

## Moral Ideals in the plays of Henrik Ibsen

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### ABSTRACT

Henrik Ibsen, one of the leading modern playwrights, realizes the social problems arising out of the marginalization of women of his age. His dramatic art exposes an in-depth exploration of familial, social, cultural, economic, and psychological conflicts faced by women in everyday life. Ibsen has earned popularity and fame among audience, critics, reviewers, and scholars around the globe through shedding a new light on his women. The article, entitled "Ibsen's Treatment of Women," focuses on Ibsen's plays in the light of his attitude towards female subjugation, marginalization, subordination, psychological trauma, dilemma, rights, and the suffrage of women, and oppression of the 19th century Scandinavian bourgeois society. It makes a thorough study of Ibsen's treatment of women in different phases of his literary career. It examines also Ibsen's skills in exploring powerful women, both in their individual spheres and in relation to the people around them. Thus, it endeavours to reveal various aspects of the women in the Ibsen canon. The researcher is of the view that Ibsen's plays are important for us today because they reveal powerful female characters that survive and exert their presence in the society in different ways. On the whole, this article attempts to look at the categorization of Ibsen's women, treatment of women and contemporary Scandinavia, role of motherhood, and critical evaluation of his female characters.

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The **morality play** is a genre of Medieval and early Tudor theatrical entertainment. In their own time, these plays were known as **interludes**, a broader term for dramas with or without a moral. Morality plays are a type of allegory in which the protagonists met by personifications of various moral attributes who try to prompt him to choose a godly life over one of evil. The plays were most popular in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries. Having grown out of the religiously based mystery plays of the Middle Ages, they represented a shift towards a more secular base for European theatre. Hildegard von Bingen's *Ordo Virtutum* (English: "Order of the Virtues") composed, is the earliest known morality play by more than a century, and the only Medieval musical drama to survive with an attribution for both the text and the music.

The principles of Ibsen's teaching, his moral ethic, was that honesty in facing facts is the first requisite of a decent life. Human nature has dark recesses which must be explored and illuminated; life has pitfalls which must be recognized to be avoided; and society has humbugs, hypocrisies, and obscure diseases which must be revealed before they can be cured. To recognize these facts is not pessimism; it is the moral obligation laid upon intelligent people. To face the problems thus exposed, however, requires courage, honesty, and faith in the ultimate worth of the human soul. Man must be educated until he is not only intelligent enough, but courageous enough to work out his salvation through patient endurance and nobler ideals. Democracy, as a cure-all, is just as much a failure as any other form of government; since the majority in politics, society, or religion is always torpid and content with easy measures. It is the intelligent and morally heroic minority which has always led, and always will lead, the human family on its upward march. Nevertheless, we alone can help ourselves; no

help can come from without. Furthermore -- and this is a vital point in understanding Ibsen -- experience and life are a happiness in themselves, not merely a means to happiness; and in the end good must prevail. Such are some of the ideas that can be distilled from the substance of Ibsen's plays.

A Doll's House takes various connotations and denotations. For instance, Nora's understanding of the meaning of freedom evolves throughout the play. In the first act, she believes that she will be totally "free" as soon as she has repaid her debt, because she will have the opportunity to devote herself fully to her domestic responsibilities. She says: My goodness, it's delightful to think of, Christine! Free from care! To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it! (Act 1, 15) After Krogstad blackmails her, she reconsiders her conception of freedom and questions whether she is happy in Torvald's house, subjected to his orders: We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation? (Act III, 63) By the end of the play, Nora seeks a new kind of freedom. She wishes to be relieved of her familial obligations in order to follow her own ambitions, beliefs, and identity. Nora finally succeeds in diagnosing her relationship with her husband and consequently, resolves to leave him. She believes that true marriage is impossible between them because neither of them loves the other. Nora says, "You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me" (Act III, 63). Nora realizes that, before she can be a wife, she must first discover herself through venturing out into the world. Helmer: Before all else, you are a wife and a mother. Nora: Don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human

