

Representation of Women in Public and Private Spheres in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House through feminist frameworks, focusing on Nora's navigation of 19th-century Norway's public and private spheres. Using Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other" and Judith Butler's theory of performativity, the analysis reveals how patriarchal norms shaped Nora's subjugation and ultimate rebellion. The study highlights the play's enduring relevance in advocating for gender equality and contributes to feminist literary criticism by exploring the intersection of gender, power, and societal norms. While previous studies have extensively analyzed Nora's character, this study explores how the play's portrayal of the duality of public and private spaces shapes Nora's rebellion against societal expectations. Furthermore, this study explores how Ibsen's work continues to resonate with contemporary audiences, highlighting the enduring relevance of his critique of gender inequality and the need for women's empowerment. By examining the enduring power of A Doll's House, the article argues that Ibsen's play continues to serve as a vital tool for understanding and challenging the structures that perpetuate gender inequality in the modern world.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas drama Henrik Ibsen, Rumah Boneka, dari sudut pandang feminis. Kita akan melihat bagaimana Nora berjuang di tengah-tengah kehidupan publik dan pribadi di Norwegia abad ke-19. Dengan menggunakan konsep "The Other" dari Simone de Beauvoir dan teori performativitas Judith Butler, kita akan memahami bagaimana norma-norma patriarki menekan Nora dan akhirnya memicu pemberontakannya. Penelitian ini menunjukkan betapa pentingnya drama ini dalam memperjuangkan kesetaraan gender, dan menambah wawasan kritik sastra feminis dengan melihat hubungan antara gender, kekuasaan, dan norma-norma sosial. Meskipun sudah banyak penelitian yang membahas karakter Nora, penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana penggambaran kehidupan publik dan pribadi dalam drama tersebut memengaruhi pemberontakan Nora terhadap harapan masyarakat. Penelitian ini juga akan mengeksplorasi bagaimana karya Ibsen masih relevan bagi penonton modern, menekankan kritiknya yang terus aktual tentang ketidaksetaraan gender dan pentingnya pemberdayaan perempuan. Dengan melihat dampak Rumah Boneka yang terus berlanjut, penelitian ini berpendapat bahwa drama Ibsen tetap menjadi alat yang ampuh untuk memahami dan menantang sistem yang menyebabkan ketidaksetaraan gender hingga saat ini.



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1. Introduction

First performed in 1879, *A Doll's House* is a landmark work critiquing 19th-century gender norms. The play written by Henrik Ibsen, features the compelling character of Nora, a woman who challenges the traditional role of a wife and mother. Hendrik Ibsen is born on March 20, 1828, and was a prominent Norwegian playwright and theatre director. Widely recognized as the "father of realism," Ibsen emerged as one of the most influential playwrights of his era. His works have enjoyed enduring popularity, making him the most frequently performed playwright after Shakespeare. By the early 20th century, his masterpiece, *A Doll's House*, had achieved the most performed play.

The play centres on an ordinary family Torvald Helmers that work as a bank lawyer married Nora and they have three little children. From the play beginning, it shows seemingly married couple until Nora realized she is under the control of the invisible hands and the pressures of patriarchal society. Nora leaves her house by slamming of a door to the world of new possibilities. She is going off to know her own responsibilities towards herself. This kind of self-realization, which usually leads to a new beginning, is one of Ibsen's main ideologies posed in his play. Nora opens her eyes and observes that her individuality and freedom have been taken in living with Torvald Helmer. She realised that she has been living a false life and that she must break free from the constraints of her marriage to find her own identity.

Ibsen's protagonist confronts a multitude of challenges stemming from the prevailing patriarchal societal structure. According to Wienclaw (2011), the portrayal of women in literature is characterized by a consistent and compelling allure. This allure is frequently constructed through the depiction of female characters as loving and gentle figures, a recurring motif shaping their narrative function and overall impact. *A Doll's House* delves into the psychological complexities of the female character, exploring her internal expectations and aspirations of women's figure in that era. Ibsen critiques the pervasive societal stereotypes and their impact on women's lives. *A Doll's House* primarily addresses women's social status and their experiences within a patriarchal framework, highlighting issues such as the lack of genuine affection and respect within marriage, the absence of equality and dignity in women's treatment, and the pervasive influence of patriarchal thinking.

