

Breaking the Chains of Submissiveness: A Review of Female Empowerment in Ibsen's 'A Doll's House'

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Abstract

This paper explores the theme of female submission in Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House". Through a critical analysis of the protagonist, Nora Helmer, it argues that Nora's journey challenges societal expectations of female submissiveness. Nora's transformation from a seemingly obedient wife to an independent individual highlights the importance of self-discovery and empowerment. By examining Nora's actions and decisions within the context of her marriage and society, this abstract aims to shed light on the significance of questioning and challenging traditional gender roles. Ultimately, it suggests that Ibsen's portrayal of Nora serves as a powerful commentary on the limitations imposed on women by patriarchal norms, emphasizing the importance of autonomy and self-determination for women in society.

Key Words: Suppression, Gender roles, Family dynamics, Feminism, Identity, Deception, Social expectations, Rebellion.

Introduction

About the author

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) was a Norwegian playwright and poet, often considered one of the most influential dramatists of the 19th century. He is known for his realistic and psychological dramas that challenged societal norms and explored themes such as individualism, morality, and the roles of men and women in society. Some of his most famous works include "A Doll's House," "Ghosts," "Hedda Gabler," and "Peer Gynt." Ibsen's plays were groundbreaking in their portrayal of complex characters and their willingness to confront controversial social issues of his time, making him a pioneer of modern theatre.

Article

In Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House," the character of Nora Helmer is portrayed as a woman suppressed by societal expectations and the constraints of her marriage. The societal norms of the time, set in the late 19th century, placed significant restrictions on women,

limiting their roles to that of dutiful wives and mothers. She continues to resonate with modern society despite being created over a century ago. The character of Nora symbolizes the struggle for personal freedom, autonomy, and self-discovery, which are timeless themes. Its evident through Nora's words "I was simply transferred from Papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything to suit yourself." (Act 3)

At the beginning of "A Doll's House," Nora Helmer is portrayed as a wife who fulfills her societal duties and responsibilities according to the expectations of her time. She appears to be devoted to her husband, Torvald, and their children. Nora takes care of the household, manages the finances, and strives to maintain a happy and harmonious family life.

However, it's important to note that Nora's initial portrayal as a responsible wife is heavily influenced by the societal norms and gender roles of her time. She conforms to the expectations placed upon her as a wife and mother, but as the play progresses, it becomes evident that Nora's obedience and compliance conceal a deeper dissatisfaction and desire for independence.

Nora Helmer is depicted as a responsible wife in the sense that she fulfills the conventional roles and duties expected of her by society and her husband, Torvald. She manages the household affairs, takes care of their children, and maintains a facade of contentment and obedience. Nora's actions, such as scrimping and saving to repay a loan taken out for Torvald's health, demonstrate her commitment to her family's well-being and her resourcefulness in fulfilling her responsibilities.

However, it's essential to recognize that Nora's portrayal as a responsible wife is largely superficial and constructed to fit societal norms. Beneath the surface, Nora harbors feelings of frustration and discontent, as she is not truly valued or respected as an equal partner in her marriage. Her obedience and compliance conceal a desire for independence and self-fulfillment, which becomes increasingly apparent as the play unfolds.

Ultimately, Nora's journey in the play involves a reevaluation of her role as a wife and her understanding of responsibility. She comes to realize that her compliance with societal expectations has stifled her individuality and autonomy. This realization prompts her to take a drastic step towards self-discovery and liberation, challenging the conventional notions of responsibility and womanhood prevalent in her society.

Nora's character arc in the play involves her awakening to her own identity and autonomy, leading her to challenge the traditional roles imposed upon her by society. Ultimately, she takes a bold and controversial step towards self-discovery and liberation,

which reshapes her understanding of responsibility and prompts her to prioritize her own needs and desires over societal expectations.

Nora's suppression is evident in her seemingly idyllic marriage to Torvald Helmer. Torvald, her husband, embodies the societal expectations of a patriarchal figure, dictating the dynamics of their relationship. Nora is confined to the role of a subservient wife, often indulging Torvald's wishes and conforming to societal norms to maintain the facade of a perfect marriage.

The suppression becomes particularly apparent in the financial aspect of their relationship. Nora's forgery of her father's signature to secure a loan for Torvald's health reveals her desperation and lack of agency. Her actions, driven by the societal pressure to uphold her husband's reputation, exemplify the oppressive nature of the societal expectations placed upon her.

Furthermore, Nora's suppressed identity is reflected in her childish and playful demeanour, which is merely a facade she puts on to meet Torvald's expectations. Her compliance with societal norms is a survival strategy, concealing her true self to conform to the established gender roles.

The turning point in the play occurs when Nora realizes the extent of her suppression and decides to challenge societal expectations by leaving her husband and children, "I have other duties just as sacred" (Act 3). This bold act is a manifestation of her desire for self-discovery and autonomy, breaking free from the shackles of societal norms.

In conclusion, Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" presents Nora Helmer as a woman suppressed by the societal expectations and gender roles of her time. Her journey towards self-discovery and liberation from the constraints of her marriage serves as a powerful critique of the oppressive nature of the societal norms that confined women in the late 19th century.

In contemporary society, many individuals, regardless of gender, may find themselves in situations akin to Nora's, where they confront societal expectations and norms that limit their personal growth and fulfilment. Like Nora, people may grapple with the tension between societal roles and their own aspirations, leading to a quest for self-realization and independence.

Moreover, Nora's story serves as a reminder of the importance of challenging oppressive structures and advocating for gender equality and individual agency. While significant progress has been made since Ibsen's time, issues such as gender discrimination, unequal power dynamics, and societal pressure to conform still persist in various forms.

Thus, Nora's journey continues to be relevant in prompting discussions about gender roles, autonomy, and the pursuit of personal happiness in modern society. Her enduring legacy underscores the enduring power of Ibsen's work to provoke introspection and inspire social change.

Works Cited

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