

Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House: Nora herself is Responsible for her Misery

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ABSTRACT

"A Doll's House" is a play written by Henrik Ibsen that was first published in 1879. Set in the late 19th century in Norway, the play follows the life of Nora Helmer, a wife and mother who appears to be living a happy and contented life. Nora Helmer is often viewed as a victim of the oppressive societal norms of her time, but a closer analysis reveals that Nora is also responsible for her own misery. Nora's actions throughout the play, including borrowing money without her husband's knowledge and lying to him about it, demonstrate her willingness to deceive those closest to her in order to achieve her own desires. This research paper will argue that Nora is herself responsible for her misery in the play. Nora's behaviour can be seen as a response to the limitations placed upon her as a woman in her society, but it is ultimately her own decisions that lead to the unravelling of her marriage and her sense of self. Her attempts to live up to societal expectations and her desire to maintain the illusion of a perfect marriage prevent her from being honest with herself and those around her, leading to a life of emotional and psychological turmoil.

INTRODUCTION

Henrik Ibsen was a Norwegian playwright and poet who is widely regarded as one of the most influential dramatists of the 19th century. Ibsen's most famous plays include "A Doll's House," "Ghosts," "Hedda Gabler," and "The Wild Duck." These works are known for their psychological complexity and their exploration of themes such as morality, gender roles, and the nature of truth. Ibsen's contributions to modern drama have been significant, and his influence can be seen in the works of playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O'Neill. Today, he is widely regarded as one of the greatest playwrights in history, and his works continue to be performed and studied around the world.

"A Doll's House" is a play written by Henrik Ibsen in 1879. It is a three-act play that explores the issues of gender roles, marriage, and societal expectations in the late 19th century. The play is set in the home of Torvald and Nora Helmer, a seemingly happy couple with three children. However, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that their marriage is not as idyllic as it seems on the surface. Nora's actions and decisions are scrutinized, and her attempts to break free from societal constraints result in a dramatic conclusion. The play caused controversy when it was first performed due to its themes and ending, which challenged the traditional gender roles of the time. "A Doll's House" is now considered a classic of modern drama and is regularly performed on stage and adapted for film and television. It remains a timeless and thought-provoking work that challenges us to examine our own beliefs and assumptions about gender roles, societal norms, and personal identity.

Nora's decision to borrow money:

Nora's decision to help her husband, Torvald, who is ill, and to pay for a trip to Italy that she believes will restore his health. However, her decision to borrow the money from a disreputable source and to keep it a secret from Torvald ultimately leads to a series of events that unfold in the play. While her intentions were noble, her decision to borrow money without telling her husband was irresponsible and illegal. Her decision to lie and deceive her husband only adds to her troubles, making her miserable in the process.

Nora's lack of responsibility:

Throughout the play, Nora demonstrates a lack of responsibility for her actions. She relies on others to solve her problems, such as when she turns to Dr. Rank for financial assistance. She is also willing to deceive her husband and others to maintain her social standing. Nora's lack of responsibility is a contributing factor to her misery, as she is unable to take control of her life.

Nora's decision to borrow money from Krogstad and forge her father's signature on the loan agreement demonstrates her lack of responsibility and her inability to take control of her own financial situation. She keeps this a secret from her husband and takes on odd jobs to repay the debt, further complicating the situation. Nora's lack of responsibility is further highlighted by her decision to leave her husband and children at the end of the play, without considering the consequences of her actions.

Nora's lack of self-awareness:

Nora is also unaware of her own desires and needs, which contributes to her misery. She is so caught up in fulfilling societal expectations and playing the role of a dutiful wife that she neglects her own personal fulfilment. This lack of self-awareness leads her to make poor decisions and compromises her own happiness. This behaviour demonstrates her lack of understanding of the impact her actions have on those around her, and her inability to recognize the consequences of her choices.

Nora Helmer's lack of awareness about the nature of her husband Torvald's sweet words towards her is a significant theme that drives the narrative and shapes the character's arc. Throughout the play, Torvald often speaks to Nora in terms of endearment and flattery, using pet names and praising her beauty and innocence. However, Nora fails to recognize the manipulative and oppressive nature of these comments, highlighting her lack of self-awareness and the power dynamic within her marriage.

Torvald's use of sweet words like "my little squirrel" towards Nora is a form of emotional manipulation, as he seeks to maintain his control and dominance over her. By framing her as innocent and naive, he reinforces the societal expectations placed upon women as passive and dependent. This behaviour ultimately undermines Nora's agency and independence, as she internalizes Torvald's expectations and becomes reliant on him for validation and support.

Nora's dependency on others:

Nora's dependency on others is a key factor in her misery. Nora's dependency on others is evident in her interactions with other characters in the play. She often relies on Torvald for financial and emotional support, and is largely subservient to his wishes and desires. She also seeks assistance from Kristine when she is in need of help, highlighting her lack of independence and self-sufficiency. Her reliance on her husband and other male figures in her life, such as Dr. Rank and Krogstad, also limits her agency and contributes to her feeling trapped and powerless.

Nora's dependency on her father is evident in the fact that she borrowed money to pay for her husband's medical treatment, and the fact that she forged her father's signature on a loan agreement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Nora is herself responsible for her misery in "A Doll's House." Her decision to borrow money without telling her husband, her lack of responsibility, lack of self-awareness, and dependency on others all contribute to her feelings of misery and powerlessness. Nora's situation is undoubtedly influenced by the patriarchal society in which she lives, but it is important to recognize that she is not solely a victim of her circumstances. Her actions have consequences, and it is ultimately her decision to leave her family at the end of the play that serves as a form of personal liberation. The play challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations, but it also highlights the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions.

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