The play's setting in 19th-century Norway is crucial to understanding, nineteenth-century Norwegian society adhered to a rigid system of gender roles, where women were relegated to a subordinate position. Domesticity and motherhood were considered the primary spheres of female activity, with women expected to prioritize their husbands' needs and the upbringing of their children. Nora's identity as a wife and mother is deeply embedded in this societal framework, and she is implicitly expected to find fulfillment within the confines of her domestic role.

Ibsen's dramatic works "*A doll's house*", make the readers deal with the rigid morality of Helmer, and the desire woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day of his wife is to sacrifice herself thoroughly for his sake. Serve as a profound critique of the prevailing social order of the 19th century, exposing

its inherent limitations and hypocrisy. Through his incisive portrayals of societal constraints, particularly those imposed upon women, Ibsen compels audiences to question established norms and envision possibilities for liberation. His pioneering contributions to the development of modern drama have secured his legacy as a seminal figure, as his works continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, prompting ongoing discussions about gender dynamics, power structures, and the pursuit of individual autonomy.

While previous studies have explored Nora's character, this article examines how the play's portrayal of public and private spheres critiques patriarchal structures. According to Jurgen Habermas, by the concept of public sphere, it's means an area in our social life in which something similar to the public can form. All citizens are guaranteed access to this area. In every conversation in which private individuals gather by forming a public body, a part of the public sphere becomes an asset (Çalışkan, 2014). The public sphere emerges as a citizen sphere, and all activities and individuals outside the public sphere are involved in the private sphere. The public sphere is the sphere of participation of equals, which symbolizes an event in which only citizens can participate. As it is understood, the public sphere is a place of public appearance and negotiation, which is an area that brings people together and divides them into many sub-public spaces. However, Private spheres is an area deprived of the objective relationship of separation and separation through the realm of being seen and heard by others through a world of something common, and the possibility of achieving something more lasting than life itself (Yersel, 2015).

Analyzing the public and private spheres is crucial for understanding gender dynamics because these spaces demonstrate how power and influence are divided along gender lines. By examining how women and men navigate and interact within these two spheres, we can understand how gender norms are shaped and reinforced.

Based on background above, This study aims to analyze the representation of women in public and private spheres using feminist theories to reveal the constraints imposed by societal expectations and the fight for gender equality. This timeless work continuously resonate with modern audiences and remains relevant in a world where gender equality is still a work in progress.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, which is particularly effective for analyzing societal and cultural constructs as represented in literature. Qualitative research emphasizes the preservation and interpretation of human behavior and societal contexts, focusing on their inherent qualities rather than reducing them to numerical data (Mulyana, 2018). This approach is suited to exploring the intricate portrayal of women's roles and the critique of patriarchal norms in *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen. A sociological approach was employed to examine structural inequalities and the societal expectations imposed on women in 19th-century Norway. This aligns with Ridgeway's (2011) argument that gender roles are deeply embedded within societal institutions, shaping individual behaviors and expectations.

Additionally, an analytical-descriptive method was used to critically evaluate Ibsen's work through a feminist lens. This feminist perspective draws upon key feminist theories, particularly Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism and Judith Butler's theory of performativity, to illuminate the complex dynamics of gender and power within the play.

Primary data includes the original text, while secondary sources included journal articles, books and academic essays to provide theoretical grounding. Key scenes were identified for their relevance to gender dynamics and analyzed through close reading, focusing on dialogue, symbols, and motifs.

