, nor will he love her.

A new letter from Krogstad arrives. He has forgiven the loan and given back the bond, which Torvald burns in the fire. Ecstatic that his reputation will not be damaged, Torvald forgives Nora everything she has done. He determines to become her teacher, father, conscience, and will. Nora finally understands her husband's self-preserving concerns, and that he does not truly love or understand her. She will always be nothing more than his doll. At that she decides to leave him, educate herself, and make her own way in the world.

The play famously closes with the slamming of a door.

Plot Diagram



Introduction

1. Nora returns with presents. A porter brings in a tree.

Rising Action

2. Torvald gives Nora money for Christmas gifts.
3. Christine asks Nora if Torvald can get her a job.
4. Krogstad blackmails Nora, as he's loaned her money.
5. Nora begs Torvald to not fire her lender Krogstad.
6. Torvald sends a dismissal letter to Krogstad.
7. Krogstad reveals the loan in a letter to Torvald.
8. Christine says Nora must tell Torvald about the loan.

9. Nora distracts Torvald with a dance for the party.

10. Christine gets Krogstad to say he'll call back his letter.

Climax

11. Torvald learns Nora forged a signature for money.

Falling Action

12. Torvald calls Nora immoral, showing his self-centeredness.
13. They receive a letter from Krogstad saying he'll keep quiet.
14. Nora sees Torvald's true nature and leaves the family.

Resolution

15. Torvald sinks into a chair and buries his face in his hands.

Timeline of Events

Moments later

Nora's old friend Christine arrives and asks Nora to have Torvald get her a job at the bank; Nora reveals her secret to Christine.

A short time later

Krogstad tells Nora she must protect his job with Torvald, or he'll reveal their secret loan and her crime.

Christmas Day

Nora begs Torvald not to fire Krogstad, but Torvald sends him a dismissal letter.

That evening

Nora distracts Torvald from getting the letter by having him help her rehearse for tomorrow night's dance.

Christmas Eve

Nora gaily returns home from shopping, asks for and receives money from Torvald and endures his usual acts of control.

Moments later

Christine and Nora are both shaken by a brief visit from Krogstad; Nora asks Torvald about hiring Christine.

That night

Nora and Torvald discuss Torvald's promotion and Krogstad's position under him and the upcoming costume party.

That evening

Krogstad puts a letter revealing his loan to Nora in Torvald's locked letter box.

The next night

Christine and Krogstad reveal their love and he offers to

A short time later

Torvald learns of the loan and yells at Nora, but forgives her when Krogstad says he'll keep quiet.

call back the letter, but doesn't.

A few moments later

Nora realizes Torvald only cares about himself and leaves him, slamming the door behind her.

🔍 Section Summaries

A Doll's House is a play in three acts. For the purpose of analysis, this study guide further breaks each act into sections defined by key dramatic events.

Act 1, Section 1

Summary

Nora comes home from Christmas shopping and persuades her husband, Torvald, to give her more money for holiday spending. Nora shows Torvald the Christmas presents she bought for the children and staff. They reminisce and discuss their financial affairs. Torvald chastises Nora for wasting money. He points out even her slightest indiscretions by noticing tiny crumbs on her mouth: Nora has eaten macaroons, even though he has warned her she will ruin her looks.

Analysis

The stage directions and props establish Nora and Torvald's financial status and the time of year. The room is "comfortable" and "tasteful," but not extravagant. Servants are a part of the household, and cash is prominently discussed and exchanged. A fire burns in the fireplace and Christmas preparations are underway.

True to Ibsen's mastery with characterization, each word and action of the characters are significant from the time they are introduced. Nora sings and whistles as she walks through the door. Moments later, Torvald will call her his "skylark," introducing the symbol of the bird that carries through the play. Skylarks are known for singing for long periods or while in flight. Nora is willing to play the part of a happy bird at the beginning of the play, even when Torvald is absent. Nora's glib attitude belies the financial pressure she is under, but the audience does not know it yet.

Both main characters' views on financial responsibility are established at the beginning of Act 1. For Torvald, "There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing or debt." First, Nora says she would not care if

Torvald died and they owed money. When Torvald presses Nora to think about what would happen to the lenders if they borrowed money, she responds, "They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were." Torvald's view on financial responsibility conforms to the mores of the time. Nora's view exposes her willingness to lie. These two opposing values reflect the central conflict in the play.