being, just as are - or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them (Act III, 65). When Nora closed behind her the door of her doll's house, she made the correct choice and opened wide the gate of life for woman. She would start her life as Linde had done and Torvald would continue his life without change - for he valued honor above the love of Nora. Only perfect freedom of having one's identity and communion can make a true bond between man and woman. Finally, Ibsen uses symbols to enhance the main social ideas he criticizes in *A Doll's House*. For instance, he uses the Tarantella dance as a symbol to present Nora's attempts to express or to announce herself and her will of emancipation. This dance is often said to be a dance simulating the furious whirling movement of those who have been bitten by the deadly tarantula spider: it is at one and the same time a frenzied activity and a symptom of death. It is characterized by fast movements, foot tapping, and on the women's part, exaggerated ruffling of petticoats. It involves a lot of very fast spinning and jumping until one cannot dance anymore and is so exhausted that they fall to the ground. The tarantella serves as her last chance to be Torvald's doll, to dance and amuse him and to distract him from reading the letter. But at the same time the dance summarizes Nora's tragic life with its delight, joy and happiness on the surface, but it hides underneath a dreadful secret. It is the culmination of Nora's doll life. Her heart, bosom and veins are full of poison. Therefore, she has to dance and dance violently to jump over the barrier of time and space, the wall of fear and deception towards discovering her own salvation, liberation and identity. Nora: Now play for me! I am going to dance! Helmer: (as he plays) Slower, slower! Nora: Can't do it any other way. Helmer: Not so violently, Nora! Nora: This is the way (Act II, 47). The dance is over. Torvald still feels that Nora must respond to his own desires. He is sexually excited by her dance and he asks her to go to bed with him. Torvald is more interested in Nora physically than emotionally. When Nora responds to his demand by saying, "Go away, Torvald! Leave me alone. I don't want all this" (Act III, 55), Torvald asks, "Aren't I your husband?" (Act III, 56). By saying this, he implies that one of Nora's duties, as his wife, is to physically please him at his command. In this way, Ibsen has focused on Nora as a symbolic character. She is all for women and is the representative of universal feminism. Through portraying her character, Ibsen has exposed social reality and women's identity, power and freedom.

*A Doll's House* was definitely the most explosive and most criticized three acts play of Ibsen, which was performed for the first time in Copenhagen, Denmark on 21 December 1879. Nora, the main character, looks like she is living a happy marriage with Torvald and her three young children, to whom she is totally dedicated to Nora hides secret that Torvald had been quite ill and she was obliged to borrow the money

needed for his recovery without her husband's knowledge. When her husband comes to discover the truth, instead of thanking her for the disponibility and enormous sacrifice shown, he causes a great strife based on jealousy. Later, Krogstad, an old friend of Mr. Helmer, Nora's blackmailer at the same time, comes back to Helmers` and seeks not only a return to his previous job, but also in a higher position than he had. The dance, for which Nora as a character is famous for in this play, is performed in front of Helmer under a frustrated emotional state, which makes Nora jump to debut wild and violent, but beautiful, at the same time, which irritates Torvald, but he does not let others understand that. Nora, felt even more offended by his behavior, eventually admits that in their eight years of marriage he had failed to know her, and therefore she will not return to her children, until she will be able to recover her lost dignity. She decides to leave Torvald and abandons her family house with a door slam, which marks the revolt of her character. *5 Ghosts* is another thrilling play of Ibsen, where Ms. Helen Alving is the widow of Captain Alving, a person Who used to have a very high social reputation. Their marriage was a farce which has to hide the fact that her husband was a banal user of alcohol and also a debauched person. However this is uncomfortable marriage inherited a boy, Oswald, but, on the other hand, Mr. Alving had an illegitimate child with his servant, a girl named Regina. When the play opens, Oswald was back home on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the orphanage which would be named after his father. Due to this occasion Manders, Alving family financial officer, has also returned. Manders was also involved in an affair with Mrs. Alving, which remained unanswered on his behalf. One night before the ceremony, the house which will be inaugurated in memory of Mr. Alving, bursts into flames. This is not the only or the smallest problem Mrs. Alving had to face, because further problems stem for her from now on. Oswald confides his mother about a serious problem: he suffers from a venereal disease, syphilis, due to immoral bohemian life in Paris. This full disappointment of Mrs. Alving at this phase does not affect only her, but Regina, also, who pretends to have an affair with Oswald

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Nora is a victim of the masculine society. Ever since Eve tempted Adam, women have been detested in many ways and for many overt reasons around the world and in various cultures. They are hated and feared for their bodies, which tempt men to give into their base instincts; they are feared and considered unclean because of their monthly cycle of bleeding; they are hated for their unique feminine abilities, which are invariably considered malicious or worse, evil by the misogynist individual or culture. Nora is no exception. She has been treated by her husband according to male criterion. She rebels against this masculine tyranny but she has to sacrifice something very precious so as to get her freedom and identity, to leave her children, her husband and the whole family. She tries to prove that female can be equal to male in everything and autonomous in her own identities.

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