The analysis of *A Doll's House* involves a close reading of the text, focusing on key dialogues and scenes that illuminate the interplay between the public and private spheres. This process involves several key steps:

- a) **Identifying Key Scenes:** The first step is to identify specific scenes that highlight the contrast between the public and private realms. These scenes often reveal the constraints imposed on women's lives, the hypocrisy of societal norms, and the ways in which women challenge those norms.
- b) **Analyzing Dialogue:** The analysis then examines the dialogue between characters, paying particular attention to, Language used to describe women and their roles, Power dynamics reflected in interactions, And the dialogue also reveals instances where characters challenge or question societal expectations.
- c) **Interpreting Symbols and Motifs:** The analysis explores key symbols and motifs that illuminate the themes of gender, power, and societal expectations.

By combining these methodologies, the article aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how *A Doll's House* critiques patriarchal structures and explores the complexities of women's representation in both the public and private spheres.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Women Representation in Public Sphere

3.1.1 The Societal Norms of the Time

In the 19th century, women were confined to domestic roles, expected to stay at home and perform household duties. However, contemporary society is striving towards greater gender equality. Through *A Doll's House*, Ibsen highlights the limitations imposed on women in the 1800s, revealing how both societal norms and the actions of men restricted her freedom and personal growth.

The play concerned with the problem of women's position in society. The structure follows the classical structure of a "well-made play" while writing about everyday, unexceptional circumstances. It shuns the idealised versions of life, instead portraying characters and events that would have been considered quite controversial and shocking to an 1800s audience. The play follows the careful exposition with appropriate suspense and careful exposition that lays the

groundwork for the ending. The audience follows Nora's character on a journey of growing and breaking out of the mould of female subservience.

Nora, a major character and a wife to Helmer, illustrates how women suffer mistreatments and degradations from their husbands in 19th century. At first sight, "A Doll's House" features the stereotypical representation of women as irrational and naïve. In the opening scene, Helmer forbids his wife eating sweets in order not to ruin her teeth. He seems to see his wife, or women in general, as intellectually inferior. In addition, He chides Nora for borrowing and spending too much money and tells her:

"That's like a woman!" (3).

As a wife, she saves her husband's life not only physically through borrowing money to pay for a recuperation trip to Italy, but also his reputation and honour which he prizes above anything else by aiding his recovery and obtaining the loan through underhanded means. All that she did only not to harm her husband position as the man of the family. Also, as a daughter, she protects her dying father from the struggles her family is going through by forging his signature. Nora take a debt without her husband and father permission. In that era, debt become anxiety rife in the 1800s due to bourgeois values is deeply wounded by the idea of borrowing money, especially from a woman. In a society where men were expected to be strong and dominant, a woman helping a man financially would be seen as a sign of weakness, a transgression of the established power dynamic. Torvald's dependence on Nora to save his life further undermines his masculinity in the eyes of society, a fact that Nora acknowledges and internalizes.

Nora tells her friend, Mrs. Linde that Torvald knowing he owed her anything would "upset (their) mutual relations" and "beautiful happy home". She says:

"how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly self-reliance, to know that he owed anything to me! It would utterly upset the relation between us;" (21).

Mrs. Linde is one of the protagonists in the play. She adheres to the dominant societal norms in that she feels miserable without having people to take care of and married to a man she didn't love was driven by a desire for financial security and stability. Thus highlighting the societal pressure on women assuming the traditional role of caretakers and nurturers and to rely on men for economic support. She exemplifies the societal expectations placed upon women in the 19th century, where prioritizing family needs over personal desires was often considered a virtue.

In the end, Nora breaking societal norms. Her subjugated existence compels her to assert her own agency and demand respect, ultimately leading her to challenge the societal norms in one of the worst ways, walking out on her husband and children and acquiring independence as a form of fighting for her human rights.