The significant number of lines in this section that are focused on Nora eating macaroons and hiding it from her husband points to the significance of this small deception, indicating another central idea. Torvald's love for her looks, and his belief that he owns and deserves them, is evident throughout the play. It is proof of his view of her as his property, his beautiful doll.

Act 1, Section 2

Summary

Christine, an old friend whom Nora hasn't seen for 10 years, visits. Christine asks Nora to use her influence to help her procure a position at the bank where Torvald is a manager. Nora reveals her secret to Christine.

Analysis

This section reveals Nora's past, her confused internal state, and her motivations. The complexities and contradictions of the scene are the hallmarks of it. Nora says she knows she should have written to Christine when her husband died, yet she did not. Nora knows she should let Christine, who has been through a difficult time, speak and Nora should listen unselfishly, yet she does not. Nora lies about where the money for the trip to Italy came from, thinking it wise to keep it a secret—"I ought to tell you that it we had it from Papa"—yet she reveals it anyway.

The light and happy Nora from the previous scene fractures in this section, exposing the character's vanity and manipulative disposition. Several times during the conversation with Christine, Nora comments on her own attractiveness. Toying with Christine about where she got the money for the Italy trip, she says, "Perhaps I got it from some other admirers. When anyone is as attractive as I am—." When talking about how hard

she had to work to buy the "simplest and cheapest things," Nora slides "Thank heaven any clothes look well on me" into the conversation. Considering that the conversation began with Nora commenting that Christine looks older as a result of her struggles, Nora's vanity here is more to her character's discredit.

Nora's manipulation shows up in the teasing, "bit by bit" approach she takes to reveal her secret circumstances. The height of Nora's tendency to manipulate comes through most clearly when she explains that she will tell Torvald about the loan when she is no longer attractive, and "then it may be a good thing to have something in reserve—," implying that in the future she may use the fact that she saved Torvald's life as a means to control him.

As much as this section reveals Nora's negative character traits, it also clarifies the core reason for her happiness (which will eventually be shattered). Her playfulness and joy are sincere in the beginning of the play. Showing Nora like this allows Ibsen to evoke empathy for her from the audience. As they discover how burdened by debt Nora has felt, and see how relieved she is that Torvald has been promoted—possibly ending the family's financial troubles—the audience relates to Nora's personal problems.

Act 1, Section 3

Summary

Nora and Christine are both shaken when Krogstad shows up unannounced to visit Torvald. Christine meets Dr. Rank for the first time; then she meets Torvald, and Nora asks her husband whether he can employ her friend at the bank. Nora plays with her three children after Torvald leaves with Dr. Rank and Christine. Krogstad returns and spies on Nora.

Analysis

The introduction of Krogstad brings a new feeling of suspense into the play. The stage directions indicate that Christine trembles when she hears his voice. As this would be visible to the audience, they will be left wondering what happened between Christine and Krogstad in the past. More suspense is added by the way Nora greets Krogstad, suggesting that she

also has a history with him; the audience has learned by now that Nora is full of secrets and surprises, so when she says, "You? What is it?" in a "strained, low, voice," it indicates a mystery yet to be revealed. Dr. Rank comes in and speaks negatively about Krogstad, layering a menacing tone on top of the suspense. This tone dies down in the middle of the scene but rises again when Krogstad lets himself in, lurks about the house, and spies on Nora in a private moment.

The conversation between Dr. Rank and Christine centers on the contrasting ideas of moral sickness and health. This discussion builds the theme of individual versus society. Christine believes the ill should be cared for, while Dr. Rank thinks caring for people is what produces moral illness because people stop caring for themselves. Laughing hysterically, Nora responds to put the focus back on the individual: "What do I care about tiresome society?" She also points out the personal power she has over Krogstad and others in society because of her husband's promotion at the bank.

That the doctor, who is a medical authority and acts as a voice of moral judgment, would be physically sick and morally corrupted is no accident. It is a commentary on the nature of individuals and how they fit into their society. When Dr. Rank speaks of Krogstad, his words could also apply to himself, considering that Dr. Rank is secretly in love with Nora: "there are certain people who go zealously snuffing about to smell out moral corruption, and ... put the person concerned into some lucrative position where they can keep their eye on him." This description fits Dr. Rank's position in Torvald's house. Torvald is a zealot about finding corruption, and he puts his doctor friend in a "lucrative" position, "lucrative" meaning that Dr. Rank feels free to flirt and meet privately with Nora.

The section ends with a glimpse into the sweet and loving side of Nora's personality, as she plays with her children.

