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## Henric Ibsen's the doll's house

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### Abstract

In Ibsen's A Doll's House, the central conflict revolves around Torvald's controlling; demeaning treatment of his wife Nora. The tragedy of the story is not only to superiority of the husband over his wife but also the dehumanizing of the children, who are never given a voice or allowed the possibility of bettering their position. They begin the story under an institution that has marginalized them, and they remain confined to subhuman status throughout the play. In this way, Ibsen's work; as he claims goes beyond being a work about woman's rights and becomes instead a work dealing with the rights of all human struggling under an oppressive, patriarchal society.

**Keywords:** Life and works, childhood and early life, career and writing, dramatist, the attitude

### Introduction

A number of foreign influences did much to bring about a revival of drama. Most important of these influences was that of the Norwegian dramatist, Henric Ibsen, whose work became known in England about 1890 and gave an enormous impetus to the realist movement, to the deeper study of character and to a subtler conception of plot and character presentation. More than any other, Ibsen may claim credit for extending the scope of the modern dramatist no doubt Ibsen's, influence was rather late in coming to England, but with the passing of time his treatment of themes and his technical methods came to be fully accepted, and a new spirit and a new enthusiasm overtook the English drama in early years of the present century. The weakness of the Victorians or more conspicuous in the drama of the period than in other forms of literature; while those qualities that made the Victorian novel and Victorian verse so remarkable, or precisely those that admit least of being expressed in terms of the theatre. In some quarters the change that came over the English drama is attributed almost entirely to Ibsen, with William Archer as his high priest and Bernard Shaw as his prophet. But the change cannot be expressed so simply as that; it was a change in the psychological climate of Europe that affected some countries more quickly than others. Mean while, among the dramatic critics of the day there was Mr. William Archer worked hard to introduce the Ibsen yeast into English theatrical bread. What Ibsen purposed to effect has been thus expressed in Mr. Shaw's Exuberant style.

### Research Methodology

In documenting the evidences in this research I have followed the rules and regulations of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. The methods and approaches adopted for this research work will include the analytical, interpretative and comparative study in the research topic.

### Research Problem

'Exploring the ways of Psychological condition of Woman to find out the socio-realistic elements of modernism in the play *Doll's House*'

### Objectives

1. To explore psychology of woman in the patriarchal society in the play Doll's House.
2. To know the social and realistic conditions of the play.
3. To analysis the modernistic elements in the play.
4. To know anti romantic elements in the play.
5. To know the female rights and emancipation in the play 'The Doll's House'

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### Life and Works

Henric Ibsen was a famous Norwegian playwright, theatre director and poet. Henric Ibsen is the Norwegian playwright deemed the "Father of realism". And he was often considered as "the father of modern theatre", and one of the founders of modernism in the theatre. Ibsen is often ranked as one of the greatest playwrights in the European literature, also perhaps the greatest playwright since Shakespeare. When European theatres were expected to show strict mores of family life and propriety, his plays were considered scandalous as they revealed the reality that was hidden behind many facades. At the young age, Ibsen was greatly influenced by the famous Norwegian poet and playwright, Henric Wergel and and Norwegian folk tales particularly collected by peter christen Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moe. His important works include, Brand (1865), Peer Gynt (1867), Emperor and Galilwan (1873), doll's house (1879), Ghosts (1881), An enemy of the people (1882), The Wild Duck (1884), Hedda Gabler (1890), and The Master Builder (1892)

