

Nora's Transformation as a Self Esteemed Woman - Detailed Study of Character Nora in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House

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Abstract

Gender and sexuality are two important forces that shape every aspect of life. Gender determines the differences in power and control in which men and women have over the socio economic determinants of their health, lives and status in their community. Henrik Ibsen who was famously known as “Father of Realism” and “Father of Modern Drama” transparently portrayed the emancipation of the individual, especially of women in his play A Doll's House. This paper aims to cast light on the unpretentious character called NORA from A Doll's House, a three act play written by Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen. Initially it was written in Danish and later translated as A Doll's House. This play is set in a Norwegian town called Circa in 1879. A deep dive has been done on the play notably on Nora's character.

Keywords: Gender roles, Sense of Guilt, Blackmail, Defiant

Introduction

It was a time when Norway was in financial crisis and was male dominated society. Men were sole in charge of all decisions while women fulfilled the family responsibilities and incharge of domestic activities like taking care of children and house chores. Unmarried women were under the control of father and married women were under the control of husbands. Only either father or Husband had complete control over the family. Women have lost their ability to be practical and to ask logical questions. Women were not allowed to work but they can engage in handicraft and craftsmanship at home. 19th century Literature played an important role in inspiring women. Works of Ibsen like The Pillars of society (1877) and A doll's House (1879) has begun to inspire the women. Henrik Ibsen lucidly portrayed gender roles of 19th century through his play A Doll's House, the world's most performed play in 2006.

Nora as blithesome

Nora is the Protagonist of the play who lost her mother and is raised by her Father and nurse Anna.

“My poor little Nora had no mother but me” -Anna

Nora is the mother of three children yet juvenile in nature eating and hiding the chocolates from her husband. As we see the play begins with the preparations for Christmas eve where Nora wants to

surprise her daughter with a Christmas tree. Nora feels excited everyday when she sees her children back to home. She plays hide and seek with her kids. It represents her as a woman of carefree minded who cares for the little joys that she can give to her kids by surprising them on Christmas eve.

Nora as audacious

Nora is also a woman who showed a willingness to take surprisingly bold risks. Everyone treat Nora as a happy woman with three kids and husband at her happy home.

“You’re a mere child, Nora” - Mrs.Linde

“You’re like the rest. You all think I’m fit for nothing really serious” -Nora

But Nora had the most difficult chapters in her life which no one knows the times when Torvald was seriously ill and was in danger of dying. Nora was in dire need of money. She was trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea. She didn’t find any alternatives other than borrowing money. But for her misfortune it is Krogstad Helmer’s subordinate that Nora borrowed money from. Unaware of this Nora is now ready to take risk even after the fact she is aware of that Helmer has aversion towards borrowing money from others. She lies to Torvald to save his life.

Nora as selfless

Nora spends all the money buying costumes for her kids and a special gift to Torvald but nothing for her. She didn’t buy anything for her. Torvald asks Nora what she bought for herself and reply was

“For myself? Oh I don’t want anything” “Really I want nothing” -Nora

Nora as discredited and self deprecated

Torvald claims to be in love with Nora but the truth is he is just pretending and making Nora believe the same. His love for Nora is domineering. Helmer used to feel jealous when Nora speaks to other men they were newly married.

“He wants to have me all to himself” -Nora

Torvald calls Nora with different names like little Lark, Squirrel, precious little song bird. He doesn’t give chance to Nora to express her feelings. When Nora asks for money Torvald smoothly rejects her request and in turn he calls her a spend thrift who spends money for useless things. Though Nora is hurt quite often she never utters a single word replying back to him. She never wanted to pickup a fight with Torvald. We see Torvald who always finds happiness in teasing her and making fun of her. As a wife she expects him to sit and talk to him which doesn’t happen from the past eight years of their married life.

Helmer’s request Nora to dance as Tarentella (is the dance of a spider in Italy believed to be highly poisonous) shows his savage mindset.

Nora as a loyal and true hearted woman

Nora is a woman who follows the lead of her husband and adjusts to Torvald's personality. She exhibits care and compassion and is sensitive to the family needs. She couldn't tolerate when Mr. Krogstad was talking about Helmer. And she replies

"If you talk disrespectfully of my husband, I must request you to go.

"Mr.Krogstad be good to speak respectfully of my husband" -Nora

She likes to please her husband and make him happy

"I'll do everything to please you Torvald. I'll and dance.," -Nora

Dr. Rank is close and bestfriend to Helmer and Nora. Dr.Rank is in love with Nora. But he never reveals it to Nora. After Krogstad's blackmail Nora discerns that the situation was out of control and at anytime krogstad may reveal the secret to Helmer. And now Nora wants to take help from Dr.Rank to pay the money to Krogstad. But in between the conversation before Nora asked for help Dr.Rank reveals that he loves her so deeply. But now Nora changes her mind of asking money from Dr.Rank. Nora rejects Dr.Rank's help afer knowing his intention towards Nora. It shows that Nora is assuredly a faithful wife to Torvald.

Nora as a crestfallen and distressed

After Krogstad's blackmail Nora is in deep water and is afraid of the thought of Helmer knowing the truth and leaving her. She is debilitated that this secret may upset their relationship. She is not ready to accept any hatred from Helmer. She wishes that "that time will never come", Helmer finding out the fact that his wife borrowed from his subordinate Mr.Nils Krogstad. Nora does fancy work to pay off the debt to Mr.Krogstad. Nora is much dwelled in the thoughts of Krogstad's demand. Helmer is indirectly the sole cause for Nora's depression. He claims that lying parents ruin their children's. According to Torvald A corrupted man/woman brings unhappiness to their family in particular their offspring. Helmer was initially a lawyer. He has come across many such cases and tracing out that lying mothers are the cause of one's family's destruction.

"Nearly all cases of early corruption may be traced to lying mothers. It generally comes from mother's side....." -Helmer Torvald

After this conversation Nora feels a sense of guilt whether she is spoiling her kids' life by lying

"I corrupt my children! Poison my home. It's not true. It can never be true." -Nora

She predicts that something terrible is going to happen

"In future I can't have them so much with me" -Nora

Conclusion

Two different Noras we can describe, Nora as submissive at the outset and a defiant Nora by the end. Nora realizes her role as a doll child before marriage and as a doll wife after marriage. She feels that she has been treated as a doll all these days firstly by her father and now by her husband.

“I mean I passed from father’s hands to yours”

She finally decides to leave her husband and children and wants to educate herself. She goes against the norms of the society which believes that a woman’s sacred duty is to take care of the family.

I have other duties equally sacred -Nora

Nora transforms from being a cheerful wife to a rebellion who is not ready to give second chance to her husband.

Helmer: What are you going to do

Nora: To take of my doll’s dress

Nora doesn’t want to reconcile with Torvald. She leaves her family to embrace her worth, knowledge, to love herself and be independent. Ibsen successfully executed the feministic perception of women role in a middle class family.

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