Act 1, Section 4

Summary

Krogstad threatens to reveal the secret loan, explaining to Nora how she has committed a criminal act. This is how he intends to blackmail her into convincing Torvald not to fire him from his modest post at the bank.

Analysis

This section opens with stage directions indicating Nora "gets up onto her knees." (She had been hiding under a table in a game of hide and seek with her children.) Nora's physical position at the beginning of her interaction with Krogstad foreshadows the new relationship he establishes with her by the end of their encounter. With Krogstad hovering over her, Nora will look like a beggar, and by the end of the scene, Krogstad makes it clear he will bring her even lower if need be. "If I lose my position a second time, you shall lose yours with me."

A dramatic pattern established earlier in the act continues; a character arrives, small talk is exchanged, and then the conversation becomes deeply philosophical. In this scene the themes that emerge are influence and respect and how they relate to individuals in society. Can there be such a thing as individuality outside the boundaries of society? Ibsen asks the audience to think deeply about this question through Krogstad and Nora's interaction in this scene.

Krogstad's motive for blackmailing Nora is not money but a desire to secure respect again from society, and he is willing to fight "as if I were fighting for my life." He views his post at the bank as his one and only chance to find redemption.

Nora represents ideas of individual influence and power, ideas that slip away as Krogstad explains how he has trapped her. By the end of the scene, Nora and Krogstad are mirror images of each other. They have made mistakes for which society will punish them. They both must fight to remain within a society that cares not at all for their individual reasons or motivations.

Act 1, Section 5

Summary

Torvald catches Nora in a lie when she initially denies that Krogstad has paid her a visit. Then the two discuss an upcoming party and Krogstad's future at the bank where Torvald has been made manager.

Analysis

The audience has come to see Nora and Krogstad as mirror images, so now when Torvald discusses Krogstad, he is also (unbeknownst to him) talking about Nora. Ibsen adds the detail here that Krogstad is in disrepute for forging a signature—the same mistake Nora has made—to ensure that the equation set up previously is apparent to the audience during this conversation. As Torvald asserts his moral judgment upon Krogstad's character, the audience sees what is at stake for Nora. Torvald likens Krogstad to an evil infection, poison, a "hypocrite," and the kind of person who makes Torvald "physically ill" to be around. He says, "It would be quite impossible for me to work with him," making it known to Nora how Torvald will react toward her if he discovers what she has done.

When caught lying about Krogstad's visit, Nora quickly brings up the upcoming masquerade ball as a distraction. Her interest in and preparation for the ball will be used by her to distract her husband several more times. In this case, however, what is most important is the metaphor that is established. Nora asks Torvald to help her choose what costume to wear.

Metaphorically, she is asking *who am I* when she asks "what shall I go as?" Later in the scene, Torvald tells Nora he "must think about your costume too," highlighting what the audience knows and Torvald does not: the truth about his wife. All Torvald really knows about Nora are her *costume* and *mask*, an unreal identity she embodies just for him. Continuing the parallel equation set up for Krogstad and Nora, Torvald also talks about Krogstad's need for a mask. He says that a "hypocrite" such as Krogstad must wear a mask "in the presence of those near and dear to him."

Also in this section, the bird symbolism threaded throughout the play takes on the specific connotation of singing signifying speech. Torvald, who has just caught Nora in a lie, tells her "a songbird must have a clean beak" to indicate that she must be honest.

All through Act 1, Nora's relationship with her children significantly declines. By the end of the scene, Torvald has rattled Nora to the point that she is afraid to be in the same room with the children. She is spiraling out of control.

Act 2, Section 1

Summary

It is Christmas day, and Nora has refused to see her children. She nervously prepares for the upcoming costume party. She discusses Dr. Rank and her loan problem with Christine, who drops by to help mend Nora's old, torn costume. Christine leaves when Torvald enters, and Nora begs him to not fire Krogstad. Angered, Torvald sends the dismissal letter immediately instead of waiting until after the New Year.

Analysis

The state of the Christmas tree in the beginning of the section serves to show the passing of time and represents Nora's emotional decline: the candles on the tree are "burned down," the tree is "in the corner," "stripped of its ornaments," and its branches are "disheveled." Act 2 opens with heavy foreshadowing. As Nora and the nurse talk about the costume and the children, the conversation illuminates Nora's terrible situation and the abandonment of her children that is to come. The nurse says the costume "needs mending," it can "easily be put in order" with patience. Nora says she would like to tear the dress "into a hundred thousand pieces." She had said this of the bond for the debt, "the nasty dirty paper" to Christine just a few moments earlier. When Nora asks the nurse how she could have left her own daughter, the nurse replies, "A poor girl who has got into trouble should be glad to. Besides, that wicked man didn't do a single thing for me." This is exactly how Nora's situation turns out by the end of the drama.