3.1.2 A World Male Dominance

Feminism fundamentally advocates for gender equality, a principle starkly absent from Nora's life. Nora as a victim of the female gender received such attitude both at her father's home and at her husband's one. Her father used to treat her as a "doll-child" (Ibsen 89). Upon marrying Torvald, she is being considered "almost as a toy". For many centuries, women have been treated as dependent creatures unable to make their own decisions and not allowed to contradict their fathers or husbands. This is the tradition that continues into the Middle Ages.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, argues that "The woman is absolutely dependent on her father and husband" (135). This statement highlights the societal constraints placed on women, emphasizing their dependence on men for both financial and emotional support. Nora's experiences in *A Doll's House* exemplify this societal reality. Initially, she embodies this dependence, relying on Torvald for her identity, happiness, and financial security. It questions the societal role and fate of a married woman in a male-dominated society, showcasing how women lacked opportunities for self-fulfillment and independence in Norway, at the time.

Torvald often dismisses Nora's concerns and questions, telling her she doesn't understand "these things". This keeps her in a state of ignorance and dependence, making her reliant on him for knowledge and guidance. For example, Torvald's dismissal of Nora's suggestion to invest in a business venture, with the dismissive statement, "You don't understand these things, my dear. Leave such matters to men," (Act 2) vividly illustrates how he silences her voice in matters of economic decision-making, reinforcing the societal expectation that women should not be involved in business or financial matters. He reinforces his authority and control over their financial future, denying her any agency in shaping their economic well-being.

In another act, Torvald shown as a husband who's always try to use Nora and not see her as a wife. He manipulate Nora to make her felt she can't do anything without her husband, make she's think that Torvald is a good husband when he is actually not.

Torvald: "I would gladly work night and day for you. Bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honor for the one he loves."

Nora: "It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done!"

Thus Nora begins to reject the authority of her husband. She does not only revolt against him but also against her male-dominated society as well when she defends indirectly women, including herself, because she believes that they are also human beings, just like men, having their own entities and feelings. Besides, she opposes Helmer because he degrades her status to only a wife and mother when he tells her;

"First and foremost you are a wife and mother"(III.p.100), by telling him "I don't believe that any longer. I believe that I am first and foremost a human being, like you" (Ibid).

Moreover, she also rebels against the traditions of her society which prevent women from taking their part in standing side by side with men so that they would together overcome their problems:

I've learned now that certain laws are different
from what I'd imagined them to be; but I can't
accept that such laws can be right. Has a woman
really not the right to spare her dying father pain,
or save her husband's life? I can't believe that. (III.p.101).

Nora's actions align with Judith Butler's theory of performativity, that is suggests gender is not a fixed essence but rather a performance, constantly constructed and reinforced through social interactions and cultural norms. Nora's initial "doll-like" persona is a performance, a product of societal expectations and the patriarchal norms that dictate her role as a wife and mother. She plays the part of the submissive, charming wife, embodying the performative norms of femininity expected of her.

However, as the play progresses, Nora begins to challenge this performative identity. She starts to question the roles she has been assigned and the expectations placed upon her. Her actions, such as her secret borrowing of money and her confrontation with Torvald, reveal a growing awareness of her own agency and a rejection of the performative norms that have shaped her identity. She starts to dismantle the "doll" persona, revealing a more complex and independent individual. This rebellion against the prescribed role of a passive, dependent wife is further fueled by the societal perspectives that have historically categorized women as the unfavorable characteristics related to men. Gender role attributions often place men in the position of being active and women in the role of passivity. Furthermore, men are frequently associated with negative qualities, resulting in women being similarly burdened with these labels Ibsen further emphasizes the public sphere's dominance by portraying Nora's limited interactions with the outside world.

3.2. Women Representation in Private Sphere

3.2.1 The Domestic Ideal and its Limitations

The rise of feminist movements in the 20th century brought about significant changes in women's rights. The liberal understanding, which is the cornerstone of the struggle for women's rights, argues that women should have the potential to develop themselves as an individually opposing being limited to the private sphere (Yıldız, 2013).

In the private sphere, Women exist because of their ability to give birth and nutrition, which has determined the difference between men and women in society. In the complication and routine of everyday life, women were far from

political. Such a distinction allowed men to gain more power and authority in all societies (Çiftçi, 1998).