### Childhood and Early Life

Henric Ibsen was born on March 20, in Skien, Norway. His parents were Knud Ibsen and MarichenAlternburg. Ibsen was a descendant of some of the oldest and most distinguished families of Norway. Shortly after his birth, financial condition of his family dwindled down. His father went in the state of depression whereas his mother took solace in spirituality. Ibsen was fifteen when he forced to leave the school. He moved to the small town of grimstad, took an apprentice job at a pharmacist and began writing plays. When he was 18, a liaison with a servant produced him an illegitimate child. Ibsen had to play for the child's upbringing till the boy grew into his teens, although Ibsen never saw him. In 1850, Ibsen went to Christiania (now Oslo) intending to matriculate at the university. But his earlier attempts of entering the university were failed as he couldn't clear the entrance exams. As a result, he dropped the idea of matriculation at the university and committed himself to writing. The same year, he published his first play, the tragedy Catalina under the pseudonym "BryniolfBiarme". His first staged play was "The Burial Mound" (1850) which didn't receive much attention. Despite of numerous unsuccessful plays, Ibsen remained determined to be a playwright. When Ibsen was young, Norwegian author Henric Wergel and was the most acclaimed, and widely read Norwegian poet and playwright. Wergeland, along with other Norwegian folk tales, particularly collected by peter christen Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moe, inspired Ibsen to write more plays.

### Career and Writing:

Ibsen worked at Detnorske Theater (Bergen), where he was involved in the production of more than 145 plays as a writer, director, and producer. No individual plays came from him during this period. His failures to achieve success gave him immense experience at the Norwegian theatre, which proved to be very helpful for him in the future. In 1858, he returned to Christiania and became the creative director of the Christiania theatre. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1858, he married Suzannah Thoreson. The couple had a son, sigurd born on December 23, 1859. They had to face poor financial circumstances, which made Ibsen made Ibsen disillusioned with his life in Norway. He left Christiania in 1864 and went to Sorrento in Italy. His play, "Brand" (1865) brought Ibsen critical

acclaim, along with considerable amount of financial success. The success of Brand composer and pianist Edward Grieg composed in incidental music And songs based on this play. The success of these plays brought Confidence in him and encouraged he to introduce more of is ideas and beliefs in to the drama. The next phase of Ibsen's life is considered as his golden age, as he reached the height of power and influence and became the centre of dramatic controversy across Europe. In 1868, he moved from Italy to Dresden, Germany and spent the next the few years in writings his most important work, Emperor and Galilean which was published in 1873. This play was based on the life and times of the Roman emperor, Julian the apostate. In 1875 Ibsen moved to Munich and published is next play, "A Doll's House", in 1879. It was followed by another play, "Ghost" in 1881. The next year in 1882, he came with another controversy play, "an enemy of the people". His early plays were controversial to a small scale of individual households. But in "An enemy of the people" the antagonist was the whole community. His next play, "the wild duke" (1884) is often considered as his finest work and also the most complex of his works. In the later years of his literary career, is dramas turned more introspective, less denouncing of society's moral values. In later plays like "Hedda Gablear", 1890 and 'The Master Builder' (1892). Ibsen explained the psychological conflicts that transcended a simple rejection of current conventions many readers, who consider anti-Victorian didacticism as dated, simplistic or banal, will find these plays more interesting for their hard-edged, objective consideration of interpersonal confrontation. "Hedda Gabler" is the most performed play of Ibsen. The title role of the play is still one of the most challenging and rewarding role for an actress. His plays, "Hedda Gabler" and A Doll's House were based on female protagonists whose almost demonic energy proves both attractive and destructive for people around them. Ibsen changes the rules of drama with his elements of realism, which was later adopted by Chekhov and others. His forward, challenging and direct approach to issues made the plays an art rather than more entertainment. Ibsen returned to Norway in 1891, which had changed considerable then. he did play a prominent role in the changes that had happened across society.

### Ibsen as a Dramatist

Ibsen's career as a dramatist spans a period of fifty year. His first play, 'Catilina' was published in 1850 and his last play, 'when we dead awaken,' in 1899. His creative period thus, cover the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period, His wrote twenty-five plays. His writing career is characterized by various stage of his artistic development. These changes may roughly be divided into the following categories:

- Nationalistic plays
- Poetic plays
- Modern, realistic, problem plays
- Psychological or 'humanistic' plays
- Metaphysical spiritual or 'visionary' plays.