The section continues to weave connections between the characters, specifically between Nora and Dr. Rank and between Torvald and Nora's papa. Dr. Rank is an example of immorality manifesting from one generation into the next. Nora tells Christine, "His father was a horrible man ... and that is why his son was sickly from childhood." In Act 1, Torvald (unknowingly) suggests to Nora that she could corrupt her children, so Dr. Rank's character serves as a magnifying mirror to Nora, intensifying her worries. Near the end of the scene, Torvald assumes Nora is in a frightened state because she is traumatized by humiliation from childhood when her father was suspected of immoral behavior. Torvald claims an important difference between himself and her Papa: "Your father's

reputation as a public official was not above suspicion." This exchange of ideas happens right before Ibsen launches into direct commentary on marriage (described in the next paragraph). That Torvald will be brought down in status by Nora's indiscretion takes on significant weight here, bringing it into the audience's awareness that husband and wife are intrinsically linked as are father and daughter. The audience is invited to question whether it is truly possible for an individual to even exist outside of society.

Torvald makes a promise to Nora he will later break: "Come what will ... I shall have both courage and strength if they be needed." Ultimately, Torvald will learn he does not have the moral character he thinks he has, but here is where the seed of Nora's hope is planted. This moment in the play is one of the few times Ibsen comments specifically on marriage, and he does so through Torvald's character: "Well, we will share it, Nora, as man and wife should." Right after Torvald makes this declaration, he soothes Nora, saying "There! There!—not these frightened dove's eyes." Calling her a dove, rather than the usual skylark or songbird, brings to bear the dove's symbolic religious significance. Thus, a connection between marriage and religion is suggested.

Act 2, Section 2

Summary

Alone, Nora agonizes over Krogstad exposing the secret loan, thinking Dr. Rank may be able to help when he shows up and reveals his impending death and feelings of love for her. Krogstad drops by and demands to see Nora and, after they talk, drops a letter divulging the loan and forgery into the locked letterbox outside Torvald's office.

Analysis

Typically, Nora and Dr. Rank's conversation quickly plunges into the topic of self-awareness through the doctor's confession of facing the ugly truth of his impending death. Dr. Rank says he has been "taking stock" of his "internal economy" and declares himself "bankrupt." When Nora accuses him of saying an "ugly thing," Dr. Rank says, "It is no use lying to oneself," and after one more "examination" he will face even

more ugly truth; he is speaking on both literal and metaphorical levels here.

His dialogue not only shows that Dr. Rank's self-awareness is on a level higher than the other characters, but also that he, in stark contrast with Torvald, is willing to try to have meaningful conversation with Nora. Dr. Rank speaks of his fear that he will be forgotten and replaced by Christine. He confesses his true feelings of love. He confronts Nora for flirting with him and explains that she misled him. He asks her why she is laughing, whereas Torvald seems to demand that Nora laugh and sing no matter if she is happy or sad. Of Torvald, Dr. Rank says, "Helmer's refined nature gives him an unconquerable disgust at everything that is ugly." Not so with Dr. Rank, and in this section of Act 2 the audience has a window to look in at the nature of the intimacy he and Nora share. However, at the end of the conversation, Dr. Rank easily assumes that Nora's problem is the lie she uses—a new dress has come and she wants to keep it a secret from Torvald. As much as Dr. Rank embraces reality, he still lacks perception into the depth of Nora's character, leaving her to find independence and solve her own problem.

Act 2, Section 3

Summary

Nora distracts Torvald from reading Krogstad's letter by having him help her rehearse the tarantella for tomorrow night's dance. Seeing that Nora is agitated, Christine offers to visit Krogstad to try to convince him to take the letter back unread, but Krogstad is not at home when she visits.

Analysis

Nora's wild rendition of the tarantella reflects her mad focus on trying to keep Torvald from the letter. It also represents her evolving independence, as she refuses to obey Torvald's various commands to slow down and dance the way he has taught her.

At the same time, Nora reveals her belief that "A wonderful thing is going to happen," a thing that makes her ecstatic as shown by her dancing. What is this wonderful thing? Is it that she is willing to dance unabashedly and embrace with all of her

being the role Torvald demands she play? She does say to him, "Torvald, dear, criticize me and correct me." Or is it her belief that she is somehow becoming more free, an idea she postulates to Torvald when she tells him he will be free from needing to attend only to her, after the dance?