Simone de Beauvoir argues that in a patriarchal society, women are often constructed as "the Other," defined by their difference from men. This "otherness" relegates women to a secondary position, defined by their lack of agency and their dependence on men. Nora, initially, embodies this concept of "otherness."

Nora, a wife of Helmer, begins the play as a childlike character who is always happy and grateful; only afterwards we find out that she has a big secret that adds more maturity to the character. In the first act, Nora subtly hints at a disconnect between her outward happiness and her true self. She playfully disobeys Torvald by eating macaroons and lying about it, and even swears for the thrill of breaking societal rules.

When Torvald enters the scene, Nora's childlike behavior becomes more patent. Torvald calls her pet names "little lark", "little squirrel", and "Little Miss Extravagant". Nora is being treated like a cute little girl and she happily accepts the epithets. Torvald finds himself having to restrain Nora with rules, much as a father would have to inhibit a child, forbidding her from pursuing candy and other temporal pleasures. Along with calling Nora his "Little spendthrift" Torvald objectifies Nora which creates an image of power and submissiveness. Degenerated word choice for women has been used throughout the play. She exists in the private sphere, her life revolving around domesticity and pleasing her husband.

Torvald's control over Nora, reflects the broader societal infantilization of women. He meticulously constructs a system of dependence that restricts her access to information and resources, effectively silencing her voice and preventing her from developing her own agency. This control is evident in a scene while Torvald is recovering from his illness, Nora expresses concern about his health. He dismisses her worries, saying;

"Don't be so silly, my little lark. You don't understand these things." (Act 1)

This exchange highlights Torvald's control over information, preventing Nora from accessing knowledge about his condition and making informed decisions about his care. He reinforces the idea that she is incapable of understanding such matters, further limiting her agency. In another scene, Torvald's control over finances further reinforces Nora's dependence. When Nora asks Torvald for money, he responds,

"My little skylark must not concern herself with such matters. You have your allowance, and that is enough." (Act 1)

This exchange demonstrates Torvald's control over Nora's finances, preventing her from having any financial independence and reinforcing her dependence on him. He dismisses her concerns about money, reinforcing the patriarchal power dynamic that denies women control over their own resources.

Torvald's control over Nora's access to information and resources is not simply a matter of personal preference but a reflection of the broader societal structures that limit women's opportunities and choices. He effectively prevents her from developing her own agency and autonomy, trapping her within the confines of the societal expectations imposed upon women.

However, Nora's actions throughout the play challenge this notion of "otherness." She actively seeks to break free from the confines of her prescribed role. She takes matters into her own hands, secretly borrowing money to save her husband's life, demonstrating a level of agency and initiative that contradicts the expectations of a passive, dependent wife. Her actions expose the limitations of the "otherness" imposed on her and reveal her own independent desires and capabilities.

Studies conducted especially in western societies show that the socialization patterns of men and women and the gender roles attributed to them differ. Accordingly, while women are expected to be sensitive, emotional, compassionate, helpful, dependent and altruistic to social relations, men are expected to be competitive, individual, successful, independent, rational, pragmatist and sovereign. These opposing roles are often adopted by men and women in the face of various transitions and changes over time, and as a result they reflect the personality traits appropriate to those roles attributed to them by society (Çiftçi, 1998).

Women's freedom have been restricted to express freely in domestic life. A lot of restrictions have been employed to limit women's independence in their daily living. In the play, women's independence are limited at home. Females are not allowed to behave freely, They can't buy and borrow to meet their desires. Torvald believes that a husband's duty is to protect and guide his wife. He relishes the idea of Nora needing his guidance The restriction is viewed through the talk between Nora and Torvald.

He asks Nora about her return to home? Nora replies "Just now. (Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.) Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought"(P.4). She has bought a lot of stuff and this activity bother Hemer, "Don't disturb me". Helmer is surprised to see all these things calling her spendthrift you have been wasting money. Nora spends all the money buying costumes for her kids and a special gift to Torvald but nothing 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" (act I).