Ibsen's first phase of writing comprises nine plays, from 'Catilina' to "The Pretenders". But his intrinsic work as a dramatist begins only after he left Norway. He did not become a great dramatist until he broke away from the stage. The plays 'Brand' and 'Peer Gynt' which were expressly not intended for the stage are extravagant fancy.

They are the best and strongest expression of Ibsen's romanticism.

The third phase of his writing made him famous and earned him the title of the 'father of the modern drama'. The play of his period is described as a social 'or realistic' or 'problem' plays. Thus, Ibsen returned his gaze from romanticism to the stark realities of the world around him.

After returning to his home country, Ibsen wrote his last four plays. These constitute the last phase of his dramatic writing. These plays are 'partly tragic monographs of individual conscience and partly transposed confessions of the author himself' (J. Lavrin). Here Ibsen moves away from the realm of individual psyche to that of individual conscience.

Some as his earlier plays; they are certainly for deeper and more significant. Some critics point out that these last plays mark a decline in Ibsen's power. Some other critics hold an entirely different view. Una Elli's – Fermor Claims that these plays represent between them some of the noblest thought and the finest dramatic art in the whole of his work. These plays mark the ultimate stage of Ibsen's journey on the road to self-discovery and self-realization. Though they are not as striking theatrically to the intellectuals of his age, Ibsen was a revolutionary thinker, a social and moral philosopher of great significance. There was the need of his message which drew them towards his plays and that constituted their real strength. But now, most of the ideas round which Ibsen's social plays were built have lost their topical interest. Therefore, the plays have lost their sensational appeal. But the technical excellence of Ibsen's dramatic craftiness is appreciated even today. The dramatic effect of his technique is as fresh as ever. 'It is Ibsen's dramatic form, not ideas, which constitute his great contribution to the theatre'.

### **Ibsen's Deep Understanding Of Human Character and Human Relationships**

The technical contribution explains the continued life of Ibsen's plays on the stage today. Ibsen's enduring greatness as a dramatist is due not to his technical innovations, but to the depth and subtlety of his understanding of character and, which is rarer, of human relations. None of the great novelists created more memorable women than Agnes, Nora, Helen Alving, Rebecca Ellida Wangel, Rita Allmers, and Ella Rontheim. And he created a succession of male characters of a size and strength that represent a challenge to any actor- Brand, Peer Gynt, Oswald Alving, Thomas Stockmen, Halvard sonless, John Gabriel Borkman, Arnold Rubek- characters who defy shallow or clever acting but who, worthily interpreted, offer as rewarding experiences as it is possible to receive in a theatre. Yet so delicate was Ibsen's understandings of human relationships with the other characters are right, the performance fails. And, as Ibsen himself insisted, his leading characters are almost exception passionate characters; even when those passions are inhibited they are never sexless. It would be an exaggeration, perhaps to say that Ibsen's plays are about sex, for they are about so much besides; but there is none of his plays, except Brand and the Enemy of the People, in which sex is not a major and decisive element.

### **The Attitude of Questioning in Ibsen's social plays**

Ibsen's uniqueness among dramatists as a contributor to the social debate has to also be noted. It is well-known that a

man may more easily be converted in to a crowd than when he is alone, and it is not the least of Ibsen's numerous contributions to the theatre that he turned it from a place of entertainment and occasional catharsis into a place from which men emerged with a compulsive feeling to reconsider basic principles which they had never before seriously questioned. Shakespeare never questioned the established tenets and beliefs of time as Ibsen did there were more social abuses in Shakespeare's England than in Ibsen's Norway, but Shakespeare never challenged one of them. Nobody ever came out of a theatre after the performance of a play by Shakespeare, feeling compelled to reconsider his basic concepts of life. Yet that was the effect of Ibsen's social plays on his contemporaries. And his ability to portray its depths and nuances, and because he did this as surely in the social plays as in everything else he wrote, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People*. Society changes quickly, the mind hardly at all; it is that which makes his work permanent.