Act 3, Section 1

Summary

Christine reveals she still harbors love for Krogstad and wishes for them to "join forces." Krogstad offers to recall his letter to Torvald and not expose Nora's loan and forgery now that Christine wants to marry him, but Christine tells him to leave the letter in the box. Krogstad waits for Christine outside while she says goodnight to Torvald and Nora. Torvald, who is bored with Christine, tells her he will not walk her home because she "[hasn't] any great distance to go."

Analysis

As they reunite, Christine and Krogstad form a relationship that sharply contrasts Nora and Torvald's relationship. Christine and Krogstad have both learned to be honest by paying the consequences of their dishonesty. Nora and Torvald still have these difficult lessons looming ahead. This new relationship is here to show that it is impossible for Nora and Torvald to be together without going through the process of becoming honest with each other and obtaining individual self-awareness.

Christine reveals to Krogstad her true motivation in visiting Nora, and it is significant that it is not, as she told Nora originally, to find pleasure in work, but because "there is not the least pleasure in working for oneself." Christine will play a part in pushing Nora to relinquish her role as a wife and mother—although it is not Christine's intention that Nora should do so. Christine's wisdom goes beyond what Nora will learn by the end of the play, but Ibsen leaves Christine and Krogstad to exemplify finding the necessity of honesty and self-awareness in a marriage rooted in depth and truth. Their honest interactions serve to shine a spotlight on the Helmers' rather superficial and dishonest relationship.

The ensuing exchange between Nora, Torvald, and Christine

supports the idea that Christine and Krogstad are wiser and more honest than Nora and Torvald. A little drunk on champagne, Torvald reveals his shallowness, indicating how erroneously he sees his true nature. He forces Nora through the door, commenting that she ought to come inside from the cold, and then moments later takes her shawl off as if she really were a doll for Christine to admire.

Torvald comes into the scene wearing a mask, and, although he takes it off, his character metaphorically keeps it on, in that he is only concerned with the appearance of things. For instance, he launches into a diatribe on how the act of embroidering makes a woman look prettier than knitting does.

Moreover, Torvald's actions show on several counts that he is not a true gentleman. He does not bother to walk Christine home, contrasting with Krogstad's concern that she not walk alone at night. Torvald reveals how two-faced he is when he says "What, already?" when Christine rises to leave and then, "At last we have got rid of her" after she is gone. His further criticism of Christine as a "frightful bore" suggests how distasteful he finds the very qualities that Nora lacks: honesty and self-awareness.

Act 3, Section 2

Summary

Torvald, in a festive mood, acts romantically toward Nora, but they are interrupted by Dr. Rank's visit, during which he lets Nora know he is dying. Torvald reads Krogstad's letter, renounces Nora, then reads Krogstad's new letter and forgives her.

Analysis

At the climax of the play, Torvald's morality is given the ultimate test. His character's success or failure places him in the center of the conflict—the place Nora has held until this moment. Torvald has been moralizing and demanding perfect loyalty, sacrifice, and truth from Nora all along. Christine, Dr. Rank, and Krogstad have also been pressing her for honesty.

Torvald hasn't experienced any resistance to his ideas of self-righteousness, but as he takes center stage and feels the first

touch of pressure, he buckles and renounces his wife. Diving deep into the depths of hatred, he calls her a "miserable creature." Even before this moment of truth, Torvald's character begins to show an unsavory side. His fantasies reveal he is sexually motivated by a desire to be both sneaky and dominating. Then he scolds Nora for saying "I won't" in response to his sexual advances. "You won't? ... Am I not your husband?" And when the moment of truth comes—in Torvald's response to the letter—it is significant that he has two opposite responses: one of renunciation and one of forgiveness. The first response is caused by his fears of personal ruin and loss, and his second response only comes after those fears have been removed. This is the moment Nora's character is crystallized for the audience. She never renounces her husband to alleviate her own fear and pain, but he easily and venomously does this to her. Now the audience sees that all of his promises are nothing but empty words when put to the test.

The concept of *understanding* is the philosophical idea this part of the play explores. Christine has just introduced the idea of understanding being the key to a true relationship, and here on display is the crisis of Nora and Torvald's misunderstanding of each other. As Torvald reveals deep feelings of resentment toward Nora's papa, he also reveals to Nora that he will not sacrifice for her in the way she sacrifices for him. In this revelation, Nora's understanding of Torvald shatters, and she sees him as he really is.