Torvald's dismissive response to Nora's request for money highlights the unequal power dynamic in their marriage. He labels her a frivolous spender, dismissing her needs without genuine consideration. In the book *The Second Sex*, Beauvior (1949) said, Males are in chains by their very sovereignty; it is because they (feels) alone earn money.

Despite her hurt, Nora remains passive, avoiding confrontation with Torvald. This pattern of behavior reveals a dynamic where Torvald enjoys teasing and belittling Nora, while she seeks connection and meaningful conversation, a desire that remains unfulfilled even after eight years of marriage. However, As the play progresses, Nora becomes increasingly aware of the limitations in her

life and her need to rebel grows. Ultimately, this culminates in her dramatic decision to leave her husband and children in search of independence.

Nora's rejection of her domestic role symbolizes a broader critique of societal expectations that confine women to the private sphere. As the Beauvoir said, Being a woman brings very strange problems to an autonomous person today (Beauvoir, 1993). Therefore, it is not surprising that women always adopt domestic roles and are confined to private spaces. On the other hand, limiting women to the private sphere makes it easier for women to be supervised, subjecting women to men and causing women to be seen as the property of men.

Even though *A Doll's House* was written in the 19th century, its themes of societal expectations and the struggle for women's liberation remain relevant today. Nora's story continues to resonate with women who face similar challenges in navigating the complexities of gender roles and societal expectations. Her rejection of her domestic role serves as a powerful reminder that women are not bound by tradition or societal norms and that they have the right to define their own lives and pursue their own aspirations. Nora's rejection of her domestic role challenges the very definition of womanhood. It suggests that women are not simply defined by their roles as wives and mothers but are capable of pursuing their own ambitions, developing their own identities, and contributing to society in meaningful ways. Her departure from her marriage is not just a personal escape but a call for a redefinition of what it means to be a woman in a society that has long sought to limit their potential.

3.2.2 The Power Dynamics of Marriage

In traditional social role division, women's roles and men's roles in the family are differentiated. The classical sociological view of the male care giving role is managerial and instrumental in nature. Men play instrumental roles by earning money in their chosen profession. In contrast to the men's role in the family, the classical sociological view of the female care giving role is characterized by emotional, physical, and maintenance work. Female family roles are traditionally understood to include relationship maintenance and an overall effort at keeping kin close and connected. Women play expressive roles, taking care of the home and emotional life of a family. (Wienclaw, *Gender Roles and Equality*, 2011).

In Ibsen's drama, Helmer's character is one that incites an instinctive backlash from modern-day readers, especially women of the 20th century, at his overbearing and patronising hyper-masculinity. Yet Torvald lacks the self-awareness to not only see that Nora is much more independent and is the one making the decisions to protect him; but also that he is not the noble, benevolent husband that he believes himself to be and contrary to his promises of risking his "life's blood, and everything" for Nora, when push comes to shove he chose to prioritise his own selfish desires over his wife.

This serves to be his tragic flaw, pushing Nora's rose-tinted lens that she sees him through to shatter and for her to leave him. But even as modern audiences may recoil from his demeanour, Ibsen's play is one grounded in realism where Torvald reflects the typical Victorian male. He is as much as a product of his society as Nora is and the rigid views on gender roles and morality have been

inculcated in him from birth. Ibsen could be attempting to illustrate how deeply-rooted our beliefs and opinions are in our environment, and that gender roles are not only a one-sided harm to women only.

For many years, Nora made sacrifices to save money to repay the loan she took out to save her husband's life. She forged her father's signature without thinking about the consequences, just to save Helmer's life. This is one of Nora's sacrifices. Nora thought that she was in need of doing something to keep her husband's love for her when she grew old, as she said: "Yes – sometimes, perhaps. Years from now, when I'm no longer pretty. You mustn't laugh! I mean, of course, when Torvald no longer loves me as he does now; when it no longer amuses him to see me dance and dress up and play the fool for him. Then it might be useful to have something up my sleeve" (Ibsen 40).