### **Henric Ibsen's Plays**

- *Catalina* (1849), Ibsen's first play, written in verse.
- *The Warrior's Barrow* (1850), his second play, also written in verse.
- *Norma* (1851), a tragic opera, in rhymed and unrhymed verse with a few passages in prose.
- *St. John's Eve* (1851), a romantic comedy in prose and verse.
- *Lady Inger* (1854), a historical tragedy in prose.
- *The Feast at Solhaug* (1855), another romantic verse and prose comedy.
- *Olaf Liljekrans* (1856), yet another verse and prose comedy.
- *The Vikings at Helgoland* (1858), a historical tragedy in verse.
- *Love's Comedy* (1862), a modern satire in verse.
- *The Pretenders* (1863), another historical prose tragedy.
- *Brand* (1865), a play in verse, meant for reading, and not for acted.
- *Peer Gynt* (1867), another play in verse.
- *The League of Youth* (1867)

### **Significance**

*A Doll's House* is symbolically significant as well as highly suggestive of the message that Ibsen seems to have intended to convey through the play. There are two important aspects of the play, which the title directly points to: the doll and house. The doll represents Nora the central characters, and the house stands for the house of Helmer where Nora lives. The word 'Doll' has been used in the title in a rather ironic manner. The word 'Doll' means a woman without any will or mind of her own, a passive and subservient woman. For eight long years Nora has been a passive and obedient wife to Helmer, always conforming to his ideas, opinions, and tastes. He has always treated her as a pet and his property. His attitude towards her has always been possessive, as if she wholly belonged to him and had no individuality of own. She has always accepted that position. Thus Nora has all these years been a 'Doll' and she has been living in a doll's house. But at the end Nora rejects her role as Helmer's 'doll-wife' and forsaking him, goes into the world outside in order to have a first-hand experience of life to establish her own identity and discover her own potentialities.

### Characterization of the Play

**Torvald Helmer:** Torvald Helmer is a lawyer. He is a principled man. He refused to undertake cases that were unacceptable in moral values. Being committed to certain principles, Torvald Helmer has seen hard days. He is the husband of Nora. He leads a simple life. He is studious and industrious. Torvald Helmer is a good husband and a loving father. He is a contented person. He is disciplined and thrifty. He talks less and works hard. He has covetously guarded his honor and his integrity. Nora has committed forgery, and she is proud of it, for she did it out of love for her husband to save his life. He is a self-conceited moralist. He values and attaches more importance to the social respectability for more than human values. Nora Helmer: Nora is a wife of Mr. Hemer. She is the heroine of the play. She loves her husband very dearly and is ready to do anything for his sake. It is her belief that her husband too loves her dearly. It is her firm belief that her husband too loves her dearly.

Nora shares her husband's joys and sorrows equally. Both of them have struggled hard to live a decent life. She is proud of her husband's commitment to professional ethics as a lawyer. She has borne him there happy children. She looks after her family with loving care. Her husband feels sick due to over work and cares. The doctors advised him to change the place. They needed money. Nora has committed forgery in order to the life of her husband, but he, instead of appreciating her act, denounces her as a liar and criminal. If we do not take Nora as childish and thoughtless as she appears to be her actions with appear far less improbable.

Nora character is really a very complex character, made up of contradictory traits. She plays a dual role that of a child and a heroic woman in one. She could leave her husband and children as unhesitatingly as she forged the signature of her father. What prompted Nora to take the momentous decision of leaving her husband, children and the house she was bound to her husband by her trust in his love for her. Once it was shattered there was no point in her staying with him. Further, her decision was facilitated by the thought that her children would be safe with the servants. Nora's father: Though Nora's father is dead before the action of the play begins; the character refers to him throughout the play. Though she clearly loves and admires her father, Nora also comes to blame him for contributing to her subservient position in life. Nils Krogstad: Nils Krogstad is known of Torvald Helmer from his school days. He is essentially a good man. But circumstances in life prompted him to become a corrupt man. He was upset when his lover Christine deserted him. He becomes morally ruined. He couldn't get settled in life. His marriage did not bring him happiness. The death of his wife further married his happiness. He held a small position in the bank. Where Mr. Helmer became the manager, he felt sure that he would be dismissed. He did not want to lose his position. Therefore, he resorted to blackmail Nora by threatening to expose her act of forgery. Thus he plays the role of villain Mr. Nils Krogstad is a shrewd fellow; he is frank and straight forward. He is a man of determination. He is essentially good. He is a victim of circumstance.