Act 3, Section 3

Summary

Nora and Torvald talk seriously about their marriage and Nora's intention to end it. Nora tells Torvald he is no longer obligated to her, and they give their wedding rings back to each other. Nora leaves, and Torvald cries out in despair and hope.

Analysis

Nora, having been treated as a "doll" by her father and then her husband, has never had to develop her own opinions about religion, morality, and the law. By the end of the play, she must develop them. Torvald lacks a general understanding of Nora's

desire for self-awareness and, point for point in their final conversation, he tries desperately to define Nora's views on "sacred duties," "religion," and "conscience" with his own. However, those days are over for Nora, who replies, "But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to."

Ibsen's choice of an ending declares the play's message that women and men will have no understanding between them until women have gone through the necessary experiences that lead to self-awareness. Those experiences include education, which results in equality. Then, and only then, is "real wedlock" possible.

Torvald's character elevates to represent all men when he tells Nora, "But no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves," and she responds as if representing all women, "It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done." The last section of the play addresses the misunderstandings between them, and Nora's voice casts judgment upon men's "great sin" against women: they have never sat down to a serious conversation or tried "in earnest" to "get at the bottom of anything." This addresses the ideas woven throughout the play linked to men thinking of women as less intelligent.

Nora does not care what others in society will say about her leaving. She sees that Torvald is exactly like her papa, and their home has "been nothing but a playroom." And the most thematically powerful example of Nora's transformation is conveyed to the audience when she says, "I believe ... I am a reasonable human being just as you are."

“” Quotes

"Nora! The same little featherhead."

— Torvald, Act 1, Section 1

When Torvald calls Nora a featherhead, it implies he does not think she is smart. Her thoughts are just empty fluff, as birds' feathers are light and shed easily. Torvald views Nora as a flighty songbird throughout the play, and he believes a woman should be as he sees Nora, naturally dependent on a man to make important decisions.

"The law cares nothing about motives."

— Krogstad, Act 1, Section 4

Nora believes that the love she showed by borrowing money to save her husband and by not concerning her papa when he was on his deathbed assures her innocence for forging her father's signature for a loan. Krogstad, a lawyer who loaned Nora money, has come to bribe her and explain her criminal act, and this is his reply to her emotional defense of her actions.

"Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home."

— Torvald, Act 1, Section 5

Torvald is speaking about Krogstad, ignorant of the fact that Nora is guilty of the same crime and lies as Krogstad. Torvald is thus unknowingly talking about his own wife and his own house. Continuing the metaphor of lies as infections, Torvald says right after this, "each breath ... in such a house is full of the germs of evil."

"Nora—Do you think he is the only one—"

— Dr. Rank, Act 2, Section 2

Nora is just about to tell Dr. Rank about her secret loan from Krogstad, and she has just said Torvald is willing to give his life for her. Dr. Rank's admission of love shocks Nora and deeply disappoints her because now she cannot ask him for help.

"But surely you can understand that being with Torvald is a little

like being with Papa."

— Nora, Act 2, Section 2

Nora explains to Dr. Rank why she prefers his company to her husband's. Earlier, Torvald has said that Nora is like her papa because she is always asking for money. In this conversation Nora says Torvald is like her papa because he is always moralizing. Later, Nora will realize that both her father and Torvald have treated her as if she were a doll and forced her to agree with them.

"My dear darling Nora, you are dancing as if your life depended on it."

— Torvald, Act 2, Section 3

Nora rehearses the tarantella to distract Torvald. Each time he begins to lose interest, she becomes more frantic in her dance moves. She must prevent him from reading Korvald's letter that exposes her forgery and debt. Torvald doesn't know he is speaking a deeper truth here; Nora's marriage—her life as she has known it—literally does depend on this dance.

"And then four-and-twenty hours till the next midnight. Then the tarantella will be over."

— Nora, Act 2, Section 3

The tarantella is the dance Nora plans to perform at the Stenborgs' costume party, but it symbolizes Nora's desire to please Torvald and, by doing so, keep her role as wife and mother. Her words foreshadow the great shift in her internal and external circumstances that will come in the next day.

"I have learned to act prudently."

Life and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that."

— Christine, Act 3, Section 1

A long life of poverty and loss has given Christine wisdom, contrasting with Nora's good luck in life. Nora's resulting lack of wisdom or self-awareness is in equally sharp contrast.