In her simple mind, Nora feels this sacrifice will be appreciated by Torvald and that he will love her more and more. Despite her lack of expertise in the legal field, Nora is convinced that there must be regulations that allow for such scenarios, as she said:

"I don't know much about law, but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that" (the Sane Society 29).

This depicts how Nora, despite having limited intelligence, made significant efforts to assist her spouse, even resorting to impersonation.

Beside of that, it seems that Torvald has his own self-styled idealism which urges him not to be indebted to anyone and one can imagine what a horrible thing for Torvald would be if the debt is carried out by a woman who is considered an inferior creature, just in the case of Nora, since, according to the European traditions of the nineteenth century, men in general were considered superior and infallible who were never wrong, finding it difficult to shake off their sense of social inferiority to women who were regarded as inferior to them. Thus, women at that time used to be just like slaves to their husbands, obeying their commands without question and it was the women who were always to blame and it was the men who were always right. This fact is confirmed by Nora who tells Torvald that he always right about whatever he does; "Oh, you're always right, whatever you do" (III.p.87).

Nora told her husband that he and her father had been unfair to her and treated her like a doll. In her father's house, she must listen to her father's views and opinions, and she must obey him while she is at her husband's house; she has to accept her husband's point of view and testicles as she says: "You arranged everything according to your taste, and so I got the same tastes as you" (Ibsen 93). Nora informs her husband that she is someone who has her own opinions and views as an independent person, as she says: "I will do everything I can think of to please you" (Ibsen 37). Through its exploration of marital relationships, the play sheds light on the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures and their impact on individual agency and autonomy.

Beyond the central figure of Nora, Ibsen's critique of societal norms is further exemplified by the character of Christine Linde, Nora's friend. Having

been liberated from her traditional caregiving responsibilities, Linde confronts the challenges of navigating a social landscape that restricts her agency and limits her opportunities for self-determination. Unfulfilled and yearning to "be a mother to someone"—specifically Krogstad's children—she finds herself unable to support her own needs. Ultimately, as a liberated woman, she willingly returns to the traditional roles of wife and mother within the Krogstad household, as she cannot find fulfillment elsewhere. This illustrates Ibsen's assertion that women have been so deeply shaped by societal expectations that the role they come to understand best is that of a housewife.

The domination of men over women in the 19th century is vividly depicted by Ibsen when, after his disappointment at Helmer's mistreatment, Nora accuses not only her father but also her husband of teaching her wrong, and it is they who change. She becomes (a parasite) who gets money or other things from others without doing anything in return, and it is their big mistake that she does not do anything in her life:

Now I look back on it, it's as if I've been
living here like a pauper, from hand to mouth.
I performed tricks for you, and you gave me
food and drink. But that was how you wanted it.
You and Papa have done me a great wrong.
It's your fault that I have done nothing with my
life.... (III.p.98).

In addition, Nora has indirectly criticized anew her society's customs concerning marriage and domestic upbringing that shape the whole life of the community's individuals in the nineteenth century when she expresses great concern not only at her life but also children's: "But our home has never been anything but a playroom. I've been your doll-wife, just as used to be papa's doll-child. And the children have been my dolls. (act III).

While marriage is often conceptualized as a union between two individuals, it also carries significant societal and moral implications. In marrying, the woman receives a piece of the world as property; legal guarantees protect her from man's caprices; but she becomes his vassal. He is economically the head of the community, and he thus embodies it in society's eyes. (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949).

A truly fulfilling marriage necessitates mutual respect, cooperation, and a sense of shared responsibility, fostering an environment conducive to individual well-being and personal growth. In the case of Nora who sacrificed too much to endure the heavy burden of her responsibility as a loving and devoted wife who had made every effort to recover her husband's health is now facing her husband's ingratitude and denial that cause her a lot of difficulty and worry, pushing her not only to hate and desert her husband but also to scorn the customs of her society at that time which allow the husband to free himself from any obligations towards his wife:

"Listen, Torvald. When a wife leaves her husband's house, as I'm doing now, I'm told that according to the law he is freed of any obligations towards her. In any case, I release you from any such obligations" (III.p.103).