**Dr. Rank:** Torvald's best friend. Dr. Rank stands out as the one character in the play who is as by and large unconcerned with what other think of him. He is also notable for his stoic acceptance of his fate. Unlike Torvald

and Nora, Dr. Rank admits to the diseased nature of his life for the most part, he avoids talking to Torvald about his imminent out of respect for Torvald's distaste for ugliness.

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

**Mrs. Linde:** Mrs. Christine Linde is Nora's schoolmate and childhood friend. She was poor. She had a helpless mother and little brothers to look after. She had loved Nils Krogstad but his financial status was not good. Therefore she was forced to Mrs. Linde. She married Mrs. Linde unwillingly and suffered a lot. She worked hard and suffered a lot. Her brothers got jobs and her mother died. Then she became free from the burden of her duty. She then came to know that she was going to take Krogstad's place in the bank.

### Conclusion

In Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the central conflict revolves around Torvald's controlling; demeaning treatment of his wife Nora. The tragedy of the story is not only to superiority of the husband over his wife but also the dehumanizing of the children, who are never given a voice or allowed the possibility of bettering their position. They begin the story under an institution that has marginalized them, and they remain confined to subhuman status throughout the play. In this way, Ibsen's work; as he claims goes beyond being a work about woman's rights and becomes instead a work dealing with the rights of all human struggling under an oppressive, patriarchal society. Why does Nora adopt. Participate in and follow the very relational structures that hold her in subjugation? The answer seems to be this: the patriarchal power structures that define the male based society, by changing the concrete conditions in which the individual is existentially situated, serves to alter the way of thinking of those who find themselves in the society. In a world where interpersonal relationships are defined in terms of an oppressed dichotomy, the oppressed internalizes that dichotomy and, rather than seeking to destroy the dichotomy, seeks to reverse its terms and himself occupies the place of oppressor. When humanity is conceived of only in term oppressor, aspiration to humanization is itself articulated in terms of the oppressive relational structure.

Thus, when Nora relates to her children, her relation to them is a function of her inculcation into a thought structure determined by the structural power relations within her society. If this is the case, Nora's interaction with her children serves as perhaps the most important articulation of the play's central theme of patriarchal oppression because it is in that interaction that the oppressive situation reaches its most comprehensive character. The depth of Ibsen's work is in its portrayal of what is perhaps most tragic, most insidious, and most powerful in patriarchal power structures: the inculcation of oppressive values; the formation of patterns of thought and behavior that reinforce and perpetuate oppressive through all levels of the social body. Nora is depicted until the end of the play as the helpless, mindless fool who wastes her husband's hard earned money; she is Torvald's plaything, his burden and responsibility.

Joan Templeton describes this marriage as a “pan cultural ideas.... A relation of superior and inferior in which wife is a creature of little intellectual and moral capacity, whose right and proper situation is subordination to her husband “. The problems that Nora, Anne- Marie and Christine Linde face are compounded by their gender. Ibsen said in a speech once that Nora was supposed to represent the everyman, and that he hadn't been trying to address the issue of woman's rights, critics argue that the presence of feminism in the play is inherent and “justifiable whatever Ibsen's intention was and in spite of his speech” (Templeton 111).

By the end of the story, Torvald's degrading treatment of Nora is resolved, though perhaps imperfectly and sadly. Nora asserts to her husband, upsetting the terms of the relational structure that defines their interaction throughout the earlier portions of the play. Unfortunately the plight of the children receives no such solution in one of her triumphant moments.

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