"And life has taught me not to believe in fine speeches."

— Krogstad, Act 3, Section 1

Krogstad is responding to Christine's plea not to expose Nora's treachery to Torvald. Because Krogstad has had to struggle as Christine has, he is annoyed by what he sees as her overly emotional appeal.

"Well, I am like a shipwrecked woman clinging to some wreckage—"

— Christine, Act 3, Section 1

Christine echoes Krogstad's earlier words, saying her life, too, has been a failure, and she is barely surviving.

"Do you understand now what it is you have done for me?"

— Torvald, Act 3, Section 2

Torvald is being sarcastic as he says these words to Nora. She believes she acted from love by forging her father's signature on a loan when she borrowed money to save her husband's life. Torvald believes she ruined his life and reputation.

"I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a double attractiveness in my eyes."

— Torvald, Act 3, Section 2

In this moment, Torvald is revealing his true nature to his wife. He says these words just after he has told Nora that she is immoral and unfit to be the mother of his children. These words not only show how sexist Torvald is but also how hypocritical and lacking in self-awareness.

"I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I."

— Nora, Act 3, Section 3

All her life, Nora has adopted her opinions from her father, husband, and the society she grew up in. This is the moment she no longer cares what men or society think. She has decided to discover—on her own—what she believes.

"I cannot spend the night in a strange man's room."

— Nora, Act 3, Section 3

Nora has learned that she and Torvald do not love or understand each other. In light of her revelation, he is a stranger to her.

Symbols

Money

Money symbolizes men's control over women, who are not allowed equal access to it. The play begins with Nora coquettishly asking Torvald for money and ends with her refusing to take any belongings from his house except those she owned before they met. She also rejects his offer to help her financially as she leaves. Christine, in direct contrast to Nora, has means to make money, which gives her the power to make her own choices.

Tarantella

The tarantella is an Italian folk dance based on the frenzied movements victims make to draw out the poison after being bitten by a spider. Ibsen chose Nora to dance the tarantella to align the symbol in the play with the myth already associated with the dance. It also symbolizes the pretense Torvald and Nora have set in the play as the staple of their relationship. He instructs, and she performs. He criticizes, and she "dances" faster to please, but that doesn't please him either. When Nora rehearses the tarantella, she dances with wild abandon. She is trying to please, but she is also frantic to remove the "poison" of corruption Torvald has suggested she possesses when he refers to Krogstad's lack of character.

Birds

When Nora is happy in the way Torvald likes and expects, he calls her his "skylark" or "songbird." When she is frightened, she is his "dove." When he is unhappy, Torvald scolds Nora, referring to her in terms of birds, such as "A songbird must have a clean beak." Birds represent Torvald's view of Nora as a creature meant to entertain and delight him, whom he must protect. They also represent Nora's flight to freedom, as she is like a bird in a cage, singing for her keep in the beginning of the play, but escaping by the end.

Themes

Sexism

Nora and Torvald's relationship is based on stereotypes. The role of each in the marriage is defined by what men and women are supposed to do rather than by what might work for the couple as individuals.

Torvald represents what he himself calls the "true man's heart." However, events in the play expose this ideal for what it is: a false heart attached to hypocritical expectations. Among them is the belief that women should accept a lesser status and value than men.

For her part Nora represents the masses of women who have given up their unique identities in order to conform to societal stereotypes. Yet these roles are just as false as the male beliefs that created them. As shown through events in the play, such roles are both unfulfilling and unsustainable.

From the moment the play opens, the pervasive sexism of the era is evident. Nora cheerfully goes about her holiday preparations while Torvald, her master, lords his power over her regarding every detail. Nora is expected to be his ideal wife while simultaneously enduring his derogatory "that is like a woman!" attitude when she acts the way he expects and desires. Through this dynamic, Ibsen exposes sexism for what it is: contradictory and impossible.

The interactions between the couple relentlessly reinforce the theme throughout the play. It is perhaps most apparent in Act 2 when Torvald and Nora are trying their best to please each other. It is at this very moment, however, that Torvald becomes angered by Nora's desire to be acknowledged for trying to please. Torvald has chosen Nora's costume and dance music for the party and asks for credit for his idea, saying, "wasn't that a happy thought of mine?" "But don't you think it nice of me too, to do as you wish?" Nora replies. Her comment causes Torvald to see equal treatment as rebellion: "Nice?—because you do as your husband wishes? ... you little rogue, I am sure you did not mean it in that way."

And again, near the end of the play, Torvald reveals just what low regard he has for women, calling Nora "a thoughtless

woman" who has put him at the mercy of Krogstad and is therefore unworthy of his affection. Yet, when the situation is rectified, Torvald is ready to take her back and simply cannot understand why she won't respond to his command. In his mind women have no life outside of what their men tell them to have. So Torvald is incapable of seeing Nora as her own person with her own thoughts, wants, and needs. Once Nora realizes this, she knows she has no choice except to leave the sexist marriage if she is to find herself.

Individual versus Society

Krogstad brings up the central question of whether a person can truly be an individual within the boundaries of society. Nora's departure delivers the answer: to be an individual means to—at least temporarily—reject or ignore social norms. However, Ibsen uses characters surrounding Nora to suggest that complete exclusion from society is impossible. The goal is rather for the individual to achieve independence. Once a person is comfortable with his or her unique personality, the individual benefits society by living more authentically within it.

Krogstad and Christine have been freed from the fetters of society by misfortune. They both long to rejoin it and cannot be permanently happy or fulfilled outside of its traditions of marriage, honest wage earning, care for others, and respect from peers. Ibsen uses the individuality of Christine and Krogstad to reflect Nora's circumstances, and as a couple to contrast Nora's relationship with Torvald. Krogstad has committed the same crime as Nora; Christine has achieved the independence Nora longs for in the beginning of the play. Both have paid a heavy price. By drawing strong parallels between Nora and these characters who have lived outside of society's expectations, Ibsen anchors Nora's defiance of society. Yet the theme of the individual versus society in *A Doll's House* is not intended to be a tribute to chaos. Nora's future is a riddle, but Ibsen has left the audience with a clue to the riddle's answer in Christine and Krogstad. It seems this is a couple who will start a new and honest life together. Torvald, on the other hand, remains on stage alone at the end of the play, still pondering the question.

Self-Awareness

The theme of self-awareness unfolds throughout Nora's journey. Dr. Rank also represents self-awareness, both in his ability to see that his death is nigh and to admit to Nora that he is in love with her. With his honesty, he stands in stark contrast to his friend Torvald, who holds an inaccurate yet unshakable belief in his own superiority.

At the beginning of the play, Nora is unaware that she lacks self-awareness. As the play unfolds she gains a sense of this as she matches her intellectual, moral, and emotional viewpoint to those of her husband and father. Torvald speaks of Krogstad as a "poisonous" endangerment to his children and a person who must wear a mask "in the presence of those near and dear to him." These words plant the seed of self-discovery in Nora. The horror of the thought of herself as being unworthy or harmful to her children forces Nora to see the consequences of her actions at the end of Act 2. In that moment she makes the earnest decision, "I shall not be able to be so much with them now as I was before," and she withdraws incrementally from her children throughout the rest of the play.

Whereas Torvald has cast doubt on Nora's sense of being a good person, it is Dr. Rank who provides an example of what a self-aware person is—in his strength to speak the truth, face his death, and see Nora for who she is. When Torvald exposes himself as a hypocrite, Nora chooses not to let an unaware man educate her, and she strikes out alone to gain a better, stronger sense of self.

Honesty

In developing Christine's character, Ibsen underscores the importance of honesty. You cannot know yourself or have a healthy relationship without it. The old adage "the truth shall set you free" rings particularly true by the end of the play, after watching the struggles created by various characters' untruths.

From the beginning, the more Nora lies and hides from the truth, the more confused she becomes. From the tiniest deception (eating macaroons) to the crime of forgery, Nora builds a tangled web of lies. Christine serves to unravel them,

both the lies told to Torvald and the deeper lies of Nora's self-deception. As a result, Nora is able to grow from someone who appears only able to play at life into a person determined to live deeply.

The differences between the two characters are stark. Nora is beautiful. Christine looks older than her years. Christine takes care of her dying mother, while Nora borrows money by forging her father's name and neglects to see him before he dies. Christine seeks a husband to live for; Nora wants to live independently. And most important, Christine is honest, while Nora lies.

Nora and Christine gradually switch circumstances by the end of the play. In the process of this transformation—which requires Nora's honesty to be complete—Christine becomes Nora's accomplice and mentor, urging her to find "understanding" through honesty, which Nora tries to avoid until the moment it is impossible for her to do so. It is Christine telling Krogstad to leave the letter—that Torvald must read it—makes the truth inescapable for Nora. With the exposure comes the opportunity to take her flight to freedom.

Suggested Reading

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