4. Conclusion

The initial observation suggests that *A Doll's House* is indicative of the conventional portrayal of women, characterized by irrationality, and naivety, along with a dependence on men. Moreover, it upholds the Victorian paradigm of demarcating public and private domains, thereby restricting women to the domestic realm. During this era, the marriage of Nora and Torvald conformed to the dominant societal norms of Norway. The way Nora is depicted suggests that society has given her a subservient position, obliging her to behave like a puppet and please her husband's desires without question. Torvald consistently asserts his dominance over her as if she were an object solely under his control, causing her to fulfill his every whim and desire. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir writes, "While women are considered dependent beings controlled by circumstances. Men can act upon the world, change it, give it meaning, while women have meaning only to men" (15).

Throughout the play *A Doll's House*, Nora undergoes a significant transformation in her understanding of the truth about her life and relationships. Initially, she is content with her role as a wife and mother, playing the part of a dutiful and submissive partner to her husband Torvald. However, as the play progresses, Nora begins to see the flaws and limitations of her life, and realizes that she has been living in a world of illusion. In the end, she understands the truth about her own worth and potential, and makes the decision to leave her husband and children in pursuit of a more authentic and fulfilling life.

In fact Nora was living in an illusion as she was deluding herself all the years she had spent with Helmer into believing that it would all come right in the end, hoping that her husband who was rather ungrateful might be changed for the better. Yet, Nora's illusions about Helmer represent an outlet for her to escape the harsh reality of her husband, besides; these illusions have to some extent provided her with some morale support so that she could endure the painful and difficult situation of the cruel environment around her, created by her husband and the current conventions.

It is true that when Helmer treats Nora badly, he is just like industrialism which degrades man to machine-like creature, forgetting that Nora is a human being having a limited patience and it would be difficult for her to stay calm especially after all abuses and tortures she faces which are carried out by her husband. However, the play is by itself a big coup against both the current traditions concerning women's rights and their representation in public and private sphere as the play starts out as a reaction against existing convention of the nineteenth century.

Therefore, the public and private spheres should be kept separate and evaluated with different criteria. The private sphere demands greater freedom and autonomy, while the public sphere needs justice and solidarity. While the problem of social order in the public sphere was solved by the creation of signs,

the problem of looking and growing in the private sphere was tried to be solved even if it was not solved by adhering to transcendental principles (Sennett, 2010).

This study contributes to feminist literary criticism by exploring the intersection of public and private spheres in Ibsen's work, offering insights into the enduring relevance of *A Doll's House* in discussions of gender equality. Its exploration of the public and private spheres, and how these spaces shape women's experiences, offers a critical lens for understanding the complex dynamics of gender inequality that persist even today. *A Doll's House* serves as a reminder that the fight for gender equality is not just about achieving legal rights but also about challenging the deeply ingrained societal norms that continue to limit women's agency and opportunities. The play's enduring power lies in its ability to spark conversations about the ways in which gender shapes our lives, both within the confines of the home and in the broader public sphere.

Ibsen's dramatic works can be interpreted as a call for societal transformation, advocating for gender equality as a fundamental principle for achieving collective well-being. His plays implicitly argue that equal status, rights, and responsibilities for both men and women are essential for fostering a just and equitable society, one that promotes individual fulfillment and ensures a brighter future for generations to come especially women. While this study has focused on women's representation, Further studies could explore Ibsen's portrayal of masculinity in *A Doll's House* or analyze similar themes in other literary work that would provide a broader understanding of the cultural and historical context of *A Doll's House*. By exploring these avenues, we can continue to uncover the complexities of gender, power, and society as reflected in literature.

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