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30 March 2022

### Nora's Liberation in *A Doll's House*

Dolls are play things for children. They are something to be picked up and toyed with at will, and then set back down when they are not in use. Usually dolls are given pretty dresses, lovely hair, and shiny eyes with rosy cheeks so that they look beautiful, even when not in use. Dolls are not meant to be able to talk back or make their own decisions—they are inanimate after all. So, when someone refers to another human being as their doll, they are subtly putting them in a place akin to a possession. Unfortunately, society mostly sees dolls and women as interchangeable—play things that are supposed to be seen and not heard. Henrik Ibsen demonstrates this in *A Doll's House*. The play finds Nora hopelessly trying to assuage a loan shark after she forged her father's name so she could help cure him of his stress induced illness. Torvald is not happy with her decision and continues to treat her like a child, however, this time Nora realizes it, and leaves to make it on her own as an independent woman, ultimately squashing the stereotypical female role in the play. The society that Nora and Torvald live in shows that women are not meant to be independent, often seen as objects, and Ibsen demonstrates this through the pet names that Torvald uses for his wife, but ultimately Nora reclaims her power by leaving.

Nora and Torvald seem to have a happy marriage, but what they really have is a power imbalance. Torvald sees himself as the man of the house, since he works. He takes himself seriously, but it is evident that he does not take Nora seriously. He believes her to be wasting her

days away while he is out doing more important things. An example is when he says to her, “Is that my little lark twittering out there?” (Ibsen, I). The bird imagery can be reminiscent of birds in cages, as Nora is confined to her position as a housewife. He compares her to a little bird, but also to a squirrel (Ibsen, I). By giving her those nicknames, he is comparing her to small and cute animals that are usually harmless. He also says to her, “Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?” (Ibsen, I). By putting all of these nicknames so closely together in a conversation, it is evident to the audience that Torvald does not think highly of Nora. He demeans her with so many pet names, implying that she does not do much all day but spend his money. This shows that he does not have a high regard for his wife, instead expecting her to be his doll. Torvald’s attitude towards Nora highlights the ways in which women are seen within society; as something that is not human. The animal names and accusation that she is spending all of his money while he is at work implies that it is a man’s world in the social hierarchy, with women having little to no power. Ibsen also has Torvald say, “You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and, as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know where it has gone” (Ibsen, I). It definitely shows the power imbalance between the two, with Torvald being the one to give Nora money, and Nora being the irresponsible one. This is because she is not meant to be anything more than what she is—a housewife. Both Torvald and Nora know this arrangement, because it reflects the society that the characters are in. However, when Nora gains her voice and refuses to be Torvald’s doll any longer, she is defying the societal stereotype and breaking free from the patriarchal confines that once held her.

Once Torvald finds out what Nora did in order to save his health, he is upset with her. He tells her that she is a terrible person, showing Nora what her husband truly thinks about her. She tried to do the best that she could in order to save his life, and yet he can only see that she acted

out on her own. It might not have been the best choice, but it was the only choice that Nora had, and Torvald fails to see this. Nora is not willing to be treated in this manner, so she finally tells her husband that she was never happy and she needs to leave him. She says, “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. I thought it great fun when you played with me” (Ibsen, III). Nora finally realizes the place that she is expected to have within society, as another man’s play thing. She refuses to stand for it though, and devises a plan to leave so she can stand on her own two feet. This goes against the typical situation of a woman, which highlights the way that Ibsen allows Nora to break out of the gendered stereotypical role that she has been bound to. She wants to educate herself and find work, something that would not be condoned had she stayed a married woman. In the end, Nora sets herself free. She is free from her marriage, but also free from the obligations that society has placed upon her. She no longer has to be a perfect doll for the world to see. Ibsen uses Nora and Torvald to show that society believes women are toys, but he does not allow Nora to remain a stereotype.

*A Doll’s House* follows an unhappy housewife that longs for freedom, but she is a bird, trapped in a cage. She tries to do everything right, but blunders, as humans do, and her husband cannot take it. He calls her a horrible person because she is not acting in the manner that he wants her to, and in that moment she does not forgive him. She understands that if she stays with him she will always be a toy, a material object, something that needs to follow the rules and stay in line. It highlights a woman’s place within society, but Nora gets to break away from that. She realizes that she is more than a doll, and leaves on a mission to live her own life. Ibsen liberates her and does not bind her to the stereotypical gendered role that society has given her. His play

shows the ways in which women have been treated within society, and ends showing that women do not have to tolerate that. Torvald's little lark gets to fly away.

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Work Cited

Ibsen, Henrik. *A doll's house*. A&C Black, 